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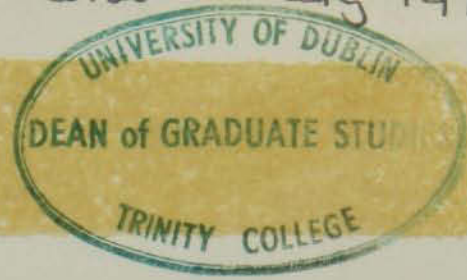


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IRISH

NATIONALIST

POLITICS,

1858-70

Richard Vincent Comerford

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
University of Dublin (Trinity College), 1976.

1878

1878



Richard Vincent Conroy

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments		v
Explanation of abbreviations		vii
Introduction		viii
Chapter one	THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION, 1855-70	1
Chapter two	INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION, 1850-64	30
	THE MACHINERY OF REVOLUTION	85
Chapter three	THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, 1861-5	121
Chapter four	POPULAR PROPAGANDA AND REFORMATION (1861-1865)	166
Chapter five	THE RISE OF THE FENIAN MOVEMENT	203
Chapter six	THE CHANGING (1865-1869)	233
Chapter seven	THE FAILURE OF FENIANISM, 1865-7	274

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		v
Explanation of abbreviations		vi
Introduction		viii
Chapter one	THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION, 1858-70	1
Chapter two	INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION, 1858-64	35
Chapter three	THE BEGINNINGS OF FENIANISM (TO 1861)	55
Chapter four	THE NATIONAL BROTHERHOOD AND THE MACMANUS FUNERAL	85
Chapter five	THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, 1861-5	121
Chapter six	FENIAN PROPAGANDA AND EXPANSION (TO 1865)	166
Chapter seven	THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF FENIANISM	203
Chapter eight	THE CHURCH AND POLITICS (TO 1865)	233
Chapter nine	THE FAILURE OF FENIANISM, 1865-7	279

CONTENTS (CONTD.)

Chapter ten	GLADSTONE AND BUTT, 1864-70	313
Chapter eleven	THE NEW FENIANISM, 1867-70	338
Chapter twelve	POLITICS AND THE LAND QUESTION, 1858-70	364
Chapter thirteen	SURVEY OF A DEVELOPING NATIONALISM, ITS STRENGTHS, AND WEAKNESSES, 1858-70	407
Synopsis of bibliography		442
Introduction to bibliography		443
Bibliography		446

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and warmest thanks must go to my supervisor, Professor T. W. Moody, S.F.T.C.D., for encouragement, advice and direction given over a period of five years. During that time I have also had the benefit of participating in Professor Moody's graduate seminars in modern Irish history, and I am grateful to all the other members for a most rewarding experience.

The repositories in which I have been enabled to do research, thanks to the courtesy of their respective directors and staffs, include the following: Trinity College Library; the National Library of Ireland; the State Paper Office, Dublin Castle; the Dublin Diocesan Archives; the Royal Irish Academy; the Public Record Office, London; the British Museum (British Library); and Quality House (National Register of Archives). For a period during 1973 I enjoyed access to the library and other facilities of the Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

For allowing me to consult their unpublished theses, I am very grateful to Miss Mary Leo, Fr Christopher O'Dwyer and Dr David Leonard.

R.V. Comerford,
Dublin,
September 1976.

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

In the footnotes, the abbreviations given below have been used to supplement many others taken from the list in Irish Historical Studies, supp. 1 (January 1968), pp 81-124.

- C.S.O. Chief Secretary's Office.
- D'Arcy William D'Arcy, The fenian movement in the United States, 1858-86 (Washington, 1947).
- D.D.A. Dublin Diocesan Archives.
- MS 331 Thomas Clarke Luby's recollections of early fenian events, communicated to John O'Leary, 1890-91 (National Library of Ireland, MS 331).
- MS 333 Thomas Clarke Luby's recollections of the Irish People, communicated to John O'Leary, 1892 (National Library of Ireland, MS 333).
- MS 5964 An account of fenianism from April 1865 to April 1866, by General F. F. Millen, 1866 (National Library of Ireland, Samuel Lee Anderson papers, MS 5964).
- MS 7517 A history of fenianism to 1868, based on police reports and official papers (National Library of Ireland, Larcom papers, MS 7517).

Steele, Land
and politics

E. D. Steele, Irish land and British
politics: tenant-right and nationality,
1865-70 (London, 1974).

A number of other books have been given self-explanatory short titles on second and subsequent citation.

All S.P.O. documents cited belong to the division
Police and crime records: Fenian papers, unless they are
explicitly indicated as appertaining to the division
Chief Secretary's Office: Registered papers.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of an earlier research project (on the career of Charles J. Kickham) I became keenly aware of the need for a fresh look at the initial phase of fenianism. Accordingly, the original intention was that this work should be a study of the first ten or twelve years of the fenian movement. It is that, but it is also something more. For it became clear after a short while that what was needed in order to get a new perspective on the I.R.B. in its early years was not merely the highlighting of hitherto unnoticed details, or more intent inspection of the already well-established outlines (valuable though both of these procedures proved to be), but an overall survey of the nationalist politics of the period, of which fenianism is only one aspect. This, then, is a study which aims at providing a synthesis of the different political developments which affected the Irish nationalist community in the years from 1858 to 1870. The intention is to achieve a just balance between the various elements (including fenianism), and by this means to obtain a more faithful understanding of each, and to identify any significant trends.

However, this balance has to be sought in the context of published historical scholarship. Hence, the amount of detail with which any topic is treated is determined by reference not only to its objective importance but also to its previous scholarly treatment (if any). Thus, for example, the social factor in fenianism has an entire chapter devoted to it, because it has not been the subject of any published study. On the other hand, it would be futile to go over in great detail ground already covered by authoritative studies, such as Dr Thornley's work on the beginnings of the home rule movement, or the work of Dr Corish and others on various aspects of the catholic church's political involvements. Nevertheless, even on the most worked-over aspects of the period (and they are few enough) it has been possible to adduce new data. And, more importantly, every topic, whether hitherto neglected or not, is freshly interpreted when fitted into the new framework.

The chronological limits of the work seem easy enough to justify, even when considered a priori. 1858 witnessed the demise of the Tenant League and the launching of the fenian organization. In 1870 a new era in Irish political history opened with the establishment of the Home Government Association. In the course of

research some factors emerged which give the Irish politics of the years 1858-70 a certain intrinsic unity. One such factor was the reasonable possibility which existed during the period that international war might seriously influence political relations between Great Britain and Ireland; such a possibility had not existed for many decades before 1858, and would not recur for many decades after 1870.

Apart from observing this international factor in Irish politics, an attempt has been made to see Irish nationalism in the context of the political movements of the age in Europe generally, and especially in Britain. However, the temptation to incorporate extensive surveys of the politics of the Irish in Britain (or in America) during this period has been resisted. As a general rule the activities of the exiles are cited only when required to explain events in Ireland itself.

Throughout, social factors have been given what appears to be their due amount of attention in what is primarily a political study. This means that they are never very far in the background, that they are frequently adverted to, and that occasionally they are at the front of the stage. In particular, it has been found that

fenianism in the mid-1860s cannot be understood unless it is considered as a social phenomenon.

The given starting-point of this study is a self-conscious community with assorted ambitions and grievances, which saw itself as the catholic people of Ireland, and exhibited various tendencies which the historian can recognise as symptoms of modern nationalism. It was not by any means the only political community on the island, and, in spite of being the largest numerically, it still was not, in 1858, the most powerful. We are not, then, undertaking to deal with Irish politics in toto, but only with the politics of what can, for convenience, be called nationalist Ireland.

We do not begin with any definition of nationalism. Rather, we set out to discover empirically what were the political manifestations of nationalism in Ireland from 1858 to 1870.

CHAPTER ONETHE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION, 1858-70

The launching of fenianism is undoubtedly the best remembered fact concerning the political history of Ireland in 1858. It did not, however, cause any ripples on the surface of public life until the closing months of the year, when the Phoenix Society attracted the attention of priests, press, police, and public. This discovery of an active, militant, conspiracy was but the culmination of a series of developments throughout the year which taken together indicated that interest in the national question had quite suddenly reached an intensity unknown in Ireland for at least a decade.

In March the noted Kilkenny repealer, and friend of the Young Irelanders, Dr Robert Cane, outlined a plan for a national political organization, and thereby initiated a debate on the subject among men who had not considered it seriously since 1848.¹ William Smith O'Brien broke his public silence on national affairs with a series of articles in the Nation in March, April, and May.²

1 Celt (Kilkenny), Mar. 1858.

2 Nation, 27 Mar. - 29 May 1858.

During the year the Tenant League (which, despite its undeniably nationalist content, was not explicitly concerned with nationalism) quietly dissolved.³ And in September the Tablet, a faithful advocate of Irish popular demands, but not of their sublimation in the question of nationhood, removed its headquarters to London, away from the suddenly uncongenial atmosphere of Dublin.⁴ Two months earlier Ireland had acquired a new weekly propagating advanced nationalist views - the Irishman. A Times correspondent with considerable experience of the country, looking at the year in retrospect, concluded that it had seen disaffection from British rule reach alarming proportions in Ireland.⁵

Clearly, some significant change in the circumstances governing Irish political life was taking effect in 1858. Because the reason for this change has not hitherto been identified, historical understanding of the period has been less than satisfactory. To make allusions to the legendary characteristics of the phoenix or to talk of a personalised Ireland being 'again about to stir herself'⁶

3 See below, ch. 12 (pp 364-7).

4 Tablet (London), 18 Sept. 1858.

5 Cited in Irishman, 8 Jan. 1859.

6 O'Hegarty, Ire. under the union, p. 423.

is merely to restate the problem in figurative language without offering a solution. Pointing to the propagandism of James Stephens as the decisive factor is a case of confusing effect with cause. It is said that 1858 witnessed a rejection of parliamentary endeavour by the Irish people, and this might seem to be a plausible explanation of what was happening. However, there is no proof that parliamentary agitation declined in popular favour at this time; indeed, the results of the 1859 general election would seem to suggest the contrary. But many hitherto silent opponents of a parliamentary policy found tongue in 1858, and their pronouncements have given the erroneous impression of a general projection of constitutionalism. Though there may indeed have been widespread disillusion with parliamentary politics in 1858, it was not noticeably greater than in any of the immediately preceding years, and it neither defines nor explains the developments we are considering.

The influence of the international military and political situation is not often considered in the study of the political history of nineteenth-century Ireland for the reason that, in general, it was of little immediate consequence. However, it is there that we find the key to many developments in Irish nationalist politics

in 1858 and subsequent years.

The Crimean war (1854-6) was a difficult episode in British history but it did not provide 'Ireland's opportunity' because it never raised the serious possibility of the overthrow of British power. That was secure so long as England and France remained in alliance. It was universally recognised in the mid-nineteenth century that only France (or possibly the U.S.A.) could hope to defeat Britain in an armed struggle. The firm purpose of doing just that appeared to be an essential part of the mystique of Bonapartism, and many people were fearful, or hopeful, that Napoleon III would inevitably attempt it. After the Crimean war suspicion increased, especially as France continued to maintain a very large standing army. Then, in 1857, imperial France - as imperial Germany was to do fifty years later - touched the most sensitive nerve in the British body politic by embarking on a programme of shipbuilding that threatened the naval supremacy on which English power and security were based.⁷ British unease was particularly severe because France was pressing ahead with the technological changes which were revolutionising naval warfare,

⁷ Robert E. Zegger, 'Victorians in arms: the French invasion scare of 1859-60' in History Today, xxiii, no. 10 (Oct. 1973), p. 709 (hereafter cited as Zegger, 'Invasion scare').

and there was the possibility that even a small number of the new ironclad ships being built on Napoleon's instructions could radically alter the balance of naval power, or even make possible the landing of an invasion force on the south coast of England.⁸ As 1858 opened, Anglo-French relations were marked by a serious tension, dissembled so far by diplomacy, but obviously capable of taking a serious turn.

On 14 January 1858 an attempt was made to assassinate Louis Napoleon. Immediately there was an outburst of French recriminations against England, where the assassination plot had been hatched among the groups of continental revolutionaries enjoying the safe asylum provided by liberal laws. The attempt of the prime minister, Palmerston, to placate French opinion misfired disastrously. His Conspiracy to Murder Bill, which would have curbed the activities of foreign conspirators in British territory, was met in the commons by a rising tide of resentment against French dictation of English law. The debate provided an occasion for highly publicised expressions of anti-French sentiment, and ended in the defeat of the conciliatory legislation and the over-

8 Zegger, 'Invasion scare', p. 709.

throw of the prime minister who had dared to introduce it.⁹

This dramatic deterioration in Anglo-French relations brought everyone concerned face to face with the prospect of a major war. For Ireland, this could mean a reduction in the garrison by a hard-pressed British government, or a tactical invasion by the French. On top of these realistic considerations, Irish sentiment had a special response to the prospect of Anglo-French war, for Irish catholic nationalism had a tradition of looking to French arms for the restoration of its fortunes. In 1858 Irish nationalists saw, in the suddenly-revealed uncertainty of Anglo-French relations, the first prospect since 1848 of the attainment of independence or self-government. The awareness of this uncertainty, and of the possibilities which it raised, is implicit in the revival of Irish nationalism in 1858, and in some of its numerous manifestations in that and subsequent years.

The impact of the Anglo-French complication on Irish thinking was made all the stronger by the fact that the British empire seemed to be facing a separate and almost equally serious threat in the shape of the Indian Mutiny, which had begun in May 1857. The Nation

9 Hansard 3, cxlviii , coll 1844-7 (19 Feb. 1858).

made no secret of its desire for a Sepoy victory, and it was clearly motivated by something much stronger than sympathy with the natives of India.¹⁰ Ever before relations with France reached a critical stage, Palmerston was worried by the effect of the Indian war on Ireland. 'The catholic party and its newspaper organs in Dublin', he declared, 'are trying to do all the mischief they can. They are praising the mutineers and calling upon the Irish to follow their example.'¹¹

As 1858 progressed, it became clear that a continental war was approaching and that this would increase the likelihood of a clash between France and Britain. By early 1859 Irish observers felt certain that a great war involving Britain, and followed by a revision of the Vienna settlement of 1815, was inevitable.¹² Hoping that a decisive moment was at hand for Ireland, John Mitchel abandoned his American affairs and moved to Paris, ready to take any initiative that would promote the independence of Ireland or, what was equally dear to his heart, the destruction of Great Britain. Soon he was contributing

10 See Nation, 23 Jan. 1858.

11 Quoted in Steele, Land and politics, p. 37.

12 Nation, 5 Feb. 1859; Irishman, 19, 26 Feb. 1859.

a regular Paris letter to the Irishman.¹³

Nationalist feeling in Ireland was strongly on Napoleon's side when in May 1859 he invaded northern Italy to challenge Austrian power there. He was going, the Nation pointed out, to vindicate the popular will of Lombardy, and, in the same way, he might at another time come to the aid of another oppressed people.¹⁴ The success of his armies at Magenta and Solferino in June was heard of in Ireland with delight. When, in July, he decided not to tempt fortune any further and made the peace of Villafranca, the Irishman expressed disappointment.¹⁵

The peace did not, however, interfere with the conviction that a conflict between Great Britain and France was inevitable.¹⁶ Irish nationalists soon had their analysis of this confirmed in a most decisive fashion by public opinion in Britain. The summer of 1859 witnessed the rise of a mass volunteer movement throughout England and Scotland, called into being by the spectre

13 Irishman, 7 May 1859 and foll.

14 Nation, 14 May 1859.

15 Irishman, 23 July 1859.

16 Irishman, 30 July 1859; Nation, 6 Aug. 1859.

of French invasion. Hundreds of thousands who could afford to purchase a rifle joined the volunteer corps springing up all over the country and devoted their spare time to drill and arms practice.¹⁷ Not since the era of the first Napoleon had Englishmen been so fearful of war on their own soil. Under the circumstances Irish nationalists, like the English middle classes, deemed it prudent to do something in anticipation of a crisis. The possibility that Napoleon might begin his assault on the United Kingdom with a descent on Ireland gave particular urgency to Irish attitudes. Nor was this merely a matter of Irish naivety, for the London Morning Advertiser was predicting at the end of June that the French would first invade the disaffected smaller island.¹⁸ Yet, the scope for an initiative by Irish nationalists pending some external development was limited, and so in July of 1859 they resorted to a symbolic gesture - the MacMahon sword movement.

The MacMahon in question was Marie Edmé Patrice Maurice de MacMahon, scion of a family long established in France, but, as the patronymic indicated, of Irish

¹⁷ Zegger, 'Invasion scare', pp 709-10; Annual Reg., 1860, pp 27-8.

¹⁸ Cited in Nation, 2 July 1859.

stock. General MacMahon achieved fame and glory in the north Italian campaign of May and June 1859, being raised in recognition of his success to the dignities of Marshal of France and Duke of Magenta. Irish nationalists of the prominent sentimental variety rejoiced in this exaltation of a member of the Milesian race.¹⁹ The Nation²⁰ featured him in one of its rare lithographic portraits, and the Irishman filled four of its closely printed pages with genealogical reports on his family.²¹ Descendant of the 'wild geese', he was the apparent personification of that traditional Franco-Irish amity which, it was fondly hoped, might soon bear fruit in the form of a French initiative in favor of Ireland.

The Irishman of 2 July 1859 summarised a letter from a correspondent suggesting that if Ireland needed a prince 'one of these days', as Belgium did in 1830, excellent material was to hand in MacMahon. On the same day both the Nation and the Irishman proposed that funds should be collected to make a presentation to MacMahon, the latter journal specifying that the gift should be a

19 Nation, 11 June 1859.

20 Nation, 30 July 1859.

21 Irishman, 23 July 1859.

sword of honour. Under the circumstances of the time the proposal was laden with significance.

The editor of each of the two sponsoring journals accepted subscriptions and held them pending the formation of a committee.²² Then the precaution of securing MacMahon's consent was taken. After an approach from J. P. Leonard, an Irishman of strong nationalist mentality resident in Paris, the marshal replied on 19 August that he was willing to accept the sword, but that the emperor's approval should be sought beforehand.²³ The MacMahon Sword Committee was formed during August. From his dominance of the behind-the-scene activity, it seems likely that the entire project was first mooted by A. M. Sullivan.²⁴ The chairman of the committee, which held its first meeting at the beginning of September, was The O'Donoghue, M.P. for Tipperary, while Patrick MacMahon, M.P. for Wexford, was vice-chairman.²⁵ Two honorary secretaries were appointed, T. D. Sullivan of the Nation and P. J. Smyth of the Irishman.²⁶

22 Irishman, 9 July 1859; Nation, 6 Aug. 1859.

23 Nation, 3 Mar. 1860.

24 A. M. Sullivan to W. S. O'Brien, 20 Aug. 1859 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446, item 3109).

25 Irishman, 3 Sept. 1859.

26 Nation, 22 Sept. 1860.

During September The O'Donoghue sought Napoleon's approval for the presentation, through the French ambassador in London. The reply, when it eventually came, was favourable.²⁷ Meanwhile the committee had advertised for designs from Irish artists. Design and manufacture occupied the summer of 1860, the sword eventually going on display during the last week of August in the window of a Dublin bookshop, where it attracted considerable attention and admiration. The hilt was of bog oak, while the steel blade and precious sheath carried fulsome inscriptions interspersed with elaborate tracery of celtic design.²⁸ The deputation in charge of the presentation left Dublin on 2 September.²⁹ The members were The O'Donoghue, T. D. Sullivan and Dr George Sigerson. In Paris they were joined by J. P. Leonard and John Mitchel, and, on 9 September, all five proceeded to the military camp at Chalons where they were received by MacMahon with all due propriety and indeed, it seems, with genuine hospitality.³⁰ He accepted the sword most

27 Irishman, 3 Mar. 1860.

28 Nation, 1 Sept. 1860.

29 Ibid., 8 Sept. 1860.

30 Ibid., 15, 22 Sept. 1860; Irishman, 15 Sept. 1860.

graciously, but, in his reply to the deputation's formal address, he was careful to confine the significance of the event to the sentimental recall of ancient family connections.³¹

In truth the MacMahon movement ended in anti-climax. The long delay in manufacturing the sword tended of itself to produce this effect, but it was caused principally by the political developments in Italy during the summer, which greatly embarrassed francophile Irishmen. The mighty impetus given to Italian nationalism by the 1859 war, and so warmly greeted in Ireland, had led inexorably to the undermining of the papal states, something which dismayed the majority of Irish nationalists. As the leaders of Irish national sentiment were honouring the French general at Chalons, one thousand Irish volunteers were under arms in central Italy intending to defend the temporal power of the pope against France's ally in war and partner in intrigue, the kingdom of Sardinia.

While Irishmen were fully justified in foreseeing important consequences for their country arising from an Anglo-French war, they tended, especially in the period

31 Nation, 15 Sept. 1860.

1858-60, to overestimate French concern for Ireland. It was easy to make the mistake of imagining that their interest in France was reciprocated by the French. John Mitchel issued a reminder on this point from Paris in October 1859: in the event of war, he said, Napoleon would act in the best interests of France, which just might happen to demand an invasion of Ireland.³² Nevertheless, Mitchel himself gave way to ill-founded optimism when continental journals began to notice Ireland from October 1859 onwards.³³ One of the first in the field was the pro-government Constitutionnel (Paris) of 23 October. Then the Brussels Revue Trimestrielle published what Mitchel thought was the first Belgian notice of Ireland since 1844.³⁴ About the same time a new paper, L'Esperance, devoted to the principles of nationality, made its appearance in Geneva, and it soon carried an article on Ireland by Mitchel himself.³⁵ During 1860 Irish affairs were considered in Le Monde (Paris), La Presse (Paris), L'Ami de la religion (Paris), L'Univers

32 Irishman, 22 Oct. 1859.

33 Ibid., 29 Oct. and 5 Nov. 1859.

34 Ibid., 5 Nov. 1859.

35 Ibid., 5, 12 Nov. 1859.

(Brussels), Le Nord (Brussels), and in a number of pamphlets including La Question Irlandaise, and MacMahon, roi d'Irlande.³⁶ All of this, however, merely proved that in 1860 French public opinion was aware of the existence of Ireland, but it induced the Irish to continue suffering from what a young and hastily-*disillusioned* Irishman in Paris a few years later described as 'the ridiculous illusion that the French like [us]'.³⁷

The comparative intensity of French awareness of Ireland in 1869 was due partly to the MacMahon sword episode, but principally to another movement, much more important and equally neglected, the national petition.

If the cause of Irish nationality was to take advantage of any great international upheaval, it would be highly desirable to convince the European powers, and especially France, that the country wanted and deserved self-government. Writing from Paris on 18 October 1859 John Mitchel had reminded his readers that in France the case of Ireland as a suppressed nation was not *accepted*, and that, under the circumstances, it was crucial to let Napoleon know that he would be welcome in Ireland if he

36 Nation, 9 May 1860; Irishman, 21, 28 July 1860.

37 John Augustus O'Shea writing 'Irishman in Paris' in Irishman, 3 Aug. 1867.

should decide to intervene there.³⁸ The MacMahon movement might be useful for this purpose, but in contemporary Europe a more sophisticated type of device for ascertaining and demonstrating the national allegiance of peoples was in vogue, namely the plebiscite. During the spring of 1860 the expansion of the Sardinian kingdom in the direction of an Italian nation state was given legitimacy by the holding of plebiscites in Tuscany, Parma, Emilia, Modena and the Romagna. In accordance with its general European policy in the mid-nineteenth century, the British government supported this vindication of liberal principles, and the emergence of a liberal-democratic state at the expense of Austrian influence. Irish propagandists subsequently compiled anthologies of statements made by English statesmen and leader writers at this time in support of the right of every nation to dismiss its rulers if dissatisfied with them, and generally to direct its own affairs in accordance with the popular will and untrammelled by any outside interference, however introduced.³⁹

38 Irishman, 22 Oct. 1859.

39 E.g., Nation, 11 Jan. 1868; A. M. Sullivan, New Ireland, (popular ed., London, 1878), pp 241-4 (hereafter cited as Sullivan, New Ireland).

Not surprisingly, Irish nationalists soon thought of challenging the British government to apply to Ireland the principles which they supported so ostentatiously in the case of Italy. In a leading article entitled 'Taking England at her word', the Nation of 14 April 1860 proposed that a petition should be presented to the queen or to parliament asking for a popular vote in Ireland on whether the people would prefer to be ruled by an Irish parliament or by the English government. All other patriotic newspapers in the country were invited to join in the project.⁴⁰ Three weeks later the Nation reported that the suggestion had been approved of in a large number of letters received by the editor and that the type of movement envisaged was already in progress in one part of the country.⁴¹ The promoters at no time anticipated the granting of the request for a plebiscite, though they hoped that the inevitable refusal would make its own point.⁴² They really intended that the petition itself should be an informal plebiscite. The Nation pointed out that it would be highly desirable to have the

40 Nation, 14 Apr. 1860.

41 *Ibid.*, 5 May 1860.

42 *Ibid.*, 14 Apr. and 5 May 1860.

government's reply in advance of a French invasion. For, it went on, if both the British and the French were on Irish soil, the natives, being unable to expel both, might have to side with one against the other.⁴³

The Irishman at first refused to recommend the national petition to its readers, on the high principle that it involved begging for national rights and so was degrading.⁴⁴ Before the end of June, however, the same paper was attempting to justify a changeabout to active encouragement of the movement.⁴⁵ Without doubt this change was made in response to the considerable support which the petition idea was receiving in the country.

The following contains the essentials of the petition formula eventually adopted:

To the queen's most excellent majesty. May it please your majesty, the petition of the undersigned natives of Ireland humbly showeth: That petitioners have seen with deep interest the recognition of the right of every people to change or choose their rulers and form of government which is contained in the speech delivered by your majesty at the opening of the present session of parliament, also in a speech delivered on a recent occasion at Aberdeen by your majesty's foreign secretary, as well as in the speeches of many

43 Nation, 23 June 1860.

44 Irishman, 19 May 1860.

45 Irishman, 30 June 1860.

other statesmen and persons of high position in England, and in the writings of the most influential English newspapers....

Your petitioners, therefore, pray that your majesty may be pleased to direct and authorise a public vote by ballot and universal suffrage in Ireland to make known the wishes of the people, whether for a native government and legislative independence, or for the existing system of government by the imperial parliament. Petitioners trust that their request will be stronger, not weaker, in your majesty's estimation, for being made respectfully, peacefully, and without violence, instead of being marked by such proceedings as have occurred during the recent political changes in Italy which have been so largely approved by your majesty's ministers. And petitioners, as duty bound, will ever pray.⁴⁶

The committee established in Dublin to direct the petition campaign issued an address which gave directions to local organizers on drafting forms and obtaining signatures. Only males over fifteen years of age were to sign, and each one should either write his own name or affix his mark.⁴⁷ Although the Dublin committee advised a house-to-house canvass in the larger towns, this recommendation was not observed in all areas. At the first public meeting to forward the petition, held in Clonmel, it had been decided to seek support outside the chapel doors; soon 30,000 signatures were claimed

46 Nation, 1 Sept. 1860.

47 Ibid.

in the town and the surrounding areas.⁴⁸ At the end of June 20,000 were said to have signed in Cork city, 5,000 in Belfast and over 3,600 in Skibbereen and two neighbouring parishes.⁴⁹ In Glasgow the national petition became the occasion of mass meetings of Irish catholics in the summer of 1860.⁵⁰ 'This new movement reminds me of old times', wrote William O'Neill Daunt, a veteran of O'Connell's repeal movement, after he had signed outside the church door in Enniskeen, Co. Cork, on 7 June.⁵¹

The function of the petition campaign as a vehicle for nationalist agitation is well illustrated by the public meeting in support of the campaign held in the round room of the Rotundo on 4 December 1860. The gathering was large and enthusiastic, making it, according to one source, 'the most numerously attended of any ever held in the round room'.⁵² Letters from Smith O'Brien and Archbishop MacHale were read by T. D. Sullivan. The chair was taken by The O'Donoghue, M.P., who rehearsed

48 Nation, 7 July, 1860.

49 Irishman, 30 June, 7 July 1860.

50 Irishman, 11 Aug., 22 Sept. 1860.

51 Journal of William J. O'Neill Daunt, 7 June 1860 (N.L.I., MS 3041).

52 Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

the infamy of the Act of Union at considerable length. Other speakers included J. F. Maguire, M.P., O'Neill Daunt, John Martin, Thomas Neilson Underwood, A. M. Sullivan, and Denis Holland, editor of the Irishman. One statement by The O'Donoghue helps to put the gathering into perspective: it was, he said, the first demonstration in favour of repeal since '48.⁵³

At the Rotundo meeting the number who had signed the national petition was given as about 200,000.⁵⁴ The publicity provided by the affair helped to speed up the progress of the movement in the weeks and months which followed.⁵⁵ On 4 January 1861 The O'Donoghue issued a public statement calling for all outstanding signatures to be forwarded as soon as possible, as he intended to present the petition on the first day of the new session of parliament, 5 February 1861.⁵⁶ But with the flow of new signatures unabated, this deadline was dropped. At the end of February the Dublin committee was thinking in terms of presentation by the latter end of March,⁵⁷ but

53 Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

54 Ibid.

55 Nation, 26 Jan. 1861.

56 Irishman, 12 Jan. 1861.

57 Irishman, 2 Mar. 1861.

its weekly meetings continued to record new accessions of signatures from various parts of Ireland and from the Irish in Britain: 8,000 arrived in the third week of March,⁵⁸ 25,000 in the fourth week.⁵⁹ The deadline eventually adhered to was 16 April. Following that date a number of people were employed to perform the task of counting the accumulated names. The final figure, reported to a meeting of the Dublin committee on 30 April, was 423,026.⁶⁰

On 8 May the great mass of manuscripts was transported to London to be put in the charge of The O'Donoghue.⁶¹ He attempted to obtain permission to present the petition in person to the queen, but the prime minister and the home secretary would not even consider that: the normal procedure should be followed.⁶² This meant forwarding the petition to the home secretary, who duly wrote to The O'Donoghue on 4 June that he had placed it before her majesty.⁶³ That, as The O'Donoghue

58 Irishman, 23 Mar. 1861.

59 Irishman, 30 Mar. 1861.

60 Irishman, 11 May 1861.

61 Ibid.

62 Nation, 5 June 1861.

63 Ibid.

ruefully admitted in a letter to the Irish press, appeared to be that, as far as the government was concerned.⁶⁴

He hoped to raise the subject in the commons by way of a motion calling on the house to do all in its power to facilitate Irish legislative independence, but the session passed without the motion being introduced.⁶⁵

Even allowing for the possibility of some fraud and intimidation in the collection of signatures, the four-hundred-thousand-plus names on the national petition constituted a considerable vote for self-government.

On the other hand it was not an overwhelming total from a country with a population of nearly six million, especially as many thousands of Irish in Britain were included. (On the basis of the 1861 census, it can be estimated that the population of Ireland included almost one and a half million male catholics over the age of fifteen.)⁶⁶

One important aspect of the national petition is the exercise in popular political organization on a country-wide basis which it involved. It can be seen

64 Nation, 5 June 1861.

65 Nation, 5 June, 17 Aug. 1861.

66 Census Ire., 1861, V, pp xiv, xvii, xxvii, 464.

as an ad hoc revival of the system of the Repeal Association. It was, excepting the MacMahon sword movement, the first public attempt at an organized response to the changed circumstances which had restored Irish self-government to the realm of political possibility. The fact that it was a response at least nominally within the context of parliament and the constitution must be noted. The organizers' hope was for constitutional concessions, to be gained peacefully and without actual outside interference. But they were clearly hoping to use external threats as a lever. Like the English volunteers, they were convinced of the seriousness of those threats. And there were Irishmen, including many of those active in collecting signatures for the national petition, who confidently hoped that those threats would become reality. The seriousness with which the possibility of a French invasion was envisaged at this time is demonstrated by the controversy on the subject in which William Smith O'Brien got himself involved.

Because he took no active part in public affairs after his return from exile in 1856, it is often assumed that O'Brien ceased to do anything that is of interest to the student of Irish nationalism. In fact, from 1856 to 1864 he devoted unexcelled effort and talent to

the examination of the past, present and future of Ireland's national existence (in addition to maintaining a vibrant interest in the nationalities of the continent which involved long comprehensive tours of enquiry in eastern and western Europe). His view of Irish affairs, never at any time hackneyed or unthinking, became at this stage more and more individual. The peculiarity in his attitude was probably due to his being an intellectual convert to Irish nationalism who was not nurtured in, or did not subsequently acquire, any of its basic prejudices. Thoughtful rejection of an automatic popular attitude can be seen in his opposition to the prospect of French intervention, when that prospect was delighting the hearts of so many other nationalists.

O'Brien's first public comment on the French invasion appears to have been that made in a letter in the Tablet of 5 June 1858. This brought a reply from an anonymous 'old repealer' protesting that Irishmen would rather be governed by France any day than live in slavery,⁶⁷ but apart from this O'Brien seems to have drawn little controversy about the subject upon himself

67 Anonymous to O'Brien, 8 June 1858 (N.L.I., O'Brien papers, MS 446, no. 3042).

until 1860, when he referred to it in a letter to the Irish American (New York).⁶⁸ In subsequent exchanges O'Brien elaborated on his objections to the policy of the 'French party'. It would be a case of replacing one foreign ruler by another one;⁶⁹ the French imperial system involved unacceptable military dictatorship;⁷⁰ but most important of all, it would cause civil war among the inhabitants of Ireland.⁷¹ Catholics with nothing to lose would support the invasion; it would be opposed by the protestants and by some catholics, and would end like the war of 1641.⁷² Protestants, he said, saw in the 'French policy' the threat of the imposition of an intolerant catholic regime.⁷³

In reply O'Brien received some hurtful personal abuse, such as the suggestion in the Irishman that he was motivated by jealousy of Marshal MacMahon who, as the

68 Referred to in Nation, 8 Dec. 1860.

69 Nation, 26 Jan. 1861.

70 Draft of O'Brien to David White, 12 Oct. 1860 (N.L.I., O'Brien papers, MS 447, no. 3186).

71 Draft of O'Brien to secretary of Cork National Reading Room, 20 Oct. 1860 (N.L.I., O'Brien papers, MS 447, no. 3189).

72 Irishman, Nation, 8 Dec. 1860.

73 Draft of O'Brien to secretary of Cork National Reading Room, 20 Oct. 1860 (N.L.I., O'Brien papers, MS 447, no. 3189).

representative of the senior line of Brian Boru's descendants, would have a better claim than O'Brien to the throne of an independent Ireland.⁷⁴ There was also some righteous indignation at the idea that the catholic majority in a free Ireland would countenance the slightest impairment of the civil and religious liberty of protestants.⁷⁵ The response which interested him most came in a letter to the papers from John Martin, who, among other things, argued that since the institution of standing armies no country had freed itself without foreign aid.⁷⁶ Martin's thesis induced O'Brien to elaborate his own case and publish it in pamphlet form.⁷⁷ But despite his prestige and his able argumentation, O'Brien had to confess that his opposition to the idea of a French invasion isolated him from his political friends.⁷⁸

Despite numerous protestations and positive indications of Anglo-French amity during the decade, the

74 Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

75 E.g., J. E. Pigot, Dublin, to O'Brien, 27 Dec. 1860 (N.L.I., O'Brien papers, MS 447, no. 3202).

76 Irishman, Nation, 5 Jan. 1861.

77 John Martin and W. S. O'Brien, Correspondence between John Martin and Smith O'Brien relative to a French invasion (Dublin, 1861) (a copy attached to N.L.I., Larcom papers, MS 7697).

78 Irishman, 13 Apr. 1861.

'French party' in Ireland persisted in the belief that the logic of Napoleon's position would lead him into war with his country's traditional rival. Napoleon has no intention of invading England and liberating Ireland, John Mitchel wrote in 1861; and if the matter were in Napoleon's hands there would be no war in his lifetime; but, Mitchel argued, events might not be in Napoleon's control, and as it takes two to make a war, so it also takes two to make an entente cordiale.⁷⁹

On another occasion Mitchel exhorted the Irish at home to 'keep the fire burning' in anticipation of the inevitable conflict between England and France, in a year, two years, or ten years.⁸⁰

With the crisis over Schleswig and Holstein coming to a climax, in January 1864, the Nation speculated at length on the prospects of a widespread European war, and urged that Ireland should make sure to count for as much in it as Venetia or Hungary.⁸¹ Joint manoeuvres by the French and English fleets in 1865 were dismissed by the Irishman as so much window-dressing.⁸² While

79 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

80 Irishman, 8 Mar. 1862.

81 Nation, 23, 30 Jan. 1864.

82 Irishman, 2 Sept. 1865.

the Austro-Prussian war was brewing up, early in 1866, the same paper envisaged the involvement of all the European powers.⁸³ In August 1867 the Irishman once again deciphered 'war clouds and omens' over Europe, and declared that England would soon be involved in a great war, and that Ireland would consequently have its chance as in 1782.⁸⁴ However, when a decisive European war did come, in 1870, it dissipated that dream.

Irish reaction to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 is exceptionally instructive. With the pre-war diplomatic crisis at its height, the Nation, confident of French victory in an international war which Britain would find it difficult to remain out of, warned the London government that it would be well advised to placate the people of Ireland by repeal of the Act of Union.⁸⁵ On the night of the French declaration of war against Prussia, Dublin was the scene of a huge and spontaneous popular demonstration, centred on the residence of the French consul. Irish and French tricolours were intermingled and bands played alternately the martial airs of each

83 Irishman, 14 Apr. 1866.

84 Irishman, 17 Aug. 1867.

85 Nation, 16 July 1870.

country.⁸⁶ Similar demonstrations, enthusiastically pro-French, took place throughout Ireland in subsequent weeks.⁸⁷ As news of French setbacks became known, plans were made for an Irish ambulance corps which would bring medical relief to wounded French soldiers and provide a cover for the despatch of Irishmen to fight for France.⁸⁸ O'Neill Daunt, in rural Cork, recorded local reaction in his diary: 'The country people here evince the strongest French feeling. "If the French are beat, Ireland's beat", said one of them to me.'⁸⁹ And, a few weeks later, 'the low protestants of this locality crow loudly over the defeat of France which they interpret as the favour of providence to protestantism'.⁹⁰ Nothing could illustrate more clearly the place of France in Irish political sentiment before the fall of the second empire.

An Anglo-French war had been an unlikely enough prospect in the years immediately before 1870, but it was always a possibility. After 1870 all was changed, and

86 Nation, 23 July 1870.

87 Irishman, 30 July, 6, 20, 27 Aug. 1870.

88 Irishman, 24 Sept. 1860.

89 Journal of William J. O'Neill Daunt, 12 Aug. 1870 (N.L.I., MS 3041).

90 Ibid., 7 Sept. 1870.

even the accession of Marshal MacMahon to the presidency of France could not raise any hopes in the minds of Irish nationalists. French power had been humiliated; if it recovered, France had two of its own provinces to liberate as a priority; and France's 'natural enemy' was no longer Great Britain but imperial Germany.

Apart altogether from Anglo-French problems, many Irish nationalists had been excited during the 1860s by the evidence of Anglo-American tensions. Many felt certain that the palpable bad feeling between London and Washington during the civil war (1861-5) would inevitably lead to active hostilities. This had important effects on the political climate in Ireland and, of course, in Irish circles in America. Anglo-American relations continued to be uneasy (and to offer hope to extreme Irish nationalists) until the end of the decade.⁹¹ The purpose of the fenian raids on Canada in 1866 and 1870 was not simply to take something from Britain, but to precipitate war between Britain and the U.S.A.

The seriously-considered possibility of international war loosening the political links with Great

⁹¹ See below, ch. 9, and Brian Jenkins, Fenians and Anglo-American relations during reconstruction (Ithaca, 1969).

Britain makes the period 1858-70 unique in the history of Ireland between 1815 and 1914. It was a possibility that influenced the politics of those thirteen years, at a number of points; some of them we have seen in this chapter, while others will be discussed later.⁹²

The main influence was, undoubtedly, on the genesis and development of fenianism.

Why then, it may be asked, do we not get an awareness of this international dimension in the memoirs of the politicians and activists of the period? This is hardly to be wondered at in the case of something which had its existence in the realm of possibility, but was never reduced to concrete reality. However, there is also a more definite reason in this case, and it is, that recalling the hopes reposed in France and in America during the 1860s would, in later years, have been embarrassing for most of those involved.

We can take A. M. Sullivan as an example. With his brother, T. D., he was a prime mover of the MacMahon sword movement and the national petition. The Nation, of which he was proprietor and editor from 1857 onwards, has numerous leading articles which consider and heartily

92 See below, chs. 3, 5, 7, 9.

welcome the possibilities of foreign intervention in Ireland in 1858 and subsequent years. The following extract from an article headed 'The weak point of the British empire' can be taken as typical of many such statements:

Whenever and wherever the chances of war with England are discussed, then and there the disaffection of Ireland becomes an element in the calculation. The only question is the possibility of availing of it. Some of the powers would find it difficult to act effectively in this country - to others it would be an easy task. Russia felt her way here in 1855, but what Russia could not undertake to do would be possible to America and a facile work to France. A war with either of these powers implies, to a certainty, the dispatch from their shores of men, arms and money to Ireland, and an uprising of Irishmen for the independence of their country.⁹³

However, one could read his well-known book of reminiscences, New Ireland (first published in 1877), and never get the impression that Sullivan had at any stage contemplated the intrusion of international considerations on Anglo-Irish relations. The MacMahon sword movement and the national petition are carefully trimmed of their wider implications.⁹⁴ The explanation is that recalling them would leave all concerned open to ridicule for apparent naivety. In retrospect, hopes reposed in the second French empire

93 Nation, 2 May 1863.

94 Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 206-8, 242-4; however, T.D. Sullivan, A.M. Sullivan: a memoir (Dublin, 1885), p. 33 has a hint of the suppressed factor.

looked ridiculous indeed, and raised doubts about the political wisdom of those who had entertained them.

Fenians and their apologists had an additional reason for maintaining silence on the international factor in the genesis of the I.R.B., as ^{recalling} it would tarnish the myth of a suppressed nationality re-emerging, by its own innate vitality and in face of all the odds, in the shape of fenianism.

1 *Ibid.*, pp. 151-5.
 2 *Ibid.*, 3 Apr. 1859.
 3 *Ibid.*, 7 May 1866.

CHAPTER TWOINDEPENDENT OPPOSITION, 1858-64

As Dr Whyte has shown, the independent opposition M.P.s in the early part of 1859 lost whatever semblance of a formal party structure they had preserved in parliament during the preceding years.¹ That, however, was not the end of independent opposition. The Nation, which mourned the demise of the independent party in April 1859,² was conducting a postmortem on the same party in May 1866, and was representing the vote taken on the reform bill a week previously as the occasion of death.³ Clearly then, something recognisable as a party survived the collapse of 1859. There was not a formal parliamentary grouping with even as much as the appearance of the discipline that its founders had intended. But there were individual M.P.s, all pledged by their election addresses to the same formula, and looked upon by their supporters as forming a distinct group with a

1 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 151-5.

2 Nation, 9 Apr. 1859.

3 Nation, 5 May 1866.

distinctive policy that logically demanded that on certain occasions they should all act together in a certain way. The supporters had lost their formal organization in 1858 with the disappearance of the Tenant League,⁴ but that event did not greatly reduce their zeal or effectiveness. Indeed, the continuing support in the country is the factor which above all else makes independent opposition in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties worthy of examination. That examination must be begun by briefly putting independent opposition in its parliamentary and historical context.

When Irish catholic opinion first obtained a parliamentary voice in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, it was in a parliament where, guided by the overwhelming power of tradition and custom, every shade of the political spectrum tended to accommodate itself to one or other of the two great alliances, the whigs or the tories. Led by O'Connell, the Irish popular representatives, like every other group that stood for political change, automatically drifted in the direction of the whigs.⁵ The first generation of emancipated

4 See below, ch. 12 (pp 364-7).

5 See Nowlan, Politics of repeal, p. 7.

English catholics tended to follow the same course.⁶

The tories were, especially in Irish catholic eyes, the party of ascendancy and privilege.

Of course the whig party as a whole was still far from being a party of radical change, especially change of the kind that would meet the demands of Irish catholic nationalism. Accordingly, O'Connell found that his cause could be best served at some times by close co-operation with the whigs, and that at other times it was better to adopt a line if not of total opposition to them then at least of independence from them on Irish questions.⁷ This ambivalent attitude to the whigs survived O'Connell by many decades. The policy of independent opposition adopted in the early 'fifties was basically a formalisation of the antipathetic stance towards the whigs. But the ambivalence remained in the attitudes and feelings of the Irish popular party, and an appreciation of that ambivalence is essential for understanding the history of the independent Irish party.

⁶ See John Vincent, The formation of the liberal party 1857-68 (London, 1966), p. 261 (hereafter cited as Vincent, Liberal party).

⁷ Nation, 2 Feb. 1861 has an interesting survey of this subject.

At the time that the independent opposition formula was adopted the ambivalence seemed to be a thing of the past, as catholic Ireland raged against Lord John Russell's legislation on ecclesiastical titles. With matters in that state, the independent oppositionists achieved impressive results in the general election of 1852.⁸ However, extreme emotions quietened down in a short time and the considerable amount of Irish catholic goodwill towards the whigs re-emerged. John Sadleir and William Keogh may have been guilty of pledge-breaking when they joined Lord Aberdeen's predominantly whig government, but their attitude was supported by a significant proportion of politically-active Irish catholics, while it was of course deplored by others. There is much uncertainty about the classification of Irish M.P.s in the popular interest during the 1850s, precisely because many of the members themselves, and many of their supporters, alternated in their attachments between independent opposition and support for the whigs.⁹ Nevertheless, by the last years of the decade there was some clarity in the distinction between that group of representatives

8 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 82-6.

9 For an illustration of the difficulties of classification see Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 180-1.

of Irish popular interests who were professed supporters of the whigs, and the independents who were in possession of what remained of an independent opposition party structure.

The clearest sign that the distinction was solidifying came when the independents began to have friendly political relations with the tories. Although that was limited by the independent opposition pledge as firmly as was support for the whigs, it was in practice difficult to keep up war on two fronts. As early as 1852 the independents had briefly contemplated supporting the Earl of Derby's first ministry,¹⁰ but significant co-operation with tories did not get under way until the second half of the decade. In 1856 co-operation at the polls had commenced, and it influenced the results of some by-elections during that year.¹¹ At the general election of 1857 tories and independent oppositionists had arranged to share the representation of some counties by putting forward one candidate each to oppose the whigs in two-seat constituencies. This ticket appealed strongly to

10 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 94-5.

11 J. H. Whyte, 'Political problems, 1850-60' in Corish, Ir. catholicism, v, fasc. 2, pp 33-4 (hereafter cited as Whyte, 'Political problems').

tenant farmers, who could cast one vote for a popular representative and then give satisfaction to their landlords with the second.¹² These tactics were successful at least in Counties Wexford and Leitrim, and in Mayo, where George Henry Moore was returned, only to be subsequently unseated on appeal.¹³

When a tory government took office following Palmerston's resignation in February 1858, it was, according to the general interpretation of the independent opposition pledge, entitled to a period of grace in which to adopt a satisfactory policy on the Irish land question, before being subjected to judgment. Instead of waiting neutrally or sceptically for a decent interval to elapse, the independents quite quickly became keen admirers of the new regime, as a series of measures pleasing to themselves and their constituents, was introduced by the government: equality for catholic chaplains in the army, abolition of the property qualification for M.P.s, the establishment of a transatlantic packet station at Galway and of a national gallery in Dublin. Coming after years of Palmerstonian obduracy, these minor

12 Nation, 29 July 1865.

13 Ibid.; Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, p. 173.

concessions were most gratefully received, and suggested strongly that Irish catholics had more to expect from the tories than from the whigs.¹⁴

In fact Disraeli was at this stage seeking to arrange a tory-catholic alliance based on qualms about Palmerston's policy on Italy.¹⁵ However, the unqualified support of the Irish independents could be secured only in return for a satisfactory tenant right measure; that would be very difficult for a tory government to concede, but Disraeli seemed to be doing his best. On 19 June 1858 he received a deputation of independent opposition members and offered to legislate for 'compensation for disturbance' on behalf of agricultural tenants in Ireland. However, the proposed law would have no retrospective effect.¹⁶ The independents were divided on the propriety of accepting such a limited concession. In any event, it had not been introduced before the debate on the reform bill of 1859 got under way. This was the kind of major measure on which independent opposition principles ought to be applied. On 31 March the independents split, some

14 Nation, 3 July 1858.

15 See Vincent, Liberal party, pp 262-3.

16 Nation, 26 June 1858.

voting against the government on a strict interpretation of the pledge, the others voting for a measure desirable in itself, and for an administration which, whatever its deficiencies, seemed more favourable to Irish interests, and to catholic interests in Ireland and in Italy, than the alternative government.¹⁷

Despite the division among the independent oppositionists, and the fact that they no longer possessed even the semblance of central organization, they did well in the general election of May 1859. Just how well, it is impossible to say exactly, owing to the continued blurring at the edges of independent opposition and catholic Liberalism. Even the Nation was slow to put a figure on the total of independents returned, but it expressed very great satisfaction at the results.¹⁸ It seems likely that about seventeen of those elected were pledged to independent opposition, though a few of them became almost at once supporters of the new Liberal government.¹⁹ The Irish tories were even more successful, having their

17 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, p. 153.

18 Nation, 7, 14 May 1858.

19 Irishman, 17 Dec. 1859; K. T. Hoppen, 'Tories, catholics and the general election of 1859' in Hist. Jn., xiii (1970), p. 66.

best election results for a generation. Their success was due almost entirely to support from catholics, and co-operation with independent oppositionists and their supporters.²⁰

Out of office, the tories (or at least Disraeli) endeavoured to retain friendly links with catholics,²¹ and in Ireland many independent opposition supporters were still capable of showing that they preferred tories to whigs. A striking instance was provided by the County Cork by-election of February 1861. On this occasion no independent candidate was forthcoming; the leader writer of the Nation and the local clergy both advised the voters not to exert themselves on behalf of the whig candidate, Roche, who had made no profession of independent or catholic principles.²² Neither had the tory candidate, Leader, but he was a good landlord, and the idea of supporting him in order to discomfit the government candidate was proposed less than two weeks before the poll.²³ It was taken up enthusiastically by

20 Ibid., pp 48-67.

21 See Vincent, Liberal party, pp 262-3.

22 Nation, 16, 23 Feb. 1861.

23 Nation, 23 Feb. 1861.

the voters of the popular party, and Leader won with a large majority.²⁴ The apparent spontaneity of the movement in favour of the tory is interesting.

The phase of co-operation between tories, catholics and independents found most striking expression in the flamboyant person of John Pope Hennessy, and his return for King's County in 1859 was the ultimate expression of that co-operation. He was a pledged oppositionist, but alone of them all he was in the second place not a liberal but a conservative, and in the commons he identified himself with the tories when not constrained by his commitment to independent opposition. Indeed, he has been described as the first catholic to represent an Irish constituency in the conservative interest.²⁵ The fact that he could at the same time pass as an independent oppositionist illustrates the climate in which the 1859 election was fought in Ireland. It also, perhaps, was a fittingly eccentric beginning to a colourful and turbulent public career (most of which was spent in the colonial service).²⁶

24 Nation, 2 Mar. 1861.

25 D. N. B. (1908-9), xvi, pp 138-9.

26 Ibid.

On 24 February 1863 Hennessey led a group of Irish M.P.s - not all of them independents - in a tentative exercise in parliamentary obstruction, which, over a decade later, was to appear as the logical extension of independent opposition. Hennessey and others were demanding the inclusion of an Irish representative on the committee of public accounts, and, after defeat on a vote, the member for King's County spoke of the minority exercising its constitutional privilege 'even though they might have to keep dividing till four or five in the morning'. In fact, he forced two further divisions on technicalities before giving way.²⁷ (He may have been encouraged to relent by the remark of an English member that the rules of the house had been made for gentlemen.)²⁸

The frustration which induced Hennessey to toy with such extreme and ungentlemanly measures was part of the condition of all Irish catholic M.P.s in the early 'sixties, whether they were government supporters or independent oppositionists. (It was also the lot of many English radical and liberal members in this era of unshakeable Palmerstonian inaction.) Dr Whyte has analysed the series of difficulties which virtually

27 Hansard 3, clxix, coll 715-7 (24 Feb. 1861).

28 Nation, 28 Feb. 1863; this remark is not reported in Hansard.

precluded any possibility of success for an independent Irish party in the 1850;²⁹ the same constraints applied in the early years of the following decade. Many of these obstacles to advance were also standing in the way of popular political progress in Britain. From an early stage thinking independent oppositionists had realised that electoral reform such as the English radicals were seeking would greatly enhance their own prospects; by the end of the fifties they knew that it was their only hope.³⁰

When John Bright returned to public life in the autumn of 1858 with the launching of a campaign for reform,³¹ some of the leading oppositionists attempted to set up a supporting movement in Ireland. Bright was invited to come across and help with the work, but he was unable ^{do so} to.³² In the spring of 1859 a county committee to campaign for the ballot was established in Tipperary under the guidance of two leading independent oppositionists, The O'Donoghue, M.P. and G. H. Moore, and with the

29 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, esp. pp 176-7.

30 See Nation, 6 June 1857, 16 Jan. 1858.

31 Vincent, Liberal party, p. 161.

32 See Irishman, 21 Aug. 1858; Evening News, 20 Jan. 1859.

enthusiastic support of the Nation, the leading journal of the oppositionists.³³

The independents attached far more importance to the secret ballot than to extension of the franchise or redistribution of seats; indeed, they professed to see little value in an extension of the franchise unaccompanied by the ballot.³⁴ This attitude was maintained so persistently that it cannot have been a pose, and we must conclude that the oppositionists sincerely believed that potential supporters were being pressurised into not voting for them, or rather that they were losing out in the battle of pressures and counter-pressures that was, inevitably, conducted around the pre-ballot polling stations.³⁵

So insistently did the Nation speak on the subject that it was eventually accused by a nationalist contemporary of advocating a policy of doing nothing but sitting

³³ Nation, 19 Feb. 1859; Tipperary Examiner, 5 Mar. 1859.

³⁴ See e.g. Nation, 16 Jan. 1858, 22 Jan. 1859, 28 Mar. 1868.

³⁵ For illumination of this problem see J. H. Whyte, 'The influence of the catholic clergy on elections in nineteenth-century Ireland' and 'Landlord influence at elections in Ireland, 1760-1885' in E. H. R. 1xxv (1960), pp 239-59 and 1xxx (1965), pp 740-60.

back in expectation of the ballot.³⁶ Naturally, that accusation had to be strenuously rejected but, as an analysis of the parliamentary policy not just of the Nation but of many independent opposition M.P.s, it contains a great measure of truth. At least from 1858 onwards, it was accepted that the ballot would come eventually. One can sense about the independent members in the early 'sixties an unenterprising attitude towards purely parliamentary politics, born of the belief that it was futile to expend great amounts of energy fighting against obstacles that would soon be swept away by the deus ex machina of electoral reform.³⁸ This kind of lethargy was largely responsible for the failure of the independent oppositionists to recreate formal party structures after the rupture of March 1859. Certainly there was no abiding contention between the M.P.s to prevent them from working together in this way.

But, organise as they might, there was no prospect of making any progress in parliament during these years. Facing similar parliamentary difficulties Daniel O'Connell

36 Dundalk Democrat cited in Nation, 9 Mar. 1861.

37 See Nation, 21 Aug. 1858.

38 See Nation, 2, 9 Feb. 1861.

had secured his leadership and authority in the country by means of extra-parliamentary organization and agitation. There was no possibility that the sense of impending crisis and opportunity which marked 1858 and the immediately following years could find an adequate outlet through parliamentary politics. It was acknowledged over and over again in those years that the country needed a national organization, possibly on the lines of the Repeal Association, but one which would at any rate give direction and leadership to the aroused feelings of nationalism. Various independent parliamentarians contributed to the manoeuvres, discussions, and plans, aimed at providing such an organization, which took place from 1858 to 1864.³⁹ It was because of their failure in this field, rather than just because of their inevitable lack of success in parliament, that they left the way open for the promoters of armed conspiracy to gain the allegiance of an important section of active nationalists.

It was not the case that the parliamentarians did not have among them a potential leader. They did have an eminently promising one in Daniel O'Donoghue, styled The O'Donoghue, chieftain of the Glens, in recognition

39 See below, chs 4, 5 (pp 85-165).

of his headship of a princely gaelic family which had retained possession of some of its ancestral lands in remote parts of Kerry and west Cork. He was the representative not only of the O'Donoghues, but also of the line of MacCarthy More.⁴⁰ He enjoyed the great local popularity and loyalty that went with this status. For good measure he was a grandnephew of the liberator. At the age of twenty-two, in 1855, he was in contact with Gavan Duffy and showing interest in a political career.⁴¹ Two years later he successfully contested a by-election in County Tipperary on the platform of independent opposition, and with the active support of G. H. Moore. After Moore had lost his own seat later in the same year, The O'Donoghue shone out as by far the most able and charismatic of the oppositionist M.P.s. He had a dashing chivalric style, striking appearance, and excellent oratorical skill.⁴²

The O'Donoghue's work for the MacMahon sword move-

40 Sir Bernard Burke, Genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Ireland (4th ed., London, 1958) pp 533-4; T. D. Sullivan, Recollections of troubled times in Irish politics (Dublin, 1905), p. 148.

41 Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, My life in two hemispheres (2 vols, London, 1898), ii, 256.

42 Ibid.

ment and the national petition we have already seen, and they are but two episodes in a ceaseless campaign that he fought from 1858 to 1865 to establish an organization that would unify, lead and control the forces of popular Irish nationalism. Throughout this period he was unfailingly conceded the leading position in every project of the constitutional nationalists, and he accepted these honours as naturally as one born to lead his fellow-men might be expected to. His address was the highpoint of scores of meetings, banquets and demonstrations. The most noteworthy points in the story of his efforts to create a national movement under his own leadership are discussed below.⁴³

Even if its only significance was that it produced this national leader manqué, the independent opposition movement of these years would deserve notice. But it is worthy of attention primarily for its function in the country rather than for any of the actions of its leading personnel. Ostensibly, the independent oppositionists

43 Chs 4, 5; The O'Donoghue's years of glory have been overlooked because he subsequently lost faith in the idea of Irish self-government; see T. D. Sullivan, Recollections, pp 148-50, where, however, the time-scale of his career is grossly distorted by the statement (p. 150) that he retired from public life in 1865; this is probably a misprint: the correct date is 1885.

were distinguished by their devotion to a principle; in reality it was a rather crude political posture masquerading as a principle, and wrapped in an incredibly clumsy formula. It was not humanly possible to remain unceasingly in the basic posture - opposition to every important measure of the government, whether desirable in itself or not -, and throughout the lifetime of the movement independent opposition M.P.s could frequently be seen bending and stretching. On the other hand, their direct competitors, the Irish catholic supporters of the whigs, who professedly disapproved of independent opposition, assumed the same destructively antagonistic posture when circumstances demanded.⁴⁴

In short, insofar as there was in the 'fifties and 'sixties a clear polarity between an independent opposition party and the catholic section of the Irish whigs, it was not based on an issue of principle or of parliamentary tactics, whatever the rhetoric might suggest. The real basis of division was a clash between an earlier and a more advanced phase of nationalism. The difference was not as obvious at the level of parliamentary representation as it was among the supporters in the country.

44 See below, ch. 8 (pp 248, 259).

While the followers of the whigs tended to be upper middle class, and included many of those catholics who had become landed proprietors by purchase of property in the encumbered estates court, the independent oppositionists had a markedly more popular following. There were tenant farmers in both camps, but they were undoubtedly more prominent on the side of the independent oppositionists, who always displayed a more earnest concern for reform of the land laws in favour of the tenantry. Catholic clergymen could be found on both sides, but virtually all of them with a popular following outside their own areas were on the independent opposition side. They included Archbishop MacHale, Frs Keefe and O'Shea of Co. Kilkenny and Frs Vaughan and Quaid of County Clare.

The division we are discussing was of a quite different kind from that which existed at an earlier date between Young Ireland and the O'Connellites, when the populace and the catholic whigs were on the same side, against a small band of doctrinaire nationalists. Independent opposition was the first widely popular movement to be imbued with Young Ireland sentiments. Almost every disciple of young Ireland who took an interest in parliamentary politics in the 'fifties and early 'sixties

supported the independent opposition party. And when the popular young Daniel O'Donoghue set about becoming a politician, in 1855, he turned to Charles Gavan Duffy and the independents, despite the protests of his O'Connell relations.

Because of its popular dimension and its openness to advanced nationalist feeling (both combined with implicit acceptance of the conventions of parliamentary democracy) the independent opposition party in the country was a sign of things to come. But it was much more than a signpost. It established, and helped to shape, a tradition which has played an important part in subsequent Irish political history. In particular, the attitudes which it nurtured had considerable influence on developments at the end of the 1860s, even though the slogan of independent opposition was no longer in use.⁴⁵ That had been abandoned in 1866; but already by 1864 the conditions which had condemned a popular Irish party to powerlessness in parliament, were slowly beginning to change.⁴⁶

45 See below, ch. 10 (pp 330-31).

46 See below, ch. §10 (pp 313-4).

CHAPTER THREETHE BEGINNINGS OF FENIANISM.

The particular thread of revolutionary tradition to which fenianism belongs entered the fabric of Irish history in 1848. The French revolution of that year made a profound impact on the Young Irelanders, as it did on the romantic nationalists of virtually every country in Europe. Close observation of developments in France brought Irish nationalists of that generation to an awareness of the potentialities of secret conspiracy, something which most of them rejected as undesirable or unsuitable for Ireland, but which a minority of enthusiasts embraced as the only effective mode of revolutionary nationalist activity. Once committed to the idea, these could claim continuity with the thinking of Wolfe Tone, and could silently exploit the considerable popular acquaintance with native agrarian conspiracies, but it seems certain that they were attracted to clandestine methods in the first instance by the example of the secret societies which seemed to have achieved so much in the continental upheavals of the year of revolutions.

A beginning of oath-bound revolutionary conspiracy

was made in Ireland before the end of 1848, involving, among others, Philip Gray, Thomas Clarke Luby and James Fintan Lalor.¹ Although their attempt at an uprising in the following year was a pathetic failure, the idea of political conspiracy lived on: the tradition of the revolutionary nationalist secret society, so characteristic of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, had taken root belatedly in Ireland, where it was to survive even more tenaciously than in the homelands of Mazzini or Blanqui.

Although the early and middle years of the fifties were unfavourable ones for the advancement of Irish nationalism in any form, yet the nucleus of secret organization continued to exist. The scantiness of the information which has come down is probably a fair indication of the number of individuals involved: they seem to have been too few to support any elaborate system of organization, and, as far as can be known, they were confined mainly to the Dublin area.² Their most substantial structure seems to have been the St Patrick's Society of Kingstown, founded in 1848, and destined to

1 T. P. O'Neill, 'Fintan Lalor and the 1849 movement' in An Cosantóir, x (Apr. 1950), pp 173-9.

2 MS 331.

become a registered friendly society, providing at the same time excellent cover for political conspiracy.³

The names of some of the Kingstown group are known - the Hickey brothers, the Rochfords, a tailor named Scott, an old-clothes man named Jennings and George Kelly who lived in Dalkey.⁴ Together with a group of city men led by Peter Langan, they were accustomed to go on Sunday trips to the Dublin mountains, where they practised military drill under the guidance of a sympathetic staff-sergeant of militia. They also collected money for the purchase of rifles.⁵ Closely connected with this group were Philip Gray and Thomas Clarke Luby, Lalor's associates of 1849.⁶

If the survival of nationalist conspiracy in Ireland was tenuous during the 1850s, it was otherwise among the Irish in America, where there was intense rivalry, misunderstanding, and confusion, but no want of plotting and planning, nor of the militant extremism

3 Irishman, 8 June 1861; John Lalor to John L. O'Ferrall, 11 Nov. 1861 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, Incoming correspondence, Ordinary, 1861).

4 MS 331.

5 Ibid.

6 MS 331.

which saw armed struggle as the way forward for the Irish nation. The Irish exiles in New York and other cities who devoted themselves to the liberation of the homeland sponsored two forms of organization, the first of which consisted of regiments of state militia recruited exclusively from among Irishmen of militant anti-English sympathies.⁷ By this means thousands of would-be 'soldiers of Irish liberty' were given military training at the expense of the American public during the 1850s. At a second level various societies - more or less secret - were instituted to encourage and direct revolutionary Irish nationalism in America, and these included the Irishmen's Civil and Military Republican Union, the Emmet Monument Association and the Irish Emigrant Aid Society.⁸

Some of the more sanguine of these Irish-Americans saw in the Crimean war (1854-6) a possible opportunity to wage successful war against England, and accordingly the Emmet Monument Association decided on an armed

7 Michael Doheny, New York, to William Smith O'Brien, 20 Aug. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

8 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., pp 5-8.

invasion of Ireland, to take place in September 1855.⁹ Joseph Denieffe has recorded how he was engaged, in the most haphazard manner, to organize preparations at home, as he left New York to return to Ireland on personal business in the summer of 1855.¹⁰ His method, apparently, was to administer an oath to suitably-minded individuals, give them details of the promised invasion and then arrange means of communication.¹¹ His most extensive effort was made in the city and county of Kilkenny, where he swore in, among others, John Haltigan, Edward Coyne and James Cody, all later fenians. Kilkenny apart, the only other area in which Denieffe claims to have organized is Dublin city, where he made contact with Langan and his group, who were of course long-standing devotees of the secret and conspiratorial mode of political activity and took readily to the new project. Langan and Gray were among those who formally joined; Luby did not, but he

9 Joseph Denieffe, A personal narrative of the Irish revolutionary brotherhood, giving a faithful report of the principal events from 1855 to 1867 written at the request of friends (New York, 1906), p. 3 (hereafter cited as Denieffe, I.R.B.).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., pp 8-12.

was clearly sympathetic.¹² Denieffe and his organization remained in readiness for the promised invasion throughout the summer and autumn, and they maintained their system of communications even after the uneventful passing of 1855 had shown that their hopes were in vain.

James Stephens, a refugee since 1848, returned to Ireland from his Parisian exile in late 1855 or early 1856.¹³ He felt and behaved like an intellectual of the romantic revolutionary class then in vogue on the continent and especially in Paris, which was more sophisticated and socialistic than the Irish species. He came with a definite purpose, and readers of his own account of this period, published many years later, have been given to understand that this was to survey the Irish political scene and assess the preparedness of the people for revolutionary conspiracy.¹⁴ However, the picture of Stephens in 1856 waiting the opportunity to launch the fenian movement is probably as misleading as that of

12 Denieffe, I.R.B., pp 8-12.

13 F. Davys, resident magistrate, Bantry, to Lord Naas, 26 Jan. 1859 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11,187); D. Ryan, The fenian chief: a biography of James Stephens (Dublin and Sydney, 1967), p. 57 (hereafter cited as Ryan, Fenian chief).

14 Weekly Freeman, 6 Oct. 1883 and foll.

Michael Davitt in prison in the mid-1870s with the concept of the new departure and the Land League fully formed in his mind. There is indeed weighty evidence that throughout 1856 Stephens's preoccupation was with the writing of a book.¹⁵ As with all his undertakings he was wildly optimistic about the outcome: the publication of his work would, he declared, have an incalculable effect on Irish public opinion, and would be of great financial benefit to himself.¹⁶ In the meantime he supported himself by giving French lessons to the children of wealthy Dublin families, though he was sometimes absent from his teaching duties for periods of four to six weeks. During these intervals he went on the travels which he later magnified into his 'three-thousand mile walk' around Ireland. These travels were probably guided by the spirit of the literary-romantic fashion for touring rather than by any directly political objective. Places with scenic, romantic and literary associations - such as Killarney, Clonmacnoise and Lissoy (Goldsmith's Auburn) - featured prominently.¹⁷ The travels may have been

15 F. Davys to Lord Naas, 26 Jan. 1859 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11,187).

16 Ibid.

17 Weekly Freeman, 6 Oct. 1883 and foll.; Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 14 says '[Stephens] had spent all his time in Paris since '48, and came over to Killarney to finish some work he had in hand.'

intended, too, to provide either substance or colour for the book, which, it would seem, however, never reached the printing press.

It is well to be cautious about the received notion that Stephens came to Ireland particularly well prepared by his experience or education in Paris for organizing conspiracy. This legend was most effectively promoted by John Savage in his collection of biographical essays, Fenian heroes and martyrs (New York, 1868), written originally as a series of articles for the Irish-American press to satisfy curiosity aroused by the 1865 arrests in Ireland. By Savage's account, O'Mahony and Stephens after their arrival in Paris in 1848 joined one of the city's secret societies, rose to prominent positions, and 'became pupils of some of the ablest and most profound masters of revolutionary science which the nineteenth century has produced'.¹⁸ The extremely general nature of this information suggests that the author is presenting what he thinks should have happened rather than anything which he has reason to believe did happen. In any case scarcely anything put on record by Stephens or O'Mahony amounts to ^{convincing} evidence that they were initiated

18 Op. cit., p. 307.

into any continental secret society, and even if they were, it is virtually certain that they never advanced beyond the lowest rank. On the other hand, they could in Paris acquire all that was publicly known about the history and methods of the secret societies, and they certainly absorbed the attitudes and convictions which inspired the revolutionary conspirators of 1848 and which were officially honoured by the second republic.

Stephens's aura of familiarity with the advanced French way of doing things, aided by his brazen self-confidence, allowed him to assume a leading position among the small group of revolutionaries which he found in Ireland on his return.

But, it must be re-affirmed, he had in 1856 no definite plans for organization in Ireland. Luby, who first met him in the second half of the year, has recorded that Stephens at that point saw no prospect of success in Ireland until England had first had its own revolution.¹⁹ How did it come about then that little more than a year later he considered the time to be ripe for action? Without doubt, he was responding to the apparent crisis in the security of the British empire which appeared on

the horizon during 1857, as France appeared to be preparing for war, and the revolt of the Sepoys threatened to destroy the power of Britain in India.²⁰ This was the background against which Stephens, in the last days of 1857, accepted an invitation from a remnant of the Emmet Monument Association to do what Denieffe had been asked to do during the Crimean war - set up a secret military organization in Ireland in anticipation of an Irish-American expedition.²¹ As in 1855, so in 1857 the Emmet Monument Association was thinking in terms of a quick response to what seemed like a favourable international situation; this is made clear by Stephens's written reply, in which he undertook to complete the necessary organization within three months.²²

It has never been fully explained why the Emmet Monument Association in 1857 chose Stephens to do the work in Ireland, but it seems probable that the influence of John O'Mahony was important. They had been together for five years in Paris before O'Mahony left for New York

20 See ch. 1, above (pp 4-7).

21 MS 331; Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 17.

22 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 159.

at the end of 1853. John Savage has painted a fanciful picture of the two of them before their parting tossing a coin to determine which would organize Ireland and which America.²⁴ There was of course no such co-ordination of purpose, and by 1856 they had lost all account of one another until communication was restored through mutual contact with John O'Daly, the Dublin publisher.²⁵ So O'Mahony would have been able to vouch both for Stephens's qualities and for his presence in Ireland when the Emmet Monument Association sought an agent in the following year. Michael Doheny, who, like O'Mahony, was prominent in the association, also knew Stephens intimately from their adventures together in 1848, recorded in The felon's track.²⁶

Stephens's response to the American initiative shows him at the top of his tactical form. The conditional acceptance was committed to Joseph Denieffe for conveyance to New York, and by accepting this assignment Denieffe in effect handed over his organization to Stephens and

^{Ryan,}
23 Fenian chief, p. 53.

24 J. Savage, Fenian heroes and martyrs (Boston, 1868), p. 307.

^{Ryan,}
25 Fenian chief, p. 61.

26 M. Doheny, The felon's track (New York, 1849).

surrendered his own earlier commission from the Emmet Monument Association. While Denieffe was in America in January and February 1858, Anglo-French relations deteriorated drastically, greatly increasing the feasibility of the proposed organization. Matters became urgent from Stephens's point of view when the March issue of the Celt set out a plan for national organization which might steal the initiative from his own project. Accordingly he lost no time when Denieffe returned to Dublin on the morning of 17 March with a favourable reply and a sum of money:²⁷ on the evening of the same day he formally established his organization, initiating T. C. Luby, Denieffe, Peter Langan, Garret O'Shaughnessy and Owen Considine.²⁸

Even though the initiative did come in the first instance from New York, Stephens's response was nevertheless eminently creative and fully entitles him to be called the founder of the I.R.B. Whereas Denieffe in 1855 had been content merely to form an Irish extension of the Emmet Monument Association, Stephens was clearly determined to establish an organization in accordance

27 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 25.

28 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 25; MS 331.

with his own plans. He took ideas from various continental societies and combined them to form a system that had some claim to originality, at least in the combination of its parts. The cellular principle was probably adopted from the société des familles which flourished in France, 1834-6.²⁹ Thus the organization was to consist of circles each headed by a centre, or A, known only to the officers immediately below him, nine Bs; each B would command nine Cs, and to them alone he would be known; each C would be responsible for, and known only to, nine Ds, the rank and file. Such at least was the blueprint, but it was never fully adhered to in practice under Irish conditions.³⁰ Stephens was conscious and proud of the fact that his scheme differed from that of the United Irishmen with its system of provincial and county leaders which, Stephens thought, was responsible for the failure of 1798.³¹ The société des familles, like so many of the societies, had an awe-inspiring initiation ritual; this Stephens

29 J. H. Lepper, Famous secret societies (London, 1932), p. 175.

30 MS 331.

31 MS 5964.

completely eschewed, tending instead towards the simplicity which was characteristic of Mazzini's Young Italy. However, there was one aspect of Young Italy which had little appeal for Stephens - the system of provincial congregations.³²

Like every secret society, Stephens's group was to be oath-bound but, again in line with Young Italy, the oath was simple and contained no reference to a death penalty.³³ Stephens gave no name to his movement and the initiated referred to the project among themselves as the organization, the movement, the brotherhood, and by similar informal designations. At the beginning this anonymity served Stephens and his friends well, but when, in the course of time, the organization attracted notoriety and comment, it was inevitably accorded a formal and distinctive title; so members began to call it the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, or the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B. in either case). Outsiders, aware from an early date of the existence of the Fenian Brotherhood in America, applied the term 'fenians' to both sets of

32 E. E. Y. Hales, Mazzini and the secret societies: the making of a myth (London, 1956), p. 61.

33 Ibid; J. H. Lepper, Famous secret societies (London, 1932), pp 158-9.

conspirators, and of course the name stuck.³⁴ For convenience we can apply the terms 'I.R.B.' or 'fenians' to the Irish organization from March 1858 onwards.

Stephens had used the Dublin section of Denieffe's organization as his foundation, and to complete the appropriation he quickly moved to Kilkenny to enrol John Haltigan and his associates.³⁵ During the summer of 1858 the I.R.B. took a firm hold in the south, and it made a spectacular advance in the south-west through the absorption of another pre-existing group, the Phoenix National and Literary Society of Skibbereen, Co. Cork. Under the leadership of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa the Phoenix Society had for a few years been a focal point of militant nationalism, though it was not a secret society.³⁶ Rossa and his few dozen followers joined Stephens's movement in the early summer of 1858 and provided a base for spectacular progress in west Cork and south Kerry during the summer and autumn.³⁷

There is ample evidence that the young Cork and

34 MS 331.

35 Denieffe, I.R.B., pp 25-6.

36 Statement by Robert Cusack, 25 Oct. 1858 (S.P.O., Police reports; secret societies, 1857-9).

37 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 26.

Kerry men who flocked into the I.R.B. at this time were strongly conscious of the international diplomatic and military situation which gave meaning to conspiracy in Ireland.³⁸ This awareness of the wider context extended to those who were opposed to the new movement. The parish priest of Kenmare, in the course of a pulpit denunciation, disclosed his belief that the organization, now known by all - despite its secrecy - to be spreading so rapidly in the area, was under the leadership of Louis Napoleon.³⁹ Apart from denouncing it on the moral principles of which he was the official interpreter, he attempted to win conviction on the basis of some practical reasoning, arguing that, however unjust some of their present laws might be, French law would be even more oppressive.⁴⁰ William Steuart Trench was similarly concerned with the international dimension when he wrote to Dublin Castle on 4 October 1858:

My own impression of the whole matter is that it is a movement of certain emissaries of France, whether authorised or not it is impossible for me

38 Constabulary reports; Kilgarvan, 5 Oct. 1858; Kenmare, 7 Nov. 1858; Bantry, 24 Oct. 1858 (S.P.O., Police reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

39 Constabulary report, Kenmare, 4 Oct. 1858 (S.P.O., Police reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

40 Ibid.

to say, who have come over to ascertain the feeling of the people in this part of the country (I mean the whole south west) in the event of a war between France and England; and I grieve to say I fear they would find many who would by no means be unfavourable to their views.⁴¹

The enthusiasm of the fenian recruits was further encouraged by the associated (though distinct) prospect of assistance, direct and indirect, from the Irish in America.⁴² When the Skibbereen boys, in 1858, adopted a pre-fenian ballad by Charles J. Kickham as their war song they changed one line to read

And would to the kind heavens our friends were here today.⁴³

The friends were of course the members of the Irish-American expedition expected, or promised, by Stephens. It is clear that at this stage the brotherhood had a strong sense of urgency about its work, action being anticipated by the end of 1858 at latest.⁴⁴ Before that

41 Quoted in S. Ó Lúing, 'The Phoenix Society in Kerry, 1858-9' in Kerry Arch. Soc. Jn., ii (1969), p. 7.

42 Constabulary reports: Kenmare, 29 Oct. 1858; Bantry, 2 Oct. 1858; Macroom, 4 Nov. 1858 (S.P.O., Police reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

43 Constabulary report, Castletown, Co. Cork, 23 Sept. 1858 (S.P.O., Police reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

44 Constabulary reports: Kenmare, 3 and 7 Nov. 1858; Skibbereen, 27 Dec. 1858; undated statement of Robert Cusack [evidently late 1858] (S.P.O., Police reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

deadline was reached the authorities had moved against the fenians - or, as they thought at the time, against the Phoenix Society - arresting a handful of prominent members in both Cork and Kerry early in December. 1859 arrived, but no American aid was in sight. Instead, James Stephens was in the U.S.A.

Stephens had launched his society on the understanding that an armed force of Irish-Americans would be sent to spearhead a rising, and that adequate funds for purposes of organization would be available from his sponsors in New York.⁴⁵ However, there was even less substance in the American promises in 1858 than there had been in 1855, and with first hand information available from Denieffe, Stephens should have suspected the worst even as he was launching the I.R.B., on 17 March. True, Denieffe had brought back eighty pounds, but the difficulty with which it had been collected, and the obvious lack of any serious activity in New York were ominous.⁴⁶ Predictably, more cash followed only when Denieffe was sent on another begging mission, and when this new supply in its turn ran out and was not supplemented Stephens decided to go to New York himself.⁴⁷

45 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 159.

46 Ibid., pp 18-22.

47 MS 331.

It was a mission which showed him to be no mere partaker of the work of others, but an innovator and an entrepreneur in political affairs, even if all of this was marred by his shortcomings.

Stephens intended to secure a constant and reliable supply of money from America, but he also had his eye on an even bigger prize than anything which could be collected in the short run among his friends in New York. This was a large sum of money - many thousands of pounds - which had originally been collected in 1848 to support what seemed like an imminent Irish bid for self-government. It was now in the hands of a committee, styled a directory, awaiting the emergence of an Irish enterprise worthy to benefit from it. The directory included Thomas Francis Meagher, Judge Robert Emmet and Richard O'Gorman (all professional Irish-Americans in every sense of the phrase), and Horace Greeley (proprietor of the New York Tribune).⁴⁸ To this rather high-toned circle John Blake Dillon had belonged during his sojourn in New York (1848-55) and Stephens had tried very hard, and in vain, to get a letter of recommendation from Dillon before leaving Ireland.⁴⁹

48 Diary of James Stephens, 1859 (P.R.O.N.I.; photostat in N.L.I., MS 4148); Fenian chief, pp 102-3.

49 MS 331.

Support from John Mitchel might have been a satisfactory substitute, but a journey to his home at Knoxville, Tennessee, proved frustrating and unrewarding for Stephens. After some false hopes had been raised, the attempt to obtain funds from the directory collapsed in utter failure in January 1859.⁵⁰

Stephens still had allies in New York, and early in 1859 they formed what was to be the American wing of the society already existing in Ireland. The generally-accepted account of what happened is that given by Luby: 'Stephens - after weeks if not months of embarrassment - founded in America the organization subsequently known as the Fenian Brotherhood, putting O'Mahony at its head as the subordinate of himself.'⁵¹ O'Mahony has left a brief account which has some significantly different implications: 'In 1859... the small remnant of the Emmet Monument Association then in existence remodelled its organization and elected me its president... The association at my suggestion assumed the title of the Fenian Brotherhood.'⁵² In any event there was now an

^{Ryan,}
50 [^] Fenian chief, pp 105-55.

51 MS 331.

52 Irishman, 16 Aug. 1862; D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S. does not illuminate the issue.

organization in America devoted exclusively to co-operation with the I.R.B.

The news of the so-called phoenix arrests had probably put the final touches to Stephens's failure to impress the directory with his organizational achievements in Ireland, but at the same time it provided a very useful pretext for money-raising. Public subscriptions had been made in Ireland to a 'fair trial fund' to meet the legal expenses of the prisoners.⁵³ Early in 1859 Stephens's New York associates launched the 'Irish patriotic defence fund' which was intended solely for financing fenianism, but the ambiguous title of which enticed contributions from many people who took this to be another fair trial fund.⁵⁴ This piece of smartness, which was apparently Stephens's own invention, backfired disastrously when the trick was exposed.⁵⁵ 'This unlucky name', wrote Luby, 'was in my opinion the pregnant cause of long-lasting misconceptions, of collapse of revenues, almost of the utter breakdown of our movement.'⁵⁶

53 See, e.g., Irishman, 12 Feb. 1859.

54 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., p. 14.

55 Ibid.; MS 331.

56 MS 331.

Nevertheless, Stephens had over six hundred pounds to his credit as he left New York.⁵⁷

The exposure of fenian activity in west Cork and Kerry, including references during magisterial investigations to his organizing tours in the area convinced Stephens that he would henceforth be a marked man: 'Of course I shall be seized as soon as I lay foot on British soil', he wrote in New York, on 12 January 1859.⁵⁸ Accordingly, he was in no hurry back to Ireland; neither was he inclined to remain in America. In March he crossed to France and settled in Paris, choosing that city for the same reason which attracted Mitchel there some weeks later - the hope that it would soon be the capital city of a nation at war with England, and that an Irish activist might be able to exert some leverage in such a location.⁵⁹

While waiting in vain for an opportunity in Paris, Stephens, now spending lavishly, tried to provide for the military education of his followers in Ireland. O'Mahony was instructed to send large numbers of Irish-Americans

57 Fenian chief, p. 156.

58 Diary of James Stephens, 1859 (P.R.O.N.I., photostat in N.L.I., MS 4148).

59 Fenian chief, pp 161-2.

with army experience home to their native localities, where under the guise of 'returned yanks' they could act as drill masters for the fenians of their respective districts.⁶⁰ Stephens laid plans for a school in Paris to which 'A's in the organization would be brought for military training.⁶¹ That project never got off the ground and the handful of young cadets who came across from Ireland in 1859 received no special education apart from an introduction to some of the civilized pleasures of Parisian life.⁶²

Meanwhile Luby was acting as Stephens's lieutenant in Ireland and doing little more than keeping contact with the existing centres of circles.⁶³ As 1859 passed into 1860 the organization was enveloped in crisis, a crisis which concerned the whole function of fenianism. The movement had been launched on the assumption that a European war was imminent, and that therefore a nationalist rebellion needed to be organized in the shortest possible time: the undertaking in the fenian oath 'to

60 MS 331.

61 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 46.

62 MS 331; Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 48.

63 MS 331.

take up arms at a moment's notice' was not an empty rhetorical flourish but the expression of a real sense of urgency. If war broke out the role of the fenians would be comparatively easy to determine, but as the months and years passed without war the sense of urgency faded. One way of dealing with this situation would have been to let things drift until such time as war would again seem imminent. But that would have meant for Stephens the writing off of his achievements, and the risk that somebody else would take the initiative next time round. So instead he determined (indeed circumstances determined it for him) to maintain constructive tension in the organization by deciding that, failing a general war, there would be a rebellion in Ireland, with aid from the Irish in America, when adequate preparations would have been made.⁶⁴ This in its turn opened up a fertile field for dispute about what constituted adequate preparation and gave rise to recriminations between the Irish and American movements, and also internally within each. Already by the end of 1859 Stephens was caught by the dilemma which he faced in a more acute form six years later, namely, how to maintain the sense of impending

64 Fenian chief, p. 165.

action on which the vitality of his organization depended, and at the same time hold back from a conflict which without foreign complications could only end in disaster. In 1859, as in 1865 or 1866, only an Anglo-French war or an Anglo-American war could have solved James Stephens's problems.

John O'Mahony was another man whose future problems had already begun to take shape by the end of 1859. He was dissatisfied with Stephens's work and exasperated by continuous calls for money.⁶⁵ Yet his position in the American organization was dependent on the reputation of Stephens: if the Fenian Brotherhood lost faith in Stephens, O'Mahony's head would roll. Their dependence on one another was fully recognised by a document for American consumption circulated for signature among the Irish centres during 1860 (at the behest of Stephens) declaring confidence in 'John and James'.⁶⁶ In an attempt to renew the original rapport with Stephens, O'Mahony crossed the Atlantic at the end of 1860. He called on Stephens in Paris and then proceeded to Ireland where he met Luby and saw something

65 Fenian chief, p. 165.

66 Ibid., p. 167.

of the organization.⁶⁷ Returning to Dublin in the spring of 1861 from a stay with his relations in Co. Tipperary, O'Mahony insisted that Luby write to Stephens asking him to come home at once.⁶⁸ Stephens obliged, and the two fenian leaders met in Dublin to settle their differences. It was an abrasive encounter, but at least agreement was reached on the important subject of what amount of aid from America would be sufficient to justify a fenian rising independent of international considerations.⁶⁹ The agreed figures were very realistic: five thousand armed and trained soldiers with officers, and fifty thousand rifles or muskets.⁷⁰ Early in March 1861 O'Mahony returned to New York, while Stephens remained in Ireland to resume direct contact with his organization,⁷¹ which was now three years in existence. During that period he had spent just over six months in Ireland, just under six months in America, and almost two full years in Paris.

67 MS 331.

68 Ibid., pp 38-9.

69 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 60.

70 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., p. 18.

71 MS 331.

There is one other episode from the early years of fenianism that needs to be recounted here, because of its consequences for Irish politics in the crucial four-year period after Stephens's return to Ireland early in 1861. It concerns the origins of the antagonism between the fenian leader and A. M. Sullivan. Early in 1858 Stephens had introduced himself to the proprietor of the Nation, hoping to gain the support of this key figure for his new organization. After what appears to have been a lengthy and acrimonious discussion, the invitation to join the I.R.B. was firmly rejected.⁷² However, when, some months later, the I.R.B. in its Phoenix Society guise began to excite interest in west Cork, the promoters claimed that Sullivan, with many other notable individuals, including W. S. O'Brien, was involved in the plot.⁷³ Sullivan, on a visit to his native district in August, found that no amount of disclaiming on his part would convince the young Phoenix men that he was not a party to the conspiracy.⁷⁴ Some time later Bishop Moriarty of Kerry told him that the government knew all about the

72 Nation, 19 Apr. 1862.

73 Ibid.; A. M. Sullivan to W. S. O'Brien, 25 Oct. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

74 Ibid.

organization, and suggested that some public advice in the Nation would save the members from being trapped.⁷⁵

Sullivan sought advice from W. S. O'Brien, in a letter dated 25 October 1858, in which he outlined his dilemma and offered to be guided by O'Brien's advice.⁷⁶ The next number of the Nation carried a leading article quoting a letter from O'Brien, dated 26 October, denying any connection with secret societies past or present, and thoroughly repudiating them. The leading article itself adverted unambiguously to the existence of a nationalist secret society in a district in the south of Ireland and depicted the folly of such organizations. Care was taken to make the criticism from a popular nationalist point of view, and heavy strictures were laid upon parish priests who had denounced the society from the loyal whig stance.⁷⁷

Five weeks later the authorities moved against the Phoenix Society, arresting prominent members in Kerry and Cork. Thenceforth Stephens conducted a campaign of vilification against Sullivan, alleging that the leading article in the Nation of 30 October had first made the

75 A. M. Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 201-2.

76 A. M. Sullivan to W. S. O'Brien, 25 Oct. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

77 Nation, 30 Oct. 1858.

authorities aware of the existence of the secret movement, and that it had incited and encouraged them to make the arrests. The truth was that the existence of the conspiracy in Cork and Kerry had been a notorious fact before the Nation made its comment, and that it had been referred to in sermons and in newspapers, including the Irishman.⁷⁸ Of course Sullivan's article incorporating O'Brien's letter had been a blow to the fenian organizers, but it had not contributed in any way to the government's moves.

In the weeks and months after the arrests Sullivan was indefatigable in his efforts to provide succour and support for the prisoners, and, when Luby went to France in the spring of 1859 to meet Stephens, he had kind words to say about the editor of the Nation.⁷⁹ But Stephens would not listen: fresh from his American disappointment, he denounced the Young Ireland group in general, and was especially vehement against Sullivan, who, he insisted, should bear the nickname of another Sullivan, the crown witness at the Phoenix trials, Goulah. John O'Mahony and Michael Doheny subsequently vied with Stephens in the

78 Nation, 19 Apr. 1862; Irishman, 9 Oct. 1858.

79 MS 331.

campaign of vituperation against Sullivan, and it is likely that the hatred of all three was incubated in New York at the end of 1858 and the beginning of 1859, with Stephens seizing on the Nation as a scapegoat for the defects in his own organization that led to the Phoenix arrests, and thereby embarrassed him so greatly just when he was trying to make a good impression on the leaders of Irish America. The injustice of the charges against Sullivan was demonstrated on a number of occasions, but for Stephens the facts did not matter.⁸⁰ Anti-Sullivan animus, deliberately stirred up by Stephens among his followers was an important element in the political manoeuvres of the years 1861-5.

80 Nation, 19, 26 Apr., 3 May 1862, 23 Oct. 1869.

CHAPTER FOURTHE NATIONAL BROTHERHOOD AND THE MACMANUS FUNERAL

As we have seen, the rise of fenianism in 1858 and subsequent years, *far from* being an isolated phenomenon, took place in a period when the prospect of a lucky break was encouraging the champions of Irish nationalism to undertake various projects in aid of the cause. The National Brotherhood of St. Patrick was one of the most important of these, and one of the most closely connected with the I.R.B.

With the national petition campaign approaching a climax in the early months of 1861, there was growing awareness of the need for a comprehensive national organization to provide guidance and leadership after the anticipated rejection of the petition.¹ While those best qualified to inspire confidence delayed or deliberated, the initiative was taken by a comparatively obscure individual named Thomas Neilson Underwood.

Underwood, a presbyterian from Strabane, had identified himself with the popular cause during the 1850s

1 Nation, 9 Feb., 9 Mar. 1861.

by his advocacy of tenant-right, having been, he claimed himself, an associate of Sharman Crawford and Charles Gavan Duffy, and one of the originators of the Tenant League.² He went to London to study for the bar and while there he observed the progress of the English Freehold Land Societies, and took from them certain ideas which he elaborated into a plan for peasant proprietorship published in the Nation late in 1857.³ Apart from a marked anti-clerical bias, he was the least doctrinaire of men, but he had a weakness for projects of organization, constantly propounding them himself or responding to those proposed by others, content to support virtually any scheme in favour of Irish popular interests. In May 1859 he was writing from London proposing a conference of all the Irish Liberal members to concert action in parliament.⁴ At the end of 1860, about the time of completion of his legal studies, he was in Dublin, where he threw himself into the national

2 T. N. Underwood, Strabane, to W. S. O'Brien, 21 Dec. 1857 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446); T. N. Underwood, Strabane, to Isaac Butt, 13 Mar. 1868 (N.L.I., Butt papers, MS 10415).

3 T. N. Underwood to W. S. O'Brien, 21 Dec. 1857 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446); Nation, 5, 12 Dec. 1857.

4 Irishman, 21 May 1859.

petition campaign. At the big Rotundo meeting in favour of the petition on 4 December, he was given the privilege of proposing one of the motions. In his address to the gathering he advocated self-government for Ireland within a reformed imperial system, with Ireland and all the other colonies having parliamentary representation at Westminster.⁵

Some weeks later, under the pseudonym 'Celt', he was contributing to the Irishman, in which paper on 26 January 1861 he proposed that, as happened among the Irish in America, banquets to celebrate St Patrick's day should be held in Ireland, and by the Irish in England and Scotland.⁶ These should be temperate and thoroughly national affairs, graced by the playing of Irish music. All of this might have gone unheeded like his other projects but for the addition of one simple practical proposal - that those interested in having such a banquet in Dublin should hand in their names at the office of the Irishman. This does not mean that the editor, Denis Holland, was particularly enthusiastic, for his brief footnote merely suggested that what 'Celt' had to

5 Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

6 Irishman, 10 Nov. 1877 identifies 'Celt' as Thomas Neilson Underwood.

say was 'worthy of consideration'. By 9 February, however, the Irishman was reporting that the proposal had been well received and that several nationalists had submitted their names. One week later, with the project obviously gathering momentum, 'Celt' elaborated on his ideas and made clear that he was following the model of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick; and he was able to report that banquets on the approved lines would be held in Cork and Belfast as well as in Dublin.

The reference to the Friendly Sons was an implicit indication that an organization was being formed which would co-ordinate the national celebrations. That was confirmed on 2 March by a reference to the admission procedures of the 'Brotherhood of the Friendly Sons'.⁷ It also emerged in the same low-key fashion that the new body was intended to do much more than arrange banquets, that it was in fact to be the answer to the often-expressed demand for an organization to co-ordinate the efforts of the entire nationalist movement.⁸

The ad hoc organizational framework created to promote the national petition provided the basis for the

7 Irishman, 2 Mar. 1861.

8 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

new movement.⁹ In Dublin one of the important early meetings was held in the national petition committee rooms with many members of the committee in attendance.¹⁰ Others, however, did not approve, most notably A. M. Sullivan. It would be tempting to postulate antipathy towards Underwood as the cause of Sullivan's opposition but for the existence of clear evidence that he was an admirer of the Strabane man. Complimentary references to (and contributions from) Underwood can be found scattered throughout the Nation in the late 'fifties.¹¹ Nor can Sullivan have been in principle averse to national banquets, for we read the following in a leading article in the Nation in the spring of 1859: 'A simple pledge from a number of nationalists to dine together on the national festival would require no minute machinery.... We ask every town and village to organize on Irish ground the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick'.¹² It is even possible that Underwood, who was never ashamed of being derivative, took his inspiration in the first

9 Irishman, 26 Jan. 1861.

10 Irishman, 23 Mar. 1861.

11 Nation, 13 June, 5 and 12 Dec. 1857, 24 July 1858, 15 Oct. 1859.

12 Nation, 19 Mar. 1859.

instance from this suggestion.

Sullivan's unease about Underwood's initiative was based not on personal antipathy but on the conviction that Underwood's organization would not be able to provide the comprehensive national leadership which, he had reason to believe, more authoritative individuals would soon be able to offer. He sent no reply to a formal invitation to join the committee forwarding Underwood's project.¹³ However, he could not but go along with the idea of the banquets and the Nation, like the Irishman, acted as ticket agent for the Dublin celebration, set to take place on 18 March because the seventeenth fell on Sunday.¹⁴ On 2 March the Nation acknowledged the value of the banquet in a half-hearted way, at the same time warning the committee against attempting too much in the political line in so short a time.

Despite lack of support from Sullivan and his influential papers, the progress of the new society was considerable. On 9 March the definitive title was unveiled in a notice to the effect that 'it is proposed

13 J. C. Waters, Dublin, to W. S. O'Brien, 22 Mar. 1861 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

14 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

to inaugurate a National Brotherhood of St. Patrick, upon the eighteenth, in Dublin'.¹⁵ The brotherhood had already been formed;¹⁶ the banquet was to be the occasion of the formal inauguration not just in Dublin but at various locations in Ireland and Britain. The rules and prospectus of the society were available in print, ready for despatch to any centre where a banquet was planned.¹⁷ Approaches to prominent personalities brought support from The O'Donoghue, G. H. Moore and John Martin; it is not likely that they joined the brotherhood but they agreed to attend (and to address) the banquet.¹⁸ About the same time the committee received the blow suffered in turn by all new nationalist enterprises of this period -- rejection by the most desirable of all potential patrons, William Smith O'Brien. He approved of the banquet, but could not attend as he felt he would have to show disapproval of some of the things likely to be said.¹⁹

15 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

16 Irishman, 23 Mar. 1861.

17 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

18 Irishman, 16 Mar. 1861; J. C. Waters to W. S. O'Brien, 22 Mar. 1861 (N.L.I. W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

19 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1861.

A. M. Sullivan, who had ceaselessly advocated the setting up of a national organization, was in a difficult position in these weeks. He could not explicitly oppose the formation of the new body, yet he had to do all he could to prevent it from pre-empting a position which could be filled far more effectively by others. The policy adopted in the leading articles of the Nation on 9 and 16 March was to insinuate, without mentioning the National Brotherhood by name, that plans were well advanced for a much better organization to be set up after the presentation of the national petition, and that local groups could even now begin preparing themselves for the work. Sullivan's position in relation to the actual banquet was no less difficult. His absence from such a gathering would be interpreted as an ignominious rout; yet if he attended he could hardly expect to be made very welcome: in fact the committee had decided against asking him to speak to any of the toasts, and such exclusion would be a humiliating experience for the editor of the Nation.²⁰ The O'Donoghue, at this time all things to all men, intervened on the morning of the 18th and succeeded in having Sullivan's

20 J. C. Waters to W. S. O'Brien, 22 Mar. 1861 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

name added to the list of speakers.²¹

In the round room of the Rotundo at seven o'clock on the eighteenth about four hundred gentlemen sat down to dinner at five shillings per person, while a few hundred ladies and gentlemen looked on from the gallery. A small band was at the ready to provide music. Above the platform 'was conspicuously displayed the green flag, resplendent with gold harps and motto "Aid yourselves and god will aid you". At the base of the flagstaff was seen the phoenix arising from its ashes.'²² The chair was occupied by Underwood who concluded his long, effusive, opening speech by reading the prospectus and proposed constitution of the National Brotherhood, thus publicly launching the society. The speakers who followed him - G. H. Moore, The O'Donoghue, John Martin, T. J. Crean, Fr John Kenyon, A. M. Sullivan and Denis Holland - were more or less equally effusive, though none of them referred to the National Brotherhood. Clearly attendance at the banquet was not synonymous with membership, or even approval, of the organization, and only about sixty of those present wore in their button-holes the green

21 Ibid.

22 Irishman, 23 Mar. 1861.

ribbon which was the badge of the society.²³

After the St. Patrick's day celebrations, then, the society was firmly established but its future scope was far from certain. Straightaway A. M. Sullivan, who had been hissed by a section of the audience in the Rotundo, set about cutting the organization down to size.²⁴ In his Morning News of the very next day, and in the next number of the Nation, he criticised the banquet committee for using the occasion to inaugurate a new political society, thus compromising many of those present, who knew nothing of the affair beforehand. In view of the extensive publicity which preceded the banquet this was unfair criticism, but it served well enough as an attack on the credibility of the brotherhood. Nothing so crude as an outright assault was attempted, but the society was put in perspective:

We are no opponents of the Brotherhood of St Patrick which may be or may become a very useful and proper organization in its way; we do not at present know enough of its constitution to reach a verdict. Our countrymen for some time past have been led to believe that a strong political organization was about to be established in Ireland. We in this journal gave our readers to

23 Ibid.

24 J. C. Waters to W. S. O'Brien, 22 Mar. 1861 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

understand that such an organization was contemplated by men in whom the people of Ireland have confidence. The Brotherhood of St. Patrick is not that organization.²⁵

Even as that was being written the Irishman, unofficial organ of the brotherhood, was conceding the point:

We have been aware for some weeks that a new political organization of nationalists is contemplated; and it was explained to Mr. Moore, The O'Donoghue, and other gentlemen a fortnight ago, that with such an organization the brotherhood would not in any way interfere but, would on the contrary, give it all possible help.²⁶

Nevertheless, the brotherhood made rapid progress. St. Patrick's day banquets had been held in conjunction with the Dublin event in about half-a-dozen other places in Ireland, and in an even greater number of places in Britain.²⁷ Most of these gatherings made arrangements for the formation of a branch of the National Brotherhood and during subsequent weeks and months these branches established firm contact with the leadership in Dublin. 'This most promising organization is rising fast into healthy and vigorous life', the Irishman announced on 13 April 1861. On 9 May the honorary secretary put the number of fully accredited branches at twenty-three.²⁸

25 Nation, 23 Mar. 1861.

26 Irishman, 23 Mar. 1861.

27 Irishman, 23, 30 Mar. 1861.

28 Irishman, 11 May 1861.

The rules, drafted and re-drafted on various occasions, allowed for a fairly loose relationship between the branches and the central association in Dublin.²⁹ However, each branch was required to make arrangements, in conjunction with the central association, for the proper celebration of the national festival. Every branch should provide itself with a reading room and should supply each member with a membership card which would entitle him to enter any reading room managed by the brotherhood. (The central association was to have a monopoly of the supply of membership cards, for which there was a small charge.) The sole requirement for membership was devotion to Irish nationality, though existing members of an established branch would vote by ballot on whether or not to accept new applicants.³⁰

The brotherhood did not profess attachment to any specific political objectives. The only practical task that it set itself was to provide occasions, and locations, for social and intellectual contact between ardent nationalists. Insistence on any particular procedure or form

29 Irishman, 13 Apr. 1861, 15 and 22 Feb. 1862.

30 Ibid.

for realising the nationality that was being celebrated would probably bring the socialising to a speedy and recriminatory conclusion. Underwood and his associates were not in agreement on any political programme. And they were not putting up a front for the I.R.B. or anyone else, though it is easy to see how a secret society might infiltrate and exploit the 'talking-shops' that they were bringing into existence.

By 25 May the Dublin reading room had been established and the brotherhood felt sufficiently confident to announce plans for a new daily newspaper that would be the official organ of the N.B.S.P.³¹ With the same confidence it embarked just at this time on involvement in the funeral of Terence Bellew MacManus - one of the most written about and least understood episodes in the history of this period.

MacManus was not one of the more charismatic figures among the exiled 1848 convicts, though his status as a martyr was enhanced in 1856 when a free pardon was granted to all the political prisoners of 1848 and 1849 apart from those who had escaped from detention; the three excepted in this way were John Mitchel, Thomas

31 Irishman, 25 May 1861.

Francis Meagher and MacManus.³² In 1858 J. F. Maguire M.P. made (in a quiet way) an unsuccessful effort to have the amnesty extended to these three.³³ A campaign with the same objective, but on far more activist lines, was initiated in the autumn of 1859 by P. J. Smyth, who had recently become editor of the Waterford Citizen, and was eager for popular agitation.³⁴ Like so much else in Ireland at the time, this campaign was conducted in awareness of developments in France, where Louis Napoleon had granted a general amnesty to political prisoners on 15 August.³⁵ The Irishman and the Nation gave their support, meetings were held, and some town councils adopted favourable resolutions on the subject.³⁶ Then, on 8 November, Mitchel wrote from Paris to publicly dissociate himself from the movement, and so effectively killed it.³⁷ MacManus was equally intransigent; his

³² Irishman, 22 Oct. 1859; police report, 11 Nov. 1861 (S.P.O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers, 1861/8418 (1877/3591)).

³³ J. F. Maguire, M.P., to W. S. O'Brien, 28 June 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

³⁴ P. J. Smyth to W. S. O'Brien, 1, 10 and 14 Oct. 1859 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

³⁵ Irishman, 22 Oct. 1859.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Nation, 17 Sept. 1859.

³⁷ Irishman, 26 Nov. 1859.

repudiation of petitioning reached the Irish newspapers from San Francisco the following April.³⁸ He would not, he proclaimed, crave any favour from the British government; if he could not return to Ireland without the consent of a foreign ruler he would never do so.³⁹ It was this set of circumstances which gave point to his celebrated obsequies. (In passing, however, it is no harm to mention that it may have been fortunate for MacManus that his principles would not allow him to return to Ireland prior to changes in the relationship with Great Britain, as he had been declared bankrupt on foot of debts in England - where he had been in business until 1848 - and his creditors had received only seven pence in the pound.)⁴⁰

MacManus died on 15 January 1861 and his passing was suitably lamented in the Irish nationalist press.⁴¹ In the middle of May news reached Ireland that plans were being made in America to exhume MacManus's remains

38 Irishman, Nation, 14 Apr. 1860.

39 T. G. McAllister, Terence Bellew McManus, 1811 (?) - 1861 : a short biography (Maynooth, 1972), p. 41 (hereafter cited as McManus).

40 Ibid., p. 24.

41 Irishman, 23 Feb. and 2 Mar. 1861; Nation, 23 Feb. 1861.

and transfer them home for re-burial.⁴² The idea is generally believed to have been conceived by Fenian Brotherhood members in California,⁴³ but John O'Mahony's Phoenix (New York) claimed that it was first with the suggestion.⁴⁴ And it is by no means certain that all those involved in San Francisco were fenians; one of the most prominent of them was Thomas Mooney, who at an early stage founded a branch of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick in San Francisco.⁴⁵ It would, however, be even more interesting to know the exact purpose and vision of the originators. Were they concerned primarily with making money and propaganda for the Fenian Brotherhood in America with little or no thought for what would happen Ireland? Did they see a parallel with the translation of Napoleon's remains from St Helena to Paris in 1840? (Certainly that was what some of the Irish participants thought of once the affair was under way.)⁴⁶ Was it intended initially by rash

42 Irishman, Nation, 25 May 1861.

43 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., p. 19.

44 Irishman, 25 May 1861.

45 Irishman, 31 Aug. 1861.

46 Nation, 8 June 1861.

enthusiasts to provide a focus, or a camouflage, for a rising in Ireland? To the very end Michael Doheny intended to use it for that purpose, and it is quite plausible that others were of a similar mind in the early stages.⁴⁷ The problem remains unsolved, but anyone seeking a solution must consider strongly the possible significance of the most important political development in the period between the original quiet interment of MacManus in January 1861 and the decision a few months later to give him an intercontinental funeral; that development was the outbreak of civil war in America in early April. Whatever is the answer, we can be sure that there was no co-ordination of purpose with the fenians (or with anyone else) in Ireland.

There was nevertheless at least one organization in Ireland suited to participation in this affair - the National Brotherhood. The Irishman of 25 May carried a declaration by the secretary 'that it is proposed that the members should attend in procession at the funeral of T. B. MacManus when his remains are brought to Ireland'. And the committee of the central association called a meeting for 3 June at its rooms, where members and other

nationalists could consider the best means of doing honour to the patriot's remains.⁴⁸ Over four hundred attended and the MacManus funeral committee was formed.⁴⁹ This committee was in time dominated by a group of young men from Dublin city who had been involved in the MacMahon sword and national petition movements and who about the end of 1860 had been attracted to the fenian organization by Luby.⁵⁰ As committees were formed in the various places in Munster and Leinster at which it was thought the cortège might halt, it almost invariably emerged that the dominant members were also prominent fenians.⁵¹ It is tempting to see in all of this the master-plan of James Stephens in action. But in reality these were almost certainly developments to which Stephens responded rather than ones which he dictated. Luby, recalling fenian involvement in the funeral, felt that 'Stephens might have discouraged it if he thought that course safe';⁵² and we know that as a rule Stephens dis-

48 Nation, 1 June 1861.

49 Nation, Irishman, 8 June 1861.

50 MS 331.

51 Irishman, 20 July, 3 Aug. and 7 Sept. 1861.

52 MS 331.

countenanced involvement by his organization in public demonstrations. He could not prevent his men from taking part in the MacManus affair, but he could influence their participation in it, and this he did, turning it brilliantly to his own advantage.

Word came from New York in July that it was planned there to put the remains on a steamer for Cork, and a circuitous route from there to Dublin with numerous stopping points was suggested; burial should be at Bodenstown.⁵³ On the advice of the Cork committee, the national committee opted instead for a direct and almost uninterrupted journey from Cork to Dublin, with burial at Glasnevin.⁵⁴ Whatever reservations they may have had about the good sense of the whole business, once it was certain to take place the former Young Ireland leaders had no choice but to give their support: in effect one of their own number was being brought before the Irish people for a verdict on his political career. Smith O'Brien, John B. Dillon, Father John Kenyon and John Martin all indicated a warm interest.⁵⁵ Similarly,

53 Irishman, 20 July 1861.

54 Irishman, 3 Aug. 1861.

55 Irishman, 28 Sept., 12, 19 Oct. 1861.

Sullivan in the Nation encouraged a big turn-out.⁵⁶ In the normal course of events some or all of these, through deference on the part of the committee, would have become prominent in the plans and preparations. If anyone could hope to bask in glory on the occasion it would surely be MacManus's colleagues of 1848. Yet, as Martin complained later, they found themselves 'in danger of being repulsed from following their old comrade's hearse unless they followed as satellites of someone in a mask'.⁵⁷ Stephens had instructed his men on the committee to ensure that the '48 men would not be able to use the funeral as a platform or as a means of acquiring publicity. The dispute which arose between the committee and Archbishop Cullen made this task much easier by inducing the moderates to remain at arm's length from the committee.

Those concerned presumed from the start that catholic services would be an integral part of the funeral with mass being celebrated at various stages.⁵⁸ In New York there was mass in St Patrick's Cathedral,

56 Nation, 5 Oct. 1861.

57 Irishman, 21 Aug. 1869.

58 See, e.g., letter in Irishman, 1 June 1861.

with Archbishop Hughes in attendance and preaching.⁵⁹ Early in October the Dublin committee wrote to Cullen requesting in a formal but rather peremptory manner that 'a solemn funeral service' should be held 'in the cathedral' when the remains arrived.⁶⁰ Cullen replied with a demand to know on what grounds such a request was based.⁶¹ This was not a refusal, but within a short time the committee was acting as if he had refused, and was going ahead with plans that would not involve any church services in Dublin.⁶² A. M. Sullivan took on the task of mediator, and both publicly - in the Nation - and privately - in conversation with members of the committee - he explained that MacManus could have the ordinary funeral rites available to every catholic without the archbishop being in any way involved; if, however, something special was to be provided, that would implicate the archbishop and so he would first have to have guarantees that the entire affair was something

59 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., p. 19.

60 E. J. Ryan to Archbishop Cullen, Oct. 1861 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, Incoming correspondence, 1861).

61 MacManus funeral committee to Cullen, 19 Oct. 1861 (D.D.A., Cullen papers, Incoming correspondence, 1861).

62 Irishman, 2 Nov. 1861.

with which he could happily be associated.⁶³

Though it was not stated explicitly, in effect an essential first step towards the provision of the guarantees would be the removal of the committee from the control of the clique of unknowns who dominated it, and their replacement by men of recognised responsibility; and even then it would probably have required a very diplomatic statement of purpose to reconcile Cullen to conferring special honours on an unrepentant Young Irelander. It is the effort to bring all of this about which lies behind the struggle in, and on the fringes of, the committee, which provided some high drama on the eve of the procession in Dublin, particularly in the conflict between T.C. Luby and Kenyon.⁶⁴ Guided by Stephens the extremists held out, and the moderates had to take part in a demonstration under the control of their opponents. At least Dillon, Martin, Kenyon, O'Brien and The O'Donoghue did;⁶⁵ three days beforehand A. M. Sullivan was 'attacked by a serious illness' from

63 Nation, 26 Oct., 9 Nov. 1861.

64 MS 331, Seamus Pender, 'Luby, Kenyon and the MacManus funeral' in Cork Hist. and Arch. Soc. Jn., 1vi, no. 183 (June 1951), pp 52-65.

65 Irishman, 16 Nov. 1861.

which, however, he had 'considerably recovered' a week later.⁶⁶

The remains arrived in Dublin on 4 November and were at once installed in the Mechanics' Institute, Lower Abbey Street, and put lying in state.⁶⁷ During the week a total of about 30,000 people filed past to pay their respects.⁶⁸ Reports of the arrangements at the lying in state would surely have confirmed Cullen's worst suspicions: for example, incense was burned near the catafalque at intervals.⁶⁹ However, the ordinary religious ministrations at the graveside were still on offer until shortly before the final procession to Glasnevin on 10 November. The chaplains of the cemetery wrote to the committee indicating that their services would be available, but only on condition that there would not be any graveside oration.⁷⁰ This move must have been inspired by Cullen; in any case it shows

66 Irishman, Nation, 16 Nov. 1861.

67 Irishman, 9 Nov. 1861.

68 Police reports, 6, 8 and 9 Nov. 1861 (S.P.O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers, 1877/3591).

69 Irishman, 9 Nov. 1861.

70 T. N. Underwood to W. S. O'Brien, 1 Jan. 1862 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

the oversimplicity of the notion that the archbishop had from the outset placed a ban on all ecclesiastical involvement in the MacManus obsequies.

Father Patrick Lavelle was at hand to assure the committee that he would supply whatever he could in the way of prayers for the departed, and at Glasnevin he was joined by another clerical rebel against authority, Father Ambrose Courtney.⁷¹ He recited the De profundis, before Lavelle delivered a short and very political harangue which was followed by another recital of the De profundis. Afterwards an oration was delivered by Captain Smith of the American delegation; he was Stephens's hand-picked man for the occasion, chosen especially to oust Father John Kenyon; he put the clash between the Irish revolutionists and the church into perspective when, after his address, he called on the multitude to fall on their knees, and led them in the recitation of the rosary.⁷²

Beyond any doubt the MacManus funeral procession was an impressive demonstration. Estimates of its size have naturally varied. Writing over forty years

71 Irishman, 16 Nov. 1861.

72 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 70; Irishman, 16 Nov. 1861.

later, Joseph Denieffe contended that the cortege had been about seven miles long.⁷³ A reliable witness writing on the day after the procession estimated that it was about one mile in length and contained between seven and eight thousand people.⁷⁴ This included large delegations from about twenty Dublin trades, potentially the most significant element of all.⁷⁵ However, those actually in the procession were far outnumbered by the on-lookers. Early in the day about forty thousand had assembled outside the Mechanics' Institute, and the entire route was lined with people.⁷⁶ The impression made by the funeral procession was not due entirely to its size. It was a masterpiece of organization and decorum. The great majority of the processionists wore black armbands with white ribbons, achieving thereby a strong visual impact. Horsemen, strikingly attired, marshalled the pedestrian participants, who moved with something like military precision.⁷⁷

73 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 70.

74 Police report 11 Nov. 1861 (S.P.O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers, 1877/3591).

75 Irishman, 16 Jan. 1861.

76 Ibid.; police report, 11 Nov. 1861 (S.P.O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers, 1877/3591).

77 Ibid.

What the MacManus funeral achieved for Stephens was, in the first place, something negative. It thwarted a potential publicity coup by rival nationalists. But not alone did it subdue the Young Irelanders, it also highlighted most devastatingly the long standing split between Young Ireland (as represented by MacManus) and the remnant of the 'Old Ireland' section of the repeal movement (represented by Cullen). It did this at a time when A. M. Sullivan and others were striving to heal that split and construct a worthy successor to the old Repeal Association.

On the positive side, the I.R.B. organization had gained much prestige. Fenian recruiters in Dublin, or anywhere in Ireland, could now point to the MacManus funeral as proof of the strength and glamour of the movement; the propaganda value of this must have been enormous. In America the Fenian Brotherhood could proclaim that Ireland was now organized and ready for war, and it could call more convincingly for men and funds. In all of this it was often difficult to resist the temptation to pretend that all the participants in the funeral were fenians, that the great crowd of on-lookers supported fenianism, and that the spirit of popular enthusiasm displayed had been evoked by the

fenians. The facts are that very few of the processionists were fenians; that there was nothing specifically fenian about the nationalist sentiment of the great bulk of the interested crowds, and that the MacManus funeral took place at a time when political excitement in the country was high, so that there would have been a big response to any well organized popular demonstration.

The last point is of crucial importance. An essential element in a national movement is the need for public displays of solidarity: the monster meetings of the repeal campaign had shown just how important that was to mid-nineteenth century Irish nationalism. However, political demonstrations in Ireland had been curbed since 1850 by the party processions act (13 & 14 Vict., c. 2) -directed primarily against orange celebrations. Accordingly, the greatly increased interest in nationalism evident from 1858 onwards was never able to find expression in public displays or processions. Never, that is, until the MacManus funeral, which precisely because it was a funeral, evaded the strictures of the party processions act. It provided an occasion for the pent-up desire for a great national rally to be satisfied. The magnitude of that rally is an indication of the strength, in November 1861, of that complex of

attitudes, beliefs and emotions that we call nationalism. But it cannot reasonably be interpreted as endorsement of the particular philosophy of nationalism adhered to by MacManus himself, much less as a public display of support for fenianism.

The Nation at once began undermining the fenian interpretation of the MacManus funeral. If only, a leading article lamented (in pointed fashion) those who marched in last Sunday's noble demonstration were portion of a trained army, then we could boast.⁷⁸ However, the most comprehensive response to the funeral, and to the fenians' exploitation of it, came from Archbishop Cullen, in the form of an equally impressive demonstration staged in Dublin less than nine months later. The occasion was the laying of the foundation stone of a new building for the Catholic University, at Drumcondra, and the great theme was the demand for a charter. As it was ostensibly a religious rather than a political affair, the party processions act could not be invoked. In every way the MacManus funeral was matched if not outdone (except perhaps for the military dash).⁷⁹ Decorations, delegations, onlookers and bands

78 Nation, 16 Nov. 1861.

79 Nation, Irishman, 26 July 1862.

left nothing to be desired. The police estimated that there were 100,000 people in the grounds at Drumcondra for the ceremony.⁸⁰ The thoroughness of the riposte was complete: Cullen ensured that the trade unions marched as they had for MacManus; and even Archbishop Hughes of New York was there, as if to expiate an indiscretion.⁸¹ Cullen's rejoinder was not lost on contemporaries;⁸² and even if it was overlooked subsequently, it still speaks eloquently to the historian.

Ostensibly, the MacManus funeral had been managed on the Irish side by a committee consisting of members of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick and some other nationalists. Not surprisingly, from this time onwards many outsiders tended to identify Stephens's still anonymous and invisible society with the brotherhood, or to see the brotherhood as merely a front for secret conspiracy. One of those deceived in this way was Archbishop Cullen, who condemned the organization by name on the grounds that it administered an oath in favour of an Irish Republic.⁸³

80 Police report, 20 July 1862 (S.P.O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers, 1877/3591).

81 Irishman, 12, 19 and 26 July 1862.

82 Nation, 26 July 1862.

83 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 95.

Despite this misapprehension Cullen's hostility was, by his own criteria, well founded, for the brotherhood, despite having no policy, was a rallying point for radicals and revolutionists, just as the Irish Confederation had been in 1847-8. It was not by any means a secret society, but there was about it from the beginning a certain unspoken assumption concerning the use of physical force. When eventually the definitive version of the rules appeared, a maxim adapted from the volunteers of 1782 was appended in a rather heavy-handed attempt at subtlety: 'A member of the National Brotherhood of St. Patrick by learning the use of arms does not forego any of his social rights.'⁸⁴

Catholic churchmen detected an air of anti-clericalism about the brotherhood, and they were worried by the presence of an inordinate proportion of protestants in the leading ranks.⁸⁵ The futile efforts of the brotherhood to assert that a healthy independence of churches did not amount to irreligion were totally undermined by an indiscretion on the part of the San Francisco branch in an address to their Dublin brethren

84 Irishman, 22 Feb. 1862.

85 Irishman, 30 Mar. 1861, 22 Feb. 1862.

on 7 January 1862. This address was published in a newspaper, Mooney's San Francisco Express, managed by the secretary of the brotherhood in those parts, Thomas J. Mooney. By March 1862 the text was available in Dublin, where it was seized upon eagerly, and publicised, by opponents of the National Brotherhood, who revelled in quoting its shocking and extremist sentiments. They lighted particularly on a passage which chided the Irish for having spent so much money during the preceding decades on churches and cathedrals: the resources expended on these 'expensive piles', it declared, could more profitably have been devoted to military preparations.⁸⁶ The Dublin members rushed to disown these and other disastrously undiplomatic expressions, but irreparable damage had been done.⁸⁷

From beginning to end the great weakness of the National Brotherhood was the poor quality of its leadership. Underwood appears to have been a rather comic figure, and, although he was president for a short time, either his colleagues or himself decided that the vice-presidency was as high an office as he could permanently

86 Nation, 22 Mar. 1862.

87 Ibid.; Irishman, 29 Mar. 1862.

adorn in the brotherhood.⁸⁸ The other vice-president from March 1862 onwards was Fr. Lavelle, a spirited and indefatigable protagonist and a valuable acquisition for the brotherhood, but disqualified on a number of counts from national leadership.⁸⁹ On 1 January 1862 Underwood had written to William Smith O'Brien vainly trying to persuade him to accept the presidency and the position was subsequently left vacant in expectation of a suitable occupant.⁹⁰ The O'Donoghue was by this time by far the most prestigious supporter remaining to the brotherhood and clearly he could have assumed the leadership if he so desired, but he probably feared that identification with this particular organization would have weakened his position with other nationalists.⁹¹ A number of able young men came forward to work for the society at a lower level. They included Denis Holland, editor of the Irishman, Charles Guilfoyle Doran and Joseph Patrick MacDonnell.

Extant records of the National Brotherhood are very

88 MS 331.

89 Irishman, 5 Apr. 1862.

90 T. N. Underwood to W. S. O'Brien, 1 Jan. 1862 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447); Irishman, 5 Apr. 1862.

91 The O'Donoghue to W. S. O'Brien [not dated, but clearly 1862] (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

scanty and no complete list of branches is readily available. Underwood, when endeavouring to impress Smith O'Brien, claimed one hundred and sixty branches.⁹² Whatever of the precise number, there can be no doubt about the high concentration of branches in Britain. Examination of the numerous weekly reports in the Irishman from 1861 to 1864 would suggest that there were about three branches among the Irish in England and Scotland for every one in Ireland itself. This reflects the readiness of the Irish in Britain at this time for social and political organization, and also their relative lack of discrimination in the matter of nationalist societies: throughout the 1860s they tended to flock to the support of any movement which appealed to them as Irishmen or as Catholics much more readily than the Irish at home, and with very little regard for questions of political doctrine. They had played a part in the national petition movement, which in all probability provided the basic organization for the National Brotherhood in Britain as in Ireland.⁹³ Even before that they had responded to the new international situation by

92 T. N. Underwood to W. S. O'Brien, 1 Jan. 1862 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

93 See above, ch. 1 (pp 23-4).

launching in 1858 the Irish Protective Association, whose objects were 'mutual instruction and information, and a close and continual watchfulness, when united in one great brotherhood all over England and Scotland, to serve the land of our fathers by every means in our power'.⁹⁴

There was considerable support in Britain for the projected daily newspaper which was to have been the official organ of the National Brotherhood, but it never materialised.⁹⁵ When Denis Holland was replaced as editor of the Irishman by P. J. Smyth, in April 1863, the brotherhood lost access to a most valuable propaganda medium, and efforts to provide their own journal were renewed.⁹⁶ The best that could be managed was an arrangement with James Roche, proprietor of the Galway-American, whose journal henceforth appeared as The United Irishman and Galway American, combining the advocacy of the federal American cause with that of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick.⁹⁷ Commercially, it

94 Nation, 28 Aug. 1858.

95 Irishman, 7 Sept. 1861.

96 Address of the central association of the national brotherhood of St. Patrick, 1 Apr. 1863 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

97 United Irishman and Galway American (Dublin), 25 July 1863 - 2 Apr. 1864.

was an unsuccessful venture, and ^{it} lasted for less than a year.

The celebration of St Patrick's day in the style of the brotherhood took place in 1862, 1863 and 1864.⁹⁸ By then, however, the fortunes of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick were on the wane. The decline of the society was caused principally by the expansion of fenianism. The awareness of growing fenian strength naturally drew away support and demoralised those who remained. But, in addition, Stephens, having initially encouraged an infiltration by his own supporters, appears to have embarked in the end on a deliberate policy of suppression of the National Brotherhood.⁹⁹ Whereas in Ireland branches simply withered away, with some individual members joining the I.R.B. and others remaining aloof, in Britain it appears that branches of the National Brotherhood went over wholesale to fenianism, as the latest and most attractive policy offered to them. There are indications that the takeover was sometimes resisted, but that seems to have been the exception rather than

⁹⁸ Irishman, 22 Mar. 1862, 21 Mar. 1863, 19 Mar. 1864.

⁹⁹ Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 56; Devoy, Recollections, p. 35.

the rule.¹⁰⁰ The National Brotherhood of St. Patrick is an excellent example of the vulnerability of an open organization in competition with a secret conspiracy.

In 1863 was a dangerous time for the political atmosphere of national political organizations was marked internally by a fairly well defined group. Firstly, there were two of the independent organizations leaders - G. M. Moore and the O'Connell. The largest element consisted of veterans of the Young Ireland party many of them now leading the political atmosphere throughout the first time since 1848, such as Robert Cook Deane his sudden death in August 1863, P. J. Smyth, John H. Pigot, John Martin, Fr John Keegan and William Walsh O'Brien. From the 'Old Ireland' tradition there was O'Connell's close ally, William J. O'Sullivan Grant. Some newspapers were involved, notably A. H. Sullivan proprietor of the Nation, who ran his editorial office at a residence house for national ideas. Denis Mahony, editor of the Irishman from 1858 to 1863, who claimed a similar function for his long-published journal, was in the fringe of

100 Irishman, 19 Dec. 1863.

CHAPTER FIVETHE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, 1861-5

In 1858 and subsequent years responsibility for producing the patently needed scheme of national political organization was assumed informally by a fairly well defined group. Firstly, there were two of the independent opposition leaders - G. H. Moore and The O'Donoghue. The largest element consisted of veterans of the Young Ireland party (many of them now finding the political atmosphere congenial for the first time since 1848), such as Robert Cane (before his sudden death in August 1858), P. J. Smyth, John E. Pigot, John Martin, Fr John Kenyon and William Smith O'Brien. From the 'Old Ireland' tradition there was O'Connell's close ally, William J. O'Neill Daunt. Some newspaper men were involved, notably A. M. Sullivan proprietor of the Nation, who saw his editorial office as a clearing-house for national ideas. Denis Holland, editor of the Irishman from 1858 th 1863, who claimed a similar function for his less prestigious journal, was on the fringe of this group, but did not have the standing necessary to gain admittance. John Mitchel, who contributed regularly to the Irishman during his sojourns in Paris,

might be described as an occasional member.

Mitchel's membership was limited by the irregularity of his contributions to the discussion rather than by his inability to visit Ireland, for the full group was not accustomed to meet together. Instead, they wrote to one another, individually made statements in the Nation or Irishman or on public platforms, and commented, either publicly or privately, on each other's proposals. Inevitably some of them did meet from time to time, as when a few of them addressed the same banquet or public gathering. The setting up of a club or private committee to provide a forum for regular contact was mooted as early as 1858.¹ Two years later the want of it was still being lamented.² A meeting held in Dublin around the beginning of 1863 under the chairmanship of G. H. Moore decided to call 'a conference of Irish nationalists', but this does not appear to have materialised.³ However, there are

1 J. E. Pigot to W. S. O'Brien, 21 Dec. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

2 J. E. Pigot to W. S. O'Brien, 4 Sept. 1860 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

3 Copy of G. H. Moore to W. J. O'Neill Daunt, 10 Feb. 1863 (N.L.I., O'Neill Daunt journal, appendix, MS 3042).

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indications, unfortunately vague, of smaller gatherings, presumably on an informal basis.⁴ Given the divergent views and personalities of those concerned a full gathering could scarcely have been a very harmonious affair. However, there was wide agreement that a beginning should be made by the establishment of a national council. This was advocated by Cane in 1858,⁵ and suggested over and over again in subsequent years.

As 1860 drew to a close only two of the leading public mentors of the national cause had any substantial achievements to point to for the three preceding years. They were A. M. Sullivan and The O'Donoghue, who had contributed so much in their different ways to the MacMahon sword movement and to the rapidly culminating national petition campaign.⁶ The Nation promised that following the rejection of the petition a summons to form a great new organization would go forth to all Irish nationalists.⁷ The pitch was queered by the

4 E.g., Nation, 17 Aug. 1861.

5 Celt, Mar., May 1858.

6 See ch. 2 above; see Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 248 for reference to their close association at this time.

7 Nation, 9 March. 1861.

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setting up of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick in the early months of 1861, but the Nation persisted: 'We think we can promise our fellow-countrymen that they shall soon have it in their power to join an organization which will be founded and fitted for practical purposes.'⁸ The promise was renewed and put in perspective on 25 May:

With the signing of the national petition has commenced a course of well-considered practical action suited to the circumstances in which the state of political affairs in Europe does now, and may at a future time, place us. We, who have had the honour of initiating that movement in this journal, have pledged ourselves to our countrymen that other measures, carrying us on, would in good time be submitted for their approval. At present we shall not say more than that the matter is not being neglected To existing patriotic organizations, now before the public, no hostility whatever is felt or will be offered ... but we believe it is not too much to say that men who are willing to serve Ireland, will soon have the opportunity of joining the ranks of an organization eminently practical in its nature, intelligible in its aims, and having at its head men who will be recognised by Irishmen all the world over as worthy of their confidence. Such is the organization now needed.⁹

As weeks passed without any such organization being launched the Nation was plied with indignant queries and was obliged to offer some excuse.¹⁰ The explanation

8 Nation, 6 Apr. 1861.

9 Nation, 25 May 1861.

10 Nation, 13 July 1861.

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given was reasonably satisfactory, and from our point of view it throws some light on an otherwise obscure development. They had, the editor admitted, given an undertaking to follow up the anticipated rejection of the national petition with the unveiling of plans for an 'enduring and effective' national organization. This work, however, had been taken over by 'men whom the country will regard as trustworthy leaders', who (it is implied) are to be held responsible for the delay.¹¹

A month later further explanation was forthcoming. When the Nation promised that the petition would only open the way for another movement something definite was in mind; but to their great satisfaction they found that the spirit evoked by the campaign rekindled hope in the hearts of some eminent patriots who had been despairing. 'These men - of names and fames well known to Ireland - met to deliberate on the best form of organization, the best course of action for the Irish people.' The Nation had waited patiently and then had written twice to the gentlemen concerned indicating that the people were eager for some useful organization, before commencing to appeal publicly to them to make a move. Could all of this, the

11 Nation, 13 July 1861.

12 Nation, 17 Aug. 1861.

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editor asked, be construed as abandonment of his promises?¹²

The 'eminent patriots' meeting to deliberate on national organization must have included The O'Donoghue: his omission from such company at this juncture would have been unthinkable. At the same time it seems certain that he had been fully involved in the Nation's scheme of action which was dropped in deference to the ^{other} 'eminent patriots'; this is implied in the Nation editorial of 17 August, and in any case seems inevitable in view of his prominence in the national petition movement and his close association with A. M. Sullivan. The paradox can be explained as follows: Sullivan and The O'Donoghue had agreed on a programme of action, of which The O'Donoghue would be leader and director, but, before the time to implement it had arrived, the chieftain had been inveigled into discussions with other prominent nationalists whose support he would dearly love to have but who, as events were to prove, would have great difficulty agreeing on any set of concrete proposals. Throughout the early 'sixties The O'Donoghue displayed an amazing talent for retaining the confidence of opposing sections of his potential grand party - one of

12 Nation, 17 Aug. 1861.

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the essential traits of any leader; however, he seems to have lacked the equally important faculty of knowing when to terminate consultation and initiate action.

The scope and importance of The O'Donoghue's leadership at this time is illustrated strikingly by his relationship with John Mitchel, that most implacable of nationalists. As Parnell was to do for Devoy eighteen years later, The O'Donoghue crossed the channel to confer with Mitchel at Boulogne early in May 1861, shortly before the presentation of the national petition.¹³ (Significantly, it was also shortly after the beginning of the American civil war). Mitchel was captivated by the attitudes and policies of his visitor, and gave him an endorsement such as he gave to no other Irish politician between 1848 and his death in 1875.¹⁴ He wrote to John O'Mahony, who he thought was still in Ireland, urging him to meet The O'Donoghue (who was 'honest, determined and thoroughgoing') and suggesting that the fenians should be prepared to co-operate with him.¹⁵

13 John Mitchel to John O'Mahony, 8 May 1861, quoted in Denieffe, I.R.B., pp 164-5.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

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The O'Donoghue had inveiled for Mitchel a radical plan of action:

He is to attempt in a day or two to present the national petition to the queen (it will be refused; that is, the home secretary will not even allow him an audience to present it); then he will present the city of Dublin petition in the house of commons. It will be met, as he expects, with shrieks, coughs, sneezes. Then he will quit parliament and go home to Ireland, where it is probable he will ask the people to join in some organization for further measures.¹⁶

This plan was probably a version of the one agreed with A. M. Sullivan, and deferred under pressure from other prominent nationalists. No doubt they had qualms about the proposed withdrawal. That, however, was precisely what would appeal to Mitchel and the adherents of the anti-parliamentary tradition that he had fathered in 1847-8. The O'Donoghue had begun to use abstentionist rhetoric at least as early as 4 December 1860, when, at the national petition meeting in the Rotundo, he declared that 'three years of parliamentary experience, short though it may appear, have convinced me that an Irishman has no business in the English house of commons'.¹⁷ At the time John Mitchel had quickly seized upon the logic of that remark, suggesting that The O'Donoghue should tell

16 Ibid.

17 Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

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his constituents that if he was returned again it would be to an Irish parliament, and that pending its assembly he would remain at home.¹⁸

Quitting parliament would not involve the abandonment of constitutional processes; elections could still be contested, thus satisfying the insistence of the Nation (in an editorial comment on parliamentary politics made a few months earlier) that the electoral battle-ground should not be surrendered to 'the enemies of nationalism', even though victory might not be possible through effort on that front alone.¹⁹ In fact, a policy of constitutional absentionism was being explicitly promoted at this time by P. J. Smyth, who advocated the return at elections of members pledged to refuse the oath in the same manner as O'Connell had in 1828, but on the grounds, this time, that the power of the British parliament in Ireland was an usurpation.²⁰

At Boulogne The O'Donoghue had discussed with Mitchel the kind of national organization that it was hoped to establish as a follow-up to the withdrawal from

18 Irishman, 15 Dec. 1860.

19 Nation, 9 Feb. 1861.

20 Irishman, 15 Dec. 1860, 13 Apr. 1861.

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parliament. It was to be within the law,²¹ which would please constitutionalists and those eager for a revival of the Repeal Association. At the same time it would co-operate with all other nationalist movements, including underground ones. That pleased Mitchel, because it smelt of illegality:

Though ostensibly legal and open it will, and must, naturally seek to connect itself with whatsoever secret machinations may be going on. That is to say, in other words, it will be an organization looking to revolution, foreign aid and more or less directly preparing for that, though for the moment within the forms of the law.²²

By comparison with The O'Donoghue, Underwood was a political lightweight, yet he stole some of the young chieftain's thunder by the setting up of the National Brotherhood. The O'Donoghue could not discountenance this attempt to organize national opinion without contradicting his own rhetoric and alienating an important section of activists whose support he needed; so he gave at least tacit approval to its foundation.²³ Once it was in being he genuinely wished it well, being

²¹ J. Mitchel to J. O'Mahony, 8 May 1861, quoted in Denieffe, pp 164-5.

²² Ibid.

²³ See ch.4 above.

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aware that, whatever its deficiencies, its collapse would be interpreted as proof that any attempt at national organization was futile.²⁴ Nevertheless, it must have interfered seriously enough with his plans for organization. And of course, later in 1861 fenian manipulation of the MacManus funeral was an even more serious upset as it temporarily paralysed all political moves by The O'Donoghue and his associates. But the chief obstacle was the inability of this group to come to any agreement among themselves. By the autumn John Mitchel was announcing that negotiations for a new national movement had reached the stage of failure or postponement.²⁵

In September a leading article in the Irishman considered the question of 'Why political life is paralysed in Ireland' and concluded that the weakness was at the top.²⁶ In the wake of the MacManus funeral the Nation appealed to the recognised leaders of the popular cause: 'We now ask how long more they will leave the bravest people and the best cause in Europe without

24 The O'Donoghue to W. S. O'Brien [two letters, both updated but apparently 1862] (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

25 American paper quoted in Irishman, 12 Oct. 1861.

26 Irishman, 14 Sept. 1861.

that leadership which they are the men to supply.²⁷

There followed a warning of the consequences of their continued inaction, a warning that proved to be an outstandingly perceptive forecast of the progress of Irish politics in the subsequent four or five years.

Anonymous bodies will spring up, the writer declared, and

earnest but inexperienced men will join them, seeing nothing better to be had; violent men will dominate them; the rudest-mannered man will set up for being the best patriot; men who do not approve of this order of things will either retire in disgust or be expelled; internal and external quarrels will soon develop themselves, the societies will alarm orders and interests that should be conciliated and that are naturally friendly to Ireland; the government will know all about their doings; it will not interfere while damage so great is being done to the Irish cause, but, when the worst in that way has been accomplished, then it will pounce on them; a jail or two will be filled with the bodies of young men who meant patriotism but did not act it wisely; and the progress of Irish nationality will receive a check from which it will take years to recover. These things will, we think, come to pass if men whose position, abilities and services constitute them the natural leaders of the Irish people do not speedily place themselves in the van of the national force and organize the struggle for Ireland's independence.²⁸

In conclusion the international perspective was sketched:

'The time is growing critical; Europe is on the brink

27 Nation, 16 Nov. 1861.

28 Ibid.

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of convulsion; England is in expectation of war; not a day is to be lost.' As if on cue, within a few days the prospect of an imminent Anglo-American war loomed up on the horizon, causing the most intense excitement in Ireland, highlighting again the dire need for a national organization, and providing an admirable occasion for a fresh start on the work of providing one.

In the third week of November news broke that on the eighth of the month a federal American man-of-war, the San Jacinto, had stopped a British mail steamer, the Trent, on the high seas and removed therefrom two envoys of the rebellious confederate states bound for England.^{28A} This insult to the flag, the ultimate in international defiance, aroused massive indignation in England, and, with both governments exchanging bellicose notes in subsequent weeks, war seemed to be the likely outcome. In Dublin A. M. Sullivan convened a meeting of prominent nationalists and sympathetic journalists resident in the city, at the European Hotel on 29 November.²⁹ This gathering arranged for a public meeting in the Rotundo

28A Annual Reg., 1861, pp 253-5 (History).

29 T. N. Underwood to W. S. O'Brien, 1 Jan. 1862 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

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on 5 December 'to take into consideration the position of Irish national affairs at the present momentous crisis'.³⁰ It was also decided that, after an appropriate amount of oratory, a resolution should be proposed calling on the chairman and secretary of the meeting, together with the proposers and seconders of motions, to summon a conference of nationalists which would in turn draw up a plan of national organization to be subsequently submitted to a public meeting for approval.³¹ At last, it seemed, a start was about to be made; but the opposition of James Stephens was to intervene decisively.

It was a case of 'standing room only' when the public meeting convened on 5 December with The O'Donoghue, inevitably, in the chair. While the crowded Rotundo was resounding to protestations of affection for, and gratitude to, America, and promises that Ireland would never follow England to war against the great benefactor of her exiled children, Stephen's counter-attack began. Luby slipped onto the platform and informed Sullivan, The O'Donoghue, and others that if their motion on organization was brought forward a substantive amendment in the fenian interest would be moved from the body of

30 Nation, 30 Nov. 1861.

31 Nation, 14 Dec. 1861.

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the hall; if, on the other hand, the motion was not proceeded with, the amendment would itself be proposed as a substantive resolution.³² Luby left the platform party in no doubt that I.R.B. strength was so disposed in the auditorium that the fenian amendment or resolution, as the case might be, could be opposed only at the risk of a disorderly end to the meeting; and that would be a disastrous setback for the organizers.³³ The platform motion on organization was not proposed. As the meeting was nearing conclusion, one of the Californian delegates to the MacManus funeral, Kavanagh, rose to speak and was greeted by rounds of applause and cheering led by fenians acting according to a preconcerted plan.³⁴ Kavanagh moved 'That a chairman, two secretaries and a committee of twenty-one members - each having been duly and separately proposed and seconded - be chosen by a majority of voices at this mass meeting to take into consideration the advisability of carrying out an organization in the present state of

32 Ibid; MS 331, pp 131-2.

33 MS 331, pp 131-2.

34 Irishman, 7 Dec. 1861; J. S [tephens] to John O'Mahony 25 Feb. [1862] quoted in Denieffe, I.R.B., pp 167-79; MS 331.

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affairs at home and abroad'.³⁵ This resolution seemed perfectly innocent of subterfuge to the great body of the meeting and was carried by acclamation. The nomination of the committee members came next, and Stephens's agents were fully prepared for that too. The naming of The O'Donoghue, G. H. Moore and P. J. Smyth disarmed suspicion and distracted attention from the fact that most of the others were comparatively unknown; a clear majority were fenian sympathisers.³⁶ The meeting had indeed produced a committee to deliberate on national organization, but it was controlled by James Stephens. And the great crowd dispersed with the unsuspecting majority convinced that the gathering had been 'a most harmonious affair' and 'a model of united action'.³⁷

The O'Donoghue had once again been thwarted but his position with the public and his pre-eminence among the active public men on the popular side were unimpaired. There is some irony in the fact that the Rotundo meeting at which his plans for national agitation were upset by the fenians, caused The O'Donoghue to fall

35 Irishman, 7 Dec. 1861.

36 MS 331; Denieffe, I.R.B., pp 167-79.

37 MS 331;

foul of Dublin Castle for disloyalty. Some of his Rotundo statements on the Irish attitude to Anglo-American relations gave rise to a correspondence with the lord chancellor of Ireland, which concluded with the announcement that the member for Tipperary was being removed from the commission for the peace in Counties Cork and Kerry.³⁸ This further enhanced his popularity. Soon a movement was afoot, on the suggestion of W. S. O'Brien, to organise demonstrations of support throughout Co. Tipperary; the first of these was held at Templeberry on 9 February 1862.³⁹ Next a county banquet in his honour was being planned for Thurles, under the direction of a committee of the catholic clergy and middle class of Tipperary.⁴⁰

The list of those invited to attend gives an indication of the high ambitions of the organizers. It included eight catholic bishops (headed by MacHale of Tuam and Leahy of Cashel), Smith O'Brien, John Martin, G. H. Moore, four or five independent opposition M.P.s,

38 Irishman, 28 Dec. 1861.

39 Irishman, 16 Feb. 1862.

40 Irishman, 12 Apr. 1862.

41 Ibid.; Nation, 17 May 1862.

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and the former Callan curates, Frs Keeffe and O'Shea, pioneers of the tenant right movement in the 1850s.⁴²

On this list interests were represented which since 1858 A. M. Sullivan, The O'Donoghue, and others had dreamt of aligning in a comprehensive national movement. The organizers of the Thurles banquet clearly had very high ambitions. Operating away from Dublin brought certain advantages. For example, church dignitaries could be invited without reference to Archbishop Cullen. (No other bishop could readily attend a meeting in the metropolis which did not have Cullen's approval - and the price of that would be very high.) Apart from the invited guests the banquet would be confined to citizens of Co. Tipperary, so the whole affair would be secure from interference by James Stephens's Dublin activists.

But the reliance on these advantages of location serves only to highlight the basic flaw in what was being attempted. For there was no formula that would satisfy all the elements of the national party, and any effort to please some sections would inevitably alienate others. W. S. O'Brien drew up resolutions for the banquet (suggesting that alone of all the organizational ventures of these years it had his unreserved approval), calling

42 Irishman, 19 Apr. 1862.

for a campaign of parliamentary agitation and condemning secret societies.⁴³ Such a programme would be immediately rejected by, among others, John Mitchel and P. J. Smyth. In fact, the banquet was likely to alienate the entire 'radical' wing of Irish nationalism. Thus, the Irishman began to complain early in May about the 'exclusive' tactics of the committee, citing the raising of the ticket price to a prohibitive ten shillings, and the omission from the programme of a toast to the press, allegedly because the person with first claim to reply to this would be Peter E. Gill of the Tipperary Advocate, a man given to the expression of 'advanced' views.⁴⁴ The banquet never took place, The O'Donoghue having been struck by sudden illness shortly before the appointed date.⁴⁵ There can be little or no doubt that this illness was of the diplomatic variety.

Throughout the remainder of 1862 and all of 1863 the nationalist journals continued to publicise the need for a grand national organization.⁴⁶ There are

43 Irishman, 31 May 1862.

44 Irishman, 3 May 1862.

45 Nation, 17 May 1862.

46 E.g., Nation, 12 July 1862, 24 Jan. 28 Mar. 1863, Irishman, 31 May 1862, 9 May, 22 Aug. 1863.

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references, some of them vague, to consultative meetings of leading nationalists during this period, but there was no substantial progress to be reported.⁴⁷

Early in 1864 there occurred another round in the conflict between the advocates of an open movement, and the fenians. It arose from a decision by Dublin city council on 15 February to allocate a site on College Green for a statue of the recently deceased husband of the queen, Prince Albert. A. M. Sullivan was by now a member of the city council, and he had proposed that the site be set aside for a statue of Henry Grattan.⁴⁸ With the intention of forcing the city fathers to reverse their decision, he launched a campaign of popular protest culminating in a public mass meeting in the Rotundo on 22 February. Not even the most doctrinaire fenian could object to the stated purpose of the meeting, but all available I.R.B. members had instructions to be present, and they seized upon Sullivan's alleged treachery in the Phoenix Society business of 1858-9 as an excuse for causing disruption.

47 Copy of G. H. Moore to W. H. O'N. Daunt, 10 Feb. 1863 (N.L.I., O'Neill Daunt journal, appendix, MS 3042); Irishman, 1, 22 Aug. 1863.

48 Irishman, 20 Feb. 1864.

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The O'Donoghue was shouted down when he insisted on referring in complimentary fashion to Sullivan; the platform was stormed, The O'Donoghue, Sullivan and others escaped to the safety of an ante-room and the auditorium was given over to scenes of riot.⁴⁹

Sullivan recovered some ground by holding a successful meeting on the same subject, and in the same location, exactly a week later.⁵⁰ However, he had to resort to admission by ticket and other security measures to achieve this; nevertheless, he did succeed in overcoming a well prepared fenian plot to *repeat* the disruption of the previous week. Stephens himself was directing operations from a nearby public house.⁵¹ Sullivan succeeded too in his campaign to have Henry Grattan rather than Prince Albert honoured on College Green, for, on 2 May, the council, in response to public pressure, reversed its earlier decision.⁵² But on the broader front victory had gone to Stephens, who once again had shown that he could sabotage any attempt at open political agitation.

49 Irishman, 27 Feb. 1864.

50 Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 250-55.

51 Ibid.; MS 333.

52 Nation, 7 May 1864.

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John Martin was one of the most candid of the group taking counsel on national affairs during this period. Having grown impatient with lack of progress, he wrote a series of letters to the nationalist press in the summer of 1863 on the subject of Irish national fortunes and organization.⁵³ After five rambling epistles from his home at Kilbroney, Rostrevor, Co. Down he had talked (or written) himself in having to attempt something practical. 'I have been provoked into committing myself to an attempt at a renewed national agitation of repeal by a public association', he wrote to W. S. O'Brien.⁵⁴ It was a sense of the honour that required a gentleman to keep his commitments which induced him to initiate and persist with the Irish National League, despite severe discouragements. For John Martin was not a very clever politician and he had no hope of succeeding where men of greater ability were failing. Neither was he a very dynamic politician: throughout the second half of 1863 he set about organizing his new association in a leisurely fashion,

53 Irishman, 30 May, 20, 27 June, 11 July, 1 Aug. 1863.

54 John Martin to W. S. O'Brien, 4 July 1863 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien, MS 8657).

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writing several more letters to the papers from Kilbroney,⁵⁵ and not getting around to any lengthy period of work in Dublin until late October.⁵⁶

The National League was eventually set up on 21 January 1864 at a meeting in the European Hotel, Bolton Street, attended by about forty people.⁵⁷ The sole aim and object of the league was 'the restoration of a separate and independent Irish legislature', and membership was open for a small fee to anyone supporting this objective.⁵⁸ The rules further laid down that the league intended no antagonism to any other association but that 'it should be free to advocate self-government by any and every means which it may deem to be righteous, honourable, prudent and expedient'. There were expressions of good will and welcome in the Irishman and Nation, but nobody displayed very much confidence or enthusiasm.⁵⁹ The fenians naturally disapproved of the association, but their well-tried disruption tactics

55 Irishman, 26 Sept., 17 Oct., 12, 19 Dec. 1863.

56 Nation, 24 Oct. 1863.

57 Copy police report, Jan. 1864 (N.L.I., Larcom papers, MS 7725).

58 Nation, 27 Feb. 1864.

59 Nation, 23 Jan., 6 Feb. 1864; Irishman, 30 Jan. 1864.

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were not employed to choke it at birth.⁶⁰ John Martin, because of his personality and his '48 record, would be difficult to denigrate as a rogue or a traitor; in any case the league was so patently doomed to failure that it posed no threat whatever to James Stephens. However, two years later, under greatly changed circumstances, fenian sympathisers did begin to make trouble at league meetings, and on one notorious occasion they pelted Martin and his associates with eggs.⁶¹

Basically, the function performed by the league was the provision of a platform for monthly harangues on the national question. An entry in O'Neill Daunt's journal for 3 January 1865 paints the picture with a few strokes. Being in Dublin he went in the evening to 'John Martin's monthly meeting of the repeal league, where some Dublin artisans and shopkeepers had assembled to keep alive the old political faith till better times'.⁶² The league also published propaganda in pamphlet form; by September 1865 it had printed a declaration of Irish grievances (in English, Irish, French and Italian), a lecture by an American priest

60 Irish People, 30 Jan. 1864.

61 Irishman, 11 Aug. 1866.

62 O'Neill Daunt Journal (N.L.I., MS 3041).

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entitled English rule in Ireland, and W. J. O'Neill Daunt's The financial grievances of Ireland.⁶³ John B. Dillon suggested to Smith O'Brien in 1864 that the league would take a year or two to run its course.⁶⁴ His general scepticism about the new movement's prospects was fully vindicated, but it did continue in existence for longer than he predicted: it was still holding meetings in 1868.⁶⁵

One of the few prominent figures to join John Martin in the National League was The O'Donoghue. This was fully in accordance with his policy of supporting any national movement, however limited, provided that he would not thereby lose too many friends elsewhere. He was on the governing body of the new association from an early stage and put his signature, with Martin's, to an address issued on 28 January 1864.⁶⁶ The coming into being of something as jejune as the league was of course an adverse verdict on The O'Donoghue's success to date

63 Irishman, 23 Sept. 1865.

64 J. B. Dillon to W. S. O'Brien, 23 July 1864 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien letters, MS 8657).

65 Irishman, 18 Jan. 1868.

66 Nation, 30 Jan. 1864.

as political leader, and the life span of the league coincided with the final collapse of his pretensions to national leadership.

In January 1865 the M.P. for Tralee, Thomas O'Hagan, was raised to the bench, and as a consequence the representation of the borough fell vacant. On 28 January the Nation announced that Joseph Neale McKenna would contest the forthcoming by-election on 'independent, catholic and national principles'. A week later it carried the startling news that The O'Donoghue was about to give up the representation of Co. Tipperary and was seeking the Tralee seat.⁶⁷ He explained to the electors that he was coming to Tralee to get a secure seat - something which he said he would be sure of in Tipperary 'if freedom of election really existed'.⁶⁸ In fact, the constraint on electoral freedom which affected him in Tipperary was the financial one. The two elections he had fought had allegedly cost him personally almost ten thousand pounds in expenses, and with another general election approaching he felt obliged by his financial position to find a less expensive constituency.⁶⁹ If he had

67 Nation, 4 Feb. 1865.

68 Irishman, 11 Feb. 1865.

69 Nation, 4 Feb. 1865.

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achieved more at national level in the way of union and organization he might have hoped for the emergence of a self-financing constituency organization in Tipperary, but as things stood he would have had to foot the bill himself once again.

The transition to Tralee was not perfectly smooth, as McKenna refused to stand down and a tense election campaign was fought. However, his strong local standing and the support of the O'Connell family interest secured for The O'Donoghue a clear victory on polling day.⁷⁰ There was much rejoicing in Kerry:

His progress through the country on his way to Dublin was such an ovation as Kerry had not seen since the days of the liberator. Triumphant arches were raised across the roads and streets, the cottages by the wayside were decked with evergreens, and portraits of the young chieftain were hung on their fronts. A procession, which at one time reached a length of four miles, accompanied him on his way, every man of that vast body wearing evergreens in his hat or dress.⁷¹

Whatever about the reasons for local adulation of 'the chieftain of the Glens', the rejoicing had very little justification in national terms. The move to Tralee was a spectacular act of retreat. The vote of the member for

70 Nation, 18 Feb. 1865.

71 Nation, 25 Feb. 1865.

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Tralee might count for as much in the house of commons as the vote of a Tipperary member, but the political status of the two in Irish politics could not be compared. Whatever excuses might be adduced, the fact remained that The O'Donoghue had had to retire from one of the largest constituencies in the country and had taken refuge in a small borough controlled by family interests. He was to hold the Tralee seat for twenty years, but his move there in 1865 marked the end of his career as a potential leader of the nation. He was then thirty-two, the same age as O'Connell in 1807, Butt in 1845, and Parnell in 1878.

A news item from later on in 1865 throws more light on the move to Tralee. The O'Donoghue's estate, it was announced, might have to be sold. (This suggests that his refusal to meet another round of election expenses in Tipperary was due to inability, rather than unwillingness, to pay.) But his tenants, the report continued, have formed a committee to buy the estate and give it back to their chieftain: clearly he was not going to be short of devoted admirers in Kerry.⁷²

The emergence of a great public organization of

72 Irishman, 25 Nov. 1865.

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Irish nationalists seemed so desirable and likely in the early 'sixties that its frustration must be classed as a major political achievement. Nobody played a more important part in this negative success than James Stephens, and, indeed, it may be here, rather than in his less clearcut positive achievements, that he made most effective use of his undeniable talents. However, the struggle between Stephens and the would-be leaders of public agitation was not the straightforward and inevitable conflict of opposing principles which fenian apologists liked to portray. At first Stephens had been in friendly contact with many of his later antagonists. In the period from 1856 to late 1858 he had met Smith O'Brien, John B. Dillon, Fr Kenyon and, of course, A. M. Sullivan.⁷³ All of these, and many other respected nationalists both in Ireland and America, decided to have nothing to do with Stephens's organization. This general refusal by the Young Irelanders to support fenianism needs to be explored if we are to achieve any understanding of the nationalist politics of the period.

In an attempt to achieve perspective it is easy to conclude that the battle between the Young Irelanders (especially A. M. Sullivan) and Stephens was just another

73 Fenian chief, pp 57-105; MS 331.

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phase of a long-drawn-out contest between constitutional and physical-force traditions. This view is expressed most confidently in a fairly recent American publication:

Like O'Connell, Sullivan proposed to drive physical force outside the moral pale in Irish politics. Unlike O'Connell, he failed. ... Sullivan gave ground, frightened into silence. With his retreat, physical force stood as an alternative, silent or vocal, to every Irish constitutional move.⁷⁴

However, no such simple dichotomy fits the available facts. For any commentary on the policies of A. M. Sullivan at this period the leading articles of the Nation are essential source material, and a glance through these shows that, whatever other issue may have separated the Nation from the fenians, it was not the admissibility or otherwise of physical force.

The invasion panic of 1859 provided a most compelling occasion for policy statements, and the Nation published them in abundance. On 7 May 1859 it exhorted the population to procure arms, used the term 'national defences and patriot army' and declared that 'in Ireland from September to April the climate would be on the side

74 Malcolm Brown, The politics of Irish literature from Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats (London, 1972), p. 163.

of the people.⁷⁵ A similar line is laid down over and over again during the remainder of the year, though usually with more circumspection.⁷⁶ Whenever the subject of physical force is mentioned in subsequent years it is not rejected on principle. Thus, in a statement of policy to mark the beginning of the paper's twentieth volume it is declared that the Nation will not renounce the country's right to use force when the time is ripe.⁷⁷ An article in 1864 provoked by fenian criticism is similarly explicit:

For our own part we have frequently recommended 'preparation' in this journal and made very intelligible what we meant thereby. We have advised Irish patriots to procure arms and to learn the use of them as far as that might be done without incurring legal penalties.... We have always believed, and stated our belief, that the fullness of Ireland's political rights will never be conceded by English, unless at a time when she shall have reason to fear the strength of the people of Ireland. Holding this opinion we have counselled the friends of Ireland to make themselves strong, by the possession of arms, for in arms and opinion combined is the true power of a nation.⁷⁸

In view of all this it seems clear that the national leadership which Sullivan tried so hard to bring into being

75 Nation, 7 May 1859.

76 E.g. Nation, 21, 28 May, 4, 25 June, 19 Nov. 1859.

77 Nation, 6 Sept. 1862.

78 Nation, 2 Apr. 1864.

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was intended, by him at least, to be a potential director not only of political but of military endeavours.

For Sullivan was firmly in the tradition of Young Ireland, especially on the key issue of principle that caused that previously undefined group to set itself visibly apart from O'Connell's Repeal Association in July 1846, namely, the admissibility of physical force in the pursuit of Irish independence. By the 1860s O'Connell's ideological following was confined mainly to the ranks of the clergy and the catholic Liberals, while many of the Young Irelanders were prominent in nationalist politics and, as we have seen, in the search for a new open national movement. And by the test of July 1846 they were still Young Irelanders. Thus Smith O'Brien, during one of his many repudiations of a possible French invasion, and after declaring that reliance should be placed instead on the public opinion of the Irish nation, added in parenthesis that 'their opinion would, of course, be backed up by their physical force'.⁷⁹ John Blake Dillon, another arch-enemy of fenianism, is usually reckoned to have abandoned his

79 Draft of W. S. O'Brien to secretary, Cork National Reading room, 20 Oct. 1860 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

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earlier strong views by the 1860s. Thus Norman conjectures, plausibly enough, that he stayed out of the National League because of its single-minded insistence on repeal, and adds that 'he had moved a long way from 1848'.⁸⁰ But Dillon's true attitude is revealed in a letter to O'Brien; he avoided the league not because of its extreme demands but because it was doomed to failure: 'For my own part I don't believe in the possibility of repealing the union by anything else than round shot and rifle bullets, and therefore I cannot honestly encourage the people to expect it by an appeal to public opinion.'⁸¹ Clearly these men were not involved in a struggle between constitutionalism and a physical force policy, least of all O'Brien who in 1848 had launched an insurrection that he justified to himself on constitutional grounds.

If then the Nation and its allies were not opponents on principle of a military policy, what was their objection to fenianism? They made no serious

80 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 138.

81 J. B. Dillon to W. S. O'Brien, 23 July 1864 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien letters, MS 8657).

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effort to prove that secret association was morally reprehensible - that was left to the clergy -, although Smith O'Brien did manage to sound as if a definitive interpretation of the moral law was being made whenever he announced that he had always opposed it.⁸² When they did give reasons for their opposition they almost invariably cited the inexpediency of secret societies, either in general, or under actual Irish conditions. O'Brien argued that the existence of a secret society discouraged others from working openly for a cause.⁸³ In any case he was sure that the Irish government was fully informed of the doings of all secret societies in the country.⁸⁴ This point about government infiltration was frequently made, as for example in the Nation's denunciation of 16 November 1861. An assertion in the same article that secret conspiracy will 'alarm orders and interests which should be conciliated' probably touches on A. M. Sullivan's most basic objection to fenianism - the conviction that it would

82 E.g. Irishman, 4 Jan. 1862; Draft of W. S. O'Brien to secretary, Cork National Reading Room, 20 Oct. 1860 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

83 Irishman, 4 Jan. 1862.

84 Ibid.

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turn the clergy against joining in a new national movement as they had joined in support of the Repeal Association.

Another line of opposition to fenianism held that, while there was a definite place for conspiracy in a national movement, the I.R.B. had gone beyond its proper subordinate role and was attempting to monopolize the action to the exclusion of all other elements. This view was perhaps propounded most coherently by P. J. Smyth, writing pseudonymously in the Irishman in 1865. Conspiracy, he wrote, is indeed an essential ingredient of revolution (and should have been used by O'Connell in 1843 and by Young Ireland in 1848), but it is only one ingredient.⁸⁵ This idea highlights an instructive and much-overlooked aspect of the politics of the period. There was no essential incompatibility between a nationalist secret society and a public national movement, even one engaged in parliamentary agitation. But there was scarcely any possibility of co-operation between this particular secret society and the particular men who were leaders of nationalist public opinion at this time.

⁸⁵ Cato (i.e. P. J. Smyth) in Irishman, 14 Jan. 1865.

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However, for a few days in December 1861 it seemed as if an attempt would be made to form an alliance. Predictably, The O'Donoghue was at the centre of the affair. On the night of the Rotundo gathering in connection with the Trent crisis, when the fenian-dominated committee an organization was formed, Luby arranged for The O'Donoghue to meet James Stephens next day at the latter's lodgings in Charlemont Street. There was no third party at the meeting and Stephen's version of the outcome as recorded by Luby was that The O'Donoghue agreed 'while still operating on his own hook, to afford us outside and parallel, so to speak, co-operation'.⁸⁶ And in furtherance of this co-operation he would act on the new committee. Referring to The O'Donoghue many years later A. M. Sullivan wrote ^{that} 'once or twice in the course of the war between the fenian and non-fenian nationalists I trembled for him',⁸⁷ meaning that he feared he would compromise in the struggle. Clearly this was one of the occasions, but Sullivan himself played his cards cautiously at the time, at least in so far as editorial comment in the Nation was concerned.

86 MS 331.

87 Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 248.

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The next issue, that of 7 December 1861, referred approvingly, if unenthusiastically, to the new committee, even though there is no doubt that Sullivan disliked it intensely. It was, however, Smith O'Brien who sabotaged this particular 'new departure', by a public exhortation to The O'Donoghue to withdraw from the committee.⁸⁸

O'Brien was the ally that the young chieftain least wanted to lose, so within a few days The O'Donoghue returned to Stephens to call off their deal, he and his supporters withdrawing from the committee at the same time.⁸⁹

Indicative of the changed situation, the Nation of 14 December carried a detailed exposé of the machinations behind the formation of the committee, knowledge which could as easily have been imparted a week earlier if Sullivan had thought well of it; instead, in the issue of 7 December he had kept his options open.

The question remains: why this unbridgeable gulf? Why did the fenian and non-fenian nationalists fail so utterly to co-operate? The best answer is the one suggested by P. J. Smyth - that it was because the fenians insisted on obtaining a monopoly -, but it needs to be teased out. The secret hetairia (which had the

88 MS 331.

89 Ibid.

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phoenix as its symbol) had monopolised Greek preparations for the struggle for freedom, but that was in a country subject to despotic rule.⁹⁰ Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, on the other hand, enjoyed virtually the full range of British civil and political liberties. There was free speech, a free press, free association and free elections. Over a number of decades there had been built up complex systems of political relationship, and all the typical power structures of liberal-democratic society - admittedly with some local variations. These structures provided a means of expression for the aspirations of the dominant middle classes (and the politically aware in general) and channels for the venting of their grievances, big and small. ~~It was a situation in which a secret society could find itself a niche, but where it could~~ 'The people who mattered' in the Irish catholic community were directly involved in parliamentary elections and the election of city and town councillors, and the indications are that most of those who did not have a vote unquestioningly accepted parliamentary rule and its

90 J. H. Lepper, Famous secret societies (London, 1932), pp 180-5.

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associated political culture, as a norm. In such a situation a secret society could find itself a niche but it could not reasonably hope to achieve dominance. The example of France in 1848 should have been a lesson to Stephens; even there, the secret societies had constituted only a small (if important) minority of the disaffected who launched the revolution.

The futile policy of imposing the exclusive hegemony of fenianism over the entire nationalist movement owed everything to James Stephens. He was incapable of voluntarily sharing authority or power with anyone else. There is a report, which seems quite authentic, that people in Kilkenny could recall him announcing when he was a boy that he was going to be a king.⁹¹ His youthful veneration for royalty obviously underwent a change, but the conviction that he ought to be an untrammelled autocrat did not. The rapprochement with The O'Donoghue on 5 December 1861 might at first sight seem to be an indication of a willingness on Stephens's part to reach some accommodation, but that was not the case. Then and on a few other occasions, under

91 Irishman, 22 Sept. 1866.

pressure from the more independent-minded of his own supporters, he feigned an interest in compromise. There is extant a letter of Charles J. Kickham, dated 14 December 1861, that throws light on the internal fenian position just then. Kickham was at the time the most prominent fenian in one of the brotherhood's strongholds, south Co. Tipperary, and he was well acquainted with Stephens. Writing to E. J. Ryan on the subject of the Rotundo committee he displayed an interest in its prospects and composition which shows that he considered it a very worthwhile development and expected to be acting under its guidance.⁹²

There is some evidence, too, that the American fenians wished their collaborators in Ireland to include many people who were not de facto in Stephens's organization. Thus, for example, when O'Mahony was sending F. F. Millen as an envoy to the I.R.B. in 1865, he gave him also a letter of introduction to P. J. Smyth.⁹³ Millen met Smyth and other prominent non-fenians and

92 C. J. Kickham to E. J. Ryan, 14 Dec. 1861 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

93 An account of fenianism from Apr. 1865 till Apr. 1866 by one of the head centres for Ireland [i.e. F. F. Millen] (N.L.I., Anderson papers, MS 5964) (hereafter cited as MS 5964).

sought their support; but the leadership of James Stephens was an insurmountable barrier.⁹⁴ Smyth and O'Mahony had been in contact for some time and they would obviously have liked to co-operate. O'Mahony had written of Smyth, in a letter apparently addressed to Stephens: 'We should throw no obstacles in the way of men like [him] joining us. The fact of their adhesion would give us the support of the monied classes in this country.'⁹⁵ When P. J. Meehan came as an envoy of O'Mahony in the summer of 1865 he carried written instructions on his dealings with the I.R.B. (which he lost), and he also had verbal orders to contact various gentlemen of advanced nationalist views (including John Martin) and seek their support.⁹⁶ As late as 1864 Stephens had a meeting with George Henry Moore who was interested in co-operation, but all came to nothing.⁹⁷ In practice the issue of co-operation had become identified with the question of the leadership of the I.R.B., for James Stephens was determined to be a dictator whatever the

94 Ibid.

95 Copy of John O'Mahony to James Stephens, 17 May 1864 (N.L.I., Devoy papers, MS 18026).

96 MS 5964.

97 Seán Ó Lúing, Ó Donnabháin Rosa, 1 (Dublin, 1969), p. 209.

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price, and prominent public men, even those not opposed on principle to secret societies, would countenance fenianism only if they could have a say in its direction, and if it could be subordinated to a wider programme of national action.

Dissatisfaction with Stephens's dictatorship was not confined to potential allies of fenianism, but was keenly felt, and from time to time expressed, by his own subordinates. We have seen already how Charles Kickham welcomed the Rotundo committee in December 1861. A detailed examination of the various waves of unrest and of the campaigns for committee government and consultation within the I.R.B., and of the wily autocrat's subterfuges for overcoming them, would be a study in itself. At the end of his Irish visit, in spring 1861, John O'Mahony, in Dublin, broached the advantages of a council.⁹⁸

(Luby thought he had got the idea in Skibbereen where he had been in consultation with O'Donovan Rossa and Dan Macartie.)⁹⁹ As a gesture of good will after a harsh verbal encounter, Stephens suggested the establishment of committees to look after the affairs of the organization

98 MS 331.

99 Ibid.

at county level. These committees were, Luby remarked later, like a certain patent brand of razor, made not to shave but to sell. They were never intended to come into existence but were proposed merely to placate O'Mahony.¹⁰⁰ In the summer of 1863 the centres in Dublin became extremely uneasy and dissatisfied with Stephens and there were calls for the establishment of a directory; the agitation reached a peak while Stephens was away in the south. Luby sent him word of the unrest, and on his return, ^{Stephens} had summoned a meeting to discuss grievances. Sitting around a table in 'the captain's' presence the centres were not so eager to voice their criticisms and face the master's retorts. The deflation of their self-confidence was completed when Stephens drew out sheets of paper and suggested that the different points of complaint be written down, one by one. The meeting concluded without any expenditure of ink.¹⁰¹

Despite his tactical agility, however, Stephens was eventually forced to accept the establishment of committees within the organization. Luby had recorded the existence of a strong tendency in that direction

100 MS 331.

101 Ibid.

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during 1865.¹⁰² In July Stephens complied with a demand from the American brotherhood that he appoint a group of his friends to advise him, by nominating John O'Leary, C. J. Kickham, David Bell, O'Donovan Rossa and F. F. Millen.¹⁰³ In September he set up a military council, largely it would seem as a device to control the big number of restless Irish-American officers scattered throughout Dublin awaiting action.¹⁰⁴ But to neither of these bodies did he give any real power or influence. One observer who had reason to know concluded that 'Stephens had determined to keep the reins of power in his own hands whatever the consequences might be'.¹⁰⁵

One of the consequences which had already followed from Stephens's dictatorial and exclusivist policy was the blighting of any hope of the emergence of a broadly-based movement which might have harnessed and put to effective use the full strength of nationalist opinion. However, the fenians did not constitute the only obstacle to an orderly and co-ordinated advance by the forces of Irish nationalism in the early 1860s. There was yet another wing that also refused to align

102 MS 333.
 103 MS 5964.
 104 Ibid.
 105 Ibid.; see also Devoy, pp 48-9.

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itself with the centre; it consisted of those who might be best described as catholic whigs or even, perhaps, the remnants of 'Old Ireland'. As they were identified to a considerable extent with the catholic clergy we will consider their contribution in a later chapter devoted to the church and politics.

The period 1841-6, that is generally reckoned as having been influenced by the famine movement, the Irish people 1841-61, so its background and the journalistic context in which it flourished can appropriately be considered here also.

The popular-catholic-nationalist side in Irish politics had a number of journalistic voices during the 1850s. Firstly, there was the Freeman's Journal, under the control of O'Connell's protestant ally, John Gray, moderate and catholic-liberal in tone. From 1857 it partly shared this editorial stance with the Telegraph (also Dublin), which was a part of John O'Connell's business empire, and one of his political weapons in the war against the Independent Association wing of the popular party; however the Telegraph was more militantly catholic than the Freeman.¹

¹ J. J. Silliman, New Ireland, p. 143.

CHAPTER SIX

FENIAN PROPAGANDA AND EXPANSION (TO 1865)

We have now reached the stage at which it is desirable to examine the expansion of fenianism during the period 1861-5. That is generally reckoned to have been influenced by the fenian newspaper, the Irish People (1863-5), so its background and the journalistic context in which it flourished can appropriately be considered here also.

The popular-catholic-nationalist side in Irish politics had a number of journalistic voices during the 1850s. Firstly, there was the Freeman's Journal under the control of O'Connell's protestant ally, John Gray, moderate and catholic-Liberal in tone. From 1852 it partly shared this editorial stance with the Weekly Telegraph (also Dublin), which was a part of John Sadleir's business empire, and one of his political weapons in the war against the independent opposition wing of the popular party; however the Telegraph was more militantly catholic than the Freeman.¹

1 Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 163.

Charles Gavan Duffy had revived the Nation in 1849, and it subsequently endeavoured to retain the spirit and ideals of Young Ireland, while at the same time addressing itself to the practical issues of a new era. It was joined in the advocacy of land reform and religious equality by the Tablet, which in 1849 had been transferred from London to Dublin by its founder and proprietor, Frederick Lucas. While the Freeman's Journal and the Telegraph tended to support the whigs, the organs conducted by Duffy and Lucas were, of course, staunch advocates of independent opposition as the only effective mode of parliamentary activity. The small faction which rejected all parliamentary agitation as useless had a platform for a brief period in the Tribune (Dublin), which ran for fifteen weeks from 3 November 1855, under the editorship of T. C. Luby and the general direction of John E. Pigot.²

Many important developments in the field of nationalist journalism in the late fifties and early sixties were encouraged by the changed political situation already discussed.³ A fall in the cost of newsprint owing

2 R. Pigott, Personal recollections of an Irish national journalist (2nd ed., Dublin and London, 1883), p.60.

3 Ch. 1 above.

to the reduction of paper taxes was both cause and consequence of important political developments in England at this period.⁴ In Ireland, as in England, a cheap popular press emerged during these years.

On 17 July 1858 a new nationalist newspaper in the Mitchelite anti-parliamentary tradition made its first appearance, in Belfast. It was the Irishman, owned and edited by Denis Holland, a Corkman who had caught the infection of romantic nationalism in the heyday of Young Ireland.⁵ Early in 1859 the Irishman transferred to Dublin. Holland received very strong encouragement from John E. Pigot who saw his journal as the long-sought answer to his prayer for a worthy successor to the pre-1849 Nation.⁶ About the same time John Martin - recently home from an exile that began with his transportation in 1848 - was reported to be considering the setting up of a newspaper.⁷

This period witnessed, too, an upsurge of popular nationalist journalism at provincial level. There had been a provincial press in the popular interest throughout

4 Vincent, Liberal party, pp 66-85.

5 James Stephens in Weekly Freeman, 6 Oct. 1883 and foll.

6 J. E. Pigot to W. S. O'Brien, 3 Jan. 1860 (N.L.I., W.S. O'Brien papers, MS 447).

7 Copy of P. J. Smyth to J. Martin, 3 Feb. 1859 (N.L.I., Hickey collection, MS 3226).

the 1850s, most notably John Francis Maguire's Cork Examiner; but from 1857 onwards a band of nationally-minded journalists began to establish new organs - or take over established ones - in various provincial towns. To take some examples: Peter Gill launched the Tipperary Advocate (Nenagh) early in 1857; a year later Clonmel produced the Tipperary Examiner which was edited at different times by John F. O'Donnell and A. W. Hartnett;⁸ the Kilkenny Journal was given fresh impetus by the accession of William Kenealy to the editorial chair. In Waterford city a committee headed by the local independent opposition M.P., J. A. Blake, launched the Citizen in September 1859 with P. J. Smyth as editor.⁹ Yet another Young Irelander to take an editorial seat at this time was M. A. O'Brennan of the Connacht Patriot.

The falling cost of newsprint, together with ever-improving means of transport and communications, encouraged the extension of daily newspaper reading. 'It is all the go now, even the farmers buy the daily papers', one interested observer commented, writing in 1863.¹⁰

8 Irishman, 5 Jan. 1861.

9 P. J. Smyth to W. S. O'Brien, 14 Aug. 1859 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

10 Fr Mullen to J. P. McDonnell, 31 July 1863 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

170

In response to this demand A. M. Sullivan, early in 1859, using the facilities of the Nation office, produced the Evening News and subsequently the Morning News.¹¹ By so doing he entered into direct competition with the Freeman's Journal. One of Sullivan's selling points was that of Ireland's eight daily papers only the Morning News was owned and edited by a catholic.¹² It was also at its inception Ireland's only penny daily.¹³ In a very short time the Freeman's Journal struck back with a price reduction from twopence halfpenny to a penny.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the News held on, and it was a viable concern economically when in 1862 Sullivan handed it over for an unstated consideration to the Irish Catholic Publishing Company.¹⁵ Conveniently, the new directors hired Sullivan as editor.¹⁶ Less happily, they embarked on some expensive projects of expansion thereby incurring

11 Nation, 7 Jan. 1865; T. D. Sullivan, A. M. Sullivan: a memoir, p. 33.

12 Nation, 3 Dec. 1859.

13 Nation, 7 Jan. 1865.

14 K. T. Hoppen, 'Tories, catholics and the general election of 1859' in Hist. Jn., xiii (1970), p.64.

15 Nation, 7 Jan. 1865.

16 Nation, 31 May 1862.

debts which eventually forced the discontinuation of the News as from the end of 1864.¹⁷ In the meantime Sullivan had retired from the editorship to be replaced, at least temporarily, by John C. Waters, M.D.¹⁸

In its flush of early success in 1861 the National Brotherhood of St Patrick had proposed to establish its own daily organ.¹⁹ In 1862 there appeared a prospectus for an 'Irish National Newspaper and Publishing Company' that aimed to collect £20,000 in shares and publish an independent daily newspaper with a circulation of from fifteen to thirty thousand.²⁰ But it was only to be another prospectus, and the first great impetus for daily newspaper publishing resulted in the emergence in 1865 of a revitalised Freeman's Journal as the unchallenged leading daily on the catholic-popular side in Irish politics. The battle of the weeklies was more drawn-out and far more exciting.

Before departing for Australia in 1855 Gavan Duffy had disposed of his shares in the Nation to A. M.

17 Morning News, 31 Dec. 1864; Nation, 7 Jan. 1865.

18 Nation, 28 Mar., 4 Apr. 1863.

19 Irishman, 25 May 1861.

20 Irishman, 16 Aug. 1862.

Sullivan and Michael Clery, on condition that his own collaborator, John Cashel Hoey, would continue as editor. Sullivan worked with Hoey in the editor's room until late in 1857, when Hoey left, apparently after Sullivan had first suggested that he himself might go.²¹ Early in 1858 Sullivan purchased Clery's shares, thus placing himself in absolute control.²² Thenceforth he shared the editorial burden with his elder brother, Timothy Daniel. They consciously endeavoured to maintain the traditions of the Nation, though Duffy confessed to Hoey on one occasion that the results sometimes made his toes tingle.²³

Sullivan was only a few months in control when the launching of the Irishman provided serious and direct competition for the Nation. The basic policy difference between the two was on the issue of parliamentary agitation, which the Nation advocated in independent opposition form and which the Irishman

21 A. M. Sullivan to C. G. Duffy, 10 May 1863 (N.L.I., A. M. Sullivan letters, MS 10489).

22 T. D. Sullivan, Recollections, p. 12.

23 A. M. Sullivan to J. Doyle, 25 Jan. 1862 (N.L.I., A. M. Sullivan papers, MS 10489).

rejected in every form. (Here again it must be emphasized that there was no clash on the physical force question.) However, the contest between the two national weeklies was a struggle between rival commercial enterprises as much as an ideological conflict, and it was enlivened by the development of a bitter personal antagonism between A. M. Sullivan and Denis Holland. As early as August 1858 the Nation carried a parody on the rather bombastic anti-parliamentary leader writing of the Irishman, without, however, mentioning the target by name.²⁴ For the most part the antagonism was comparatively veiled during 1859,²⁵ but it burst into the open in 1860. There were bitter editorial exchanges on aspects of recruitment for the papal brigade,²⁶ and the Irishman joined whole-heartedly in a new phase of the verbal warfare between Sullivan and the promoters of the New York fenian organ, The Phoenix.²⁷

24 Nation, 28 Aug. 1858.

25 See for example, Irishman, 5 Mar. 1859; Nation, 12 Mar. 1859.

26 Irishman, 12 May 1860; Nation, 19 May 1860.

27 Irishman, 22 Dec. 1860; Nation, 29 Dec. 1860.

Holland suffered a disastrous blow in 1861 when he unsuccessfully contested a libel charge at Armagh assizes. The aggrieved party was a landowner and magistrate of the county, William Jones Armstrong, who had been accused of cruelty to tenants in an article copied by the Irishman from the Dundalk Democrat. Armstrong was awarded fifty pounds compensation and all costs.²⁸ To meet these crushing expenses Holland borrowed a large sum from his father-in-law, William Watson, and made over to him as security the property of the Irishman.²⁹

When A. M. Sullivan in the Nation, in April 1862, began a meticulous and lengthy rebuttal of the allegations made against him in connection with the phoenix arrests, the Irishman immediately provided his accusers with a platform from which to reply. In fact the charges were repeated in an open letter to Sullivan from O'Donovan Rossa carried by the very next issue of the Irishman.³⁰ Sullivan responded by bringing a civil action for libel against Holland.³¹ The outcome was virtually a tie as far as point-scoring went: the jury

28 Irishman, 22 June, 3 Aug. 1861.
 29 Irishman, 28 Mar. 1863
 30 Irishman, 26 Apr. 1862.
 31 Nation, 3 May 1862.

found in favour of Sullivan, which allowed him to proclaim the vindication of his integrity³²; but the damages amounted to a mere sixpence, which gave the Irishman great scope for ridicule.³³ However, as Holland had to meet the full costs of the case - about two hundred and fifty pounds - the last laugh was with Sullivan.³⁴ Once again Watson came to the rescue. Holland now owed a large sum of his father-in-law and despite attempts to get financial support from his friends he was unable to resolve his debt. Before the end of 1862 he had opened negotiations with P. J. Smyth for the sale of his newspaper and in April of the following year Smyth became proprietor and editor of the Irishman.³⁵ Sullivan had disposed of Holland, but he had not got rid of the Irishman. However, for the next few years differences could be aired without stirring up bitter personal animosity, something which only returned when Richard Pigott succeeded Smyth as proprietor of the Irishman in 1865.

As part of the background to the establishment of the fenians' Irish People the attitude of the Irishman

32 Nation, 21 June 1862.
 33 Irishman, 28 June 1862.
 34 Ibid.
 35 Irishman, 4, 18 Apr. 1863.

to fenianism is of considerable interest. On 9 October 1858 it carried an editorial reply to a correspondent from Kenmare who had written in anger with details of the local parish priest's altar condemnation of the burgeoning Phoenix Society; not even Smith O'Brien could be more forthright than the editor on this occasion:

If there be any absurd secret society existing in his parish, the priest is quite right in warning his people to shun it. These societies are most frequently organized by Castle spies and by informers of the Jimmy O'Brien class, who make a trade in the blood of honest, simple credulous men. We earnestly join our voice to that of the priest, and implore the peasantry to shun those treacherous midnight associations: believe us, that is not the way in which Irish independence is to be worked out.³⁶

In the week following 30 October the Irishman received a letter denouncing the Nation's attack on secret societies; it acknowledged the letter but refused publication, and suggested that there was much ado about nothing, or about very little, in the current controversy.³⁷ After all, secret societies had been reported from only two parishes and both had parish priests of 'disagreeable whig tendencies'; all of which could be taken as a warning that 'if priests try truckling this way to our natural enemies

36 Irishman, 9 Oct. 1858.

37 Irishman, 6 Nov. 1858.

they drive the peasants under their charge into the unfortunate reaction of secret organization.'³⁸

The next issue took up the whole question in a leading article, entitled simply 'Secret societies', that deserves to be quoted at some length:

It would seem that there is some political society in Munster, seemingly secret... Of its course of operation we are quite ignorant; but we learn from unquestionable sources that it has no connection whatever with ribbonism, or midnight conspiracy... that it has no 'oaths of blood' - that it countenances no 'dagger law' - but that prudently or imprudently, wisely or rashly, its members believe that by its means, they can help in bringing back the independence of Ireland Now on the wisdom of this organization we are not going to pronounce to-day. Of its legality or illegality we know nothing and would therefore be foolish in offering an opinion. But from what we have heard we believe it numbers in its ranks thousands of young men, able, honest, intelligent.... The faithful and devoted clergy of Ireland have always, and wisely, had a horror of secret societies. For in our country they have either been mad combinations of vengeful peasants plunging into blood and crime in retaliation for the tyranny of landlords... or they have been traps framed by spies and informers.... To Ireland they have been a sad affliction and a curse; and whether they be called by the rival names of ribbonism or orangeism we must abhor and denounce them in the name of our bleeding country. But we should discriminate. For we fear that the wholesale denunciation of all forms of secret societies by well-meaning amiable persons misleads and confounds the people.... In fact the catholic church itself has countenanced and used secret associations to protect religion from armed infidelity or ruffian power. A secret organization,

38 Ibid.

then, for the political amelioration of Ireland would be no actual crime, no sin.³⁹

From all of this we can deduce that before 10 October Holland, living in Belfast, knew next to nothing of fenianism, and was perhaps even totally unaware of its existence. It is equally clear that during the subsequent weeks he received a fairly thorough grounding in the subject. It is tempting to speculate that this occurred between 6 and 13 November, but the ambiguity in the comment of 6 November is probably an indication not of continuing ignorance but of an uncertainty about what attitude to adopt, an uncertainty which had resolved itself a week later. Stephens seemed to have been acquainted with Holland in 1848, so it may seem surprising that he did not take him at least partially into his confidence and seek his support (as he did with A. M. Sullivan) before October 1858.⁴⁰ But it must be remembered that the Irishman had not appeared until July, by which time Stephens was immersed in work in the south-west corner of the country, from where a new journal publishing in Belfast can hardly have appeared worthy of much attention.

39 Irishman, 13 Nov. 1858.

40 Weekly Freeman, 6 Oct. 1883 and foll.

It would be interesting to know just how the fenian case was presented to Holland, but, however it was done, we can surmise that he did not react as negatively as A. M. Sullivan. In subsequent years the fenians felt confident that they would be accorded, at the least, benevolent neutrality by the Irishman. In 1861 Charles Kickham was assured by John O'Mahony and by 'another patriot' (obviously Stephens or Luby) that Holland's paper 'could not afford' to oppose fenianism.⁴¹ However it is inherently improbable that this implies subsidisation by the fenians; if it has any financial connotations, which is unlikely, they refer to the purchase of the paper by individual fenian sympathisers. Stephens never had the Irishman 'in his pocket'. Holland might refuse to condemn nationalist secret societies, and he might join whole-heartedly in the fenian vendetta against A. M. Sullivan, but the Irishman was the organ of a party (not in the formal sense indeed) which was by no means of one mind on the usefulness of conspiracy in general and of fenianism in particular. It carried a regular weekly letter from John Mitchel when he was in Paris during the period 1859-62, and he was no uncritical

41 C. J. Kickham to E. J. Ryan, 14 Dec. 1861 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

supporter of fenianism. Neither was John E. Pigot, another very important contributor. Neither was Holland himself, while editor of the Irishman. His personal attitudes were best represented by the National Brotherhood of St. Patrick.

The brotherhood certainly experienced a sense of loss when Holland ceded control of the Irishman to P. J. Smyth; the central association at once issued a circular to all branches announcing in panic-stricken tones that the new proprietorship could not be relied upon for one issue.⁴² The changeover provided the stimulus for the National Brotherhood to go ahead after long threatening with the publication of its own newspaper, or more precisely the short-lived joint venture with James Roche, the United Irishman and Galway American.⁴³

Holland's departure also prepared the way for the fenians to launch their paper. With the able and independent Smyth in control, the Irishman was no longer susceptible to fenian pressures. (He set the tone of his editorship with a note to the effect that he was not connected with any existing political organization in

42 Printed address of central association of National Brotherhood of St. Patrick, 1 Apr. 1863 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

43 Ibid.; see above ch. 4.

Ireland.)⁴⁴ Nevertheless it seems likely that it was not the changes at the Irishman office so much as the fear that Roche and the National Brotherhood would make an impact with their new weekly, that convinced James Stephens in the summer of 1863 that he should have his own newspaper.⁴⁵

The Irish People was intended by Stephens to be a money-making proposition, as is well known. He first told Luby of his decision to start a newspaper just after the latter gentleman had returned from a trip to America bearing a disappointingly small financial contribution from the brethren overseas.⁴⁶ To Luby at least, Stephens made no secret of the great hopes which he reposed in this new source of wealth: receipts from O'Mahony had not amounted to £250 per year but, he calculated, the newspaper once established would bring five or six times that amount, and maybe fifteen or eighteen times.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, to see the Irish People merely as a device for filling the fenian coffers would be to accept a superficial understanding of the workings of fenianism in the summer and autumn of 1863.

44 Irishman, 25 Apr. 1863.

45 J. Warren [i.e. J. Stephens] [to T. C. Luby] on 14 Aug. [1863] (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

46 MS 331.

47 J. Warren [i.e. J. Stephens] [to T. C. Luby], undated (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

On Luby's return from America on the occasion mentioned he found Stephens's organization suffering from troubles much more serious than scarcity of finance. Stephens himself was in an uncharacteristically diffident, mood and even momentarily expressed a wish to be finished with the business altogether.⁴⁸ The Dublin centres were growing dissatisfied with the captain's leadership and were thinking about a directory.⁴⁹ At the same time a radical (but non-fenian) nationalist element - closely connected with the leadership of the National Brotherhood - was posing a double threat to the allegiance and stability of the I.R.B. organization. The first threat was coming from Roche's Galway-American which combined militant nationalist rhetoric with advocacy of the northern cause in the American civil war, and a fairly clear call to Irish patriots to begin the fight for Irish freedom by enlisting in the federal army.⁵⁰ The success of this appeal would have deprived the I.R.B. of its most valuable

48 MS 331.

49 MS 331.

50 Galway American (Galway), 12 Apr. 1862 - 27 June 1863, continued as United Irishman and Galway American (Dublin), 25 July 1863 - 2 Apr. 1864.

rank and file members. From the very beginning of the civil war the fenian leadership at both sides of the Atlantic had seen the danger of such an exodus and had campaigned against it.⁵¹

Peter E. Gill of the Tipperary Advocate, a colourful character, active in politics at county level, and a member of the National Brotherhood, began during the summer of 1863 in co-operation with some like-minded individuals, to lay plans for a series of great outdoor patriotic meetings at various evocative locations throughout Co. Tipperary.⁵² These gatherings were calculated to prove irresistible to the classes who comprised the ranks of fenianism. And, if successfully carried through, they would place the organizers in that position of leadership of the local discontents which Stephens hoped to achieve through the I.R.B. Besides, the government might be moved to take drastic measures which would seriously inconvenience fenianism. It was precisely because he had a newspaper at his command that Gill was able to promote his project. The editor of the Nation, who undoubtedly appreciated every move in the

51 J. M. Herson, Celts, catholics and copperheads: Ireland views the American civil war (Columbus (Ohio), 1968), pp 24, 28, 34; see Irish People 23 Jan., 6 Feb. and 5 Mar. 1864.

52 Tipperary Advocate, 8 Aug. 1863.

game, had no hesitation in lending his influential voice to augment the advance publicity, assuredly not from sympathy with the eccentric Gill but in the full awareness that his scheme would seriously undermine the I.R.B.⁵³ In view of all this, it goes without saying that James Stephens needed a newspaper of his own for even more serious reasons than the raising of money.

The decision to start the Irish People was announced in late July, just four months before the first issue appeared. In the meantime Stephens adroitly utilised the preparations as a means to amuse and thereby discipline the organization in the south; there were funds to be collected, subscribers to be canvassed and local promotion committees to be established. Stephens spent the early autumn supervising this work and planning the detailed arrangements for the newspaper itself. John O'Leary was summoned home from London to assume a major part in the direction of the journal.⁵⁴ Stephens spent a few days in Mullinahone and paid unwonted attention to Charles J. Kickham whom he planned to entice away to Dublin as a leader writer.

53 Nation, 8, 15 and 22 Aug. and 3 Oct. 1863.

54 M. Bourke, John O'Leary: a study in Irish separatism (Tralee, 1967).

Kickham at this time, on Stephen's instructions, played a key role in thwarting the planned series of public meetings in Co. Tipperary.⁵⁵ The first of them was convened on 15 August on the summit of Slievenamon, in the centre of a locality where Kickham had wielded influence over national-minded youth even before the advent of the I.R.B. He was the first choice for the chairmanship of the Slievenamon meeting and he accepted the offer, but with motives which the organizers scarcely suspected. When the day arrived over one thousand people climbed Slievenamon, despite discreet discouragement through the fenian organization in some of the nearby towns. The chairman had the difficult task of letting the gathering hear the kind of rhetoric which was to be expected on such an occasion, while at the same time discouraging the holding of any further meetings. Accordingly, in his address he catalogued popular grievances, while at the same time hammering away at the point that speech-making would never achieve any redress. Gill and a close associate, John A. Finerty, also spoke, but Kickham had done his job so well that those present

55 J. Devoy, Recollections of an Irish rebel (New York, 1929), p. 308. (hereafter cited as Devoy, Recollections).

got his message, and although one further meeting took place the project soon flopped.⁵⁶

Comment is frequently made on the fact that Stephens gathered so many important fenians together to work on the Irish People in 12 Parliament Street, Dublin, and thereby made them easy prey for the authorities. There is, however, another aspect of this concentration of talent which has scarcely ever been adverted to, probably because the internal history of fenianism is so poorly documented and so little known. For it seems clear to me - though the point can hardly be established by positive evidence - that Stephens used the newspaper as a pretext to bring to Dublin, and make financially dependent on himself, a number of natural leaders of fenianism at local level, who, in their native places, were capable of wielding more influence than the captain wished any of his subordinates to enjoy. The list of Irish People staff who fall into this category is quite long: Charles J. Kickham, John Haltigan, O'Donovan Rossa, Denis Dowling Mulcahy, James O'Connor and Cornelius Dwyer Keane; the first four had been acknowledged local leaders prior to 1858 and so possessed a certain independence

56 Ibid.; Nation, 22 Aug. 1863.

vis-a-vis Stephens on their home territory; with O'Connor, one of the centres for Cork city, Stephens had had a dispute in the summer of 1863.⁵⁷ Why did Stephens, who had no scarcity of intelligent supporters in Dublin, take so many key men from the provinces? It seems probable that the absolute monarch brought the nobility from their provincial strongholds to the royal court in order to circumscribe their influence and increase his own centralised power.

In a wider context the founding of the Irish People by the man who had hitherto decried the press as a means of influencing public opinion, tells us something of the realities of the politics of the period.⁵⁸ It amounted to a tacit admission by Stephens that the political context in which he was functioning was too sophisticated for the unaugmented efforts of a secret society to carry the day. It also suggests, as will be argued in a later chapter, that the I.R.B. was by this time something more than a secret society.⁵⁹

The most important function of the Irish People was to pre-empt a propaganda vantage point from which

57 MS 331.

58 MS 331.

59 Ch. 7 below.

alternative leaders could have undermined the allegiance of the fenian rank and file, dependent for instruction, as they were until November 1863, on viva-voce communication in a society where the newspaper had long since been established as the chief medium of political education. Of course the leading articles of the Irish People were not overtly addressed to the I.R.B., but to the Irish public at large. In fact when necessity demanded - as for example when the Irish People was accused publicly of involvement with a secret society - the existence of a nationalist secret society, or of any group on Irish soil known as 'the fenians' could be denied, formal veracity being preserved by resort to verbal quibbles.⁶⁰ (After all, whether the fenian organization was a secret society or not was a question of definition; and officially only the American branch of the organization was given the appellation 'fenian'.) Or the existence of fenianism could be tacitly accepted while at the same time the writer dissimulated any authoritative knowledge of the society's doings.⁶¹ There was no need for anything more forthright on the subject:

60 Irish People, 23 Jan., 12 Mar., 9 Apr. 1864.

61 Irish People, 5, 19 Mar. 1864.

fenian readers understood (and even the uninitiated could read between the lines). But on the points of policy where the average non-doctrinaire fenian might be vulnerable to external pressure there was open unequivocal statement, constantly reiterated. Thus foreign enlistment was strongly discouraged (to counter federal recruitment), ecclesiastical interference in politics was denounced (because ecclesiastics were denouncing fenianism), and national independence obtained by physical force was declared to be the only means of achieving any amelioration of grievances (lest fenians might see some sense in any rival movement with less extreme objectives or advocating less drastic methods - such as the National League or the National Association).

The Irish People certainly prevented the seduction of the fenian rank and file from their allegiance. In fact its period of publication - from late 1863 to September 1865 - coincided with a remarkable expansion of the I.R.B. and it seems reasonable to assume that there was, to some extent at least, a causal connection. Material is available to make possible studies of the beginnings, progress and extent of fenianism in many areas of the country. Few of these have yet been presented

to the public, or even undertaken,⁶² and it is beyond the scope of the present work to seek to supply the deficiency, but it is nevertheless possible to delineate fenian expansion in a general way, and see a meaningful pattern therein.

In its early days the I.R.B., as we have seen, absorbed existing groups in Dublin, and in the south.⁶³ But its early progress simultaneously followed to a considerable extent a related but more widespread pattern, namely the network of areas where the Young Irelanders' confederate clubs had flourished in 1848. It was not, of course, the clerical and middle class former leaders of the clubs who embraced fenianism, but usually people who had been too young or too insignificant socially to hold office in the eminently respectable '48 movement, but who had nevertheless been influenced by it. The coincidence between fenian strongpoints at the end of 1858 and the locations of 1848 clubs is not complete but it is great enough to draw attention to its significance. At any rate, by autumn 1858 the I.R.B. was in existence

62 See however Breandán Mac Giolla Choille, 'Fenians, Rice and ribbonmen in Co. Monaghan, 1864-7' in Clogher Record, vi, no. 2 (1967), pp 221-52; Seán Ó Lúing, 'A contribution to a study of fenianism in Breifne' in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 157-74; Seán Ó Lúing, 'The Phoenix Society in Kerry, 1858-9' in Kerry Arch. Soc. Jn., ii (1969), pp 5-25; etc.

in Dublin city, and parts of Counties Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford, Cork, Kerry and perhaps Wicklow, Carlow and Meath.⁶⁴ The movement appears to have made very little progress beyond those areas - or within them either - in the two years following the Phoenix arrests of December 1858.⁶⁵ A document circulated to centres in the summer of 1860 obtained twenty-five signatures, all of them of men resident in Leinster and Munster.⁶⁶

It appears that at this time the organization in Dublin was still confined to Peter Langan's group of fifty or thereabouts.⁶⁷ Luby, who is the authority for this, has recorded details of a subsequent sudden expansion in the capital. Sometime in the autumn of the same year, 1860, he made the acquaintance of a young Co. Cork national teacher temporarily on professional business in Dublin, who introduced him to another Corkman named James O'Callaghan, a draper's assistant in Mary Street.⁶⁸ O'Callaghan had been sworn into the I.R.B. in his native

64 MS 331; Devoy, Recollections, pp 29-31.

65 MS 331.

66 MS statements of support for 'John and James', 1860 (New York Public Library, Margaret McKim Maloney collection; O'Donovan Rossa papers).

67 MS 331.

68 MS 331.

county, and Luby now gave him the rank of B in the organization and thereby commissioned him to enlist new members. The outcome was spectacular. Within a short time O'Callaghan initiated a large number of eager intelligent young men of such high calibre that Luby straightaway gave a batch of them in turn the rank of B in the organization, and recommended to Stephens on his return from Paris early in 1861 that they be advanced to the status of centres.⁶⁹ They were to constitute a highly important element in the I.R.B. Luby refers to them and their recruits as 'the new Dublin organization'.

He also mentions casually that some of them had been involved in the national petition campaign, as if this fact were not of any great significance.⁷⁰ However it is clear that precisely what O'Callaghan did was to enrol into the I.R.B. a large section of the strong and active organization which had sprung up in the city in support of the petition campaign. The clearest indication of this comes from Devoy, who also states that he himself was sworn in by O'Callaghan in the first week

69 MS 331.

70 MS 331.

of 1861.⁷¹ Luby was under the impression that Devoy's entry was made by way of Langan's group, which (again according to Luby) burst into active recruitment in emulation of the 'new organization'. Others introduced to the I.R.B. in Dublin at this time through one channel or another included Edward Duffy, John Nolan, Hugh Brophy and Matthew O'Neill, all very effective recruiters in subsequent years.⁷²

When Stephens ventured back to Ireland in 1861 he obviously found his organization in a flourishing state in Dublin, but there appears to have been no comparable flowering to admire in the provinces. He was soon in the southern counties with Luby, revitalising the organization and breaking some fresh ground especially in Cork and Kerry.⁷³ On a second trip to the south in 1861 they visited Co. Clare where they seem to have had very little success, if any.⁷⁴ During the same year the first serious attempt to launch fenianism in Connacht was made by Edward Duffy, who made but slow

71 Irish Freedom, Mar. 1913; Devoy, Recollections, p. 26.

72 Irish Freedom, Mar. 1913; MS 331.

73 MS 331.

74 MS 331.

progress at first.⁷⁵ (He was involved in a struggle with ribbonism, a subject dealt with in a later chapter.)⁷⁶ From late 1863 onwards he enjoyed much greater success, and seems to have established fenianism in all the western counties.⁷⁷ A similar pattern was followed in Ulster with John Nolan beginning the work in Belfast in 1862 after he had moved there to take up a new job. Then, during the period of the Irish People, there followed expansion throughout the province although here, as in the west, ribbonism was a problem.⁷⁸ During 1864 and 1865 the efforts of Duffy and Nolan were supplemented by missions undertaken by O'Donovan Rossa, Luby and Stephens himself.⁷⁹

Luby, who was in as good a position as anyone to know, associated the Irish People with the progress of the fenian organization, holding not only that the movement became strong in Connacht and Ulster after the launching of the paper but that its strength increased

75 Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 160-62.

76 Ch. 12 below.

77 Irish Republic, 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 160-62; MS 331.

78 MS 331.

79 S. Ó Lúing, Ó Donnabháin Rosa 1 (Dublin, 1969), p. 206; Irish Republic, 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 160-62; MS 331.

considerably in other places also.⁸⁰ In fact, even the propaganda activity preparatory to publication seems to have drummed up extra support in Munster, if we are to credit a contemporary dispatch from Stephens.⁸¹ It was apparently at this time that progress was first made in Limerick city, which was later to be a stronghold.⁸² On the newspaper and fenianism in Britain, Luby is even more definite. 'We had', he writes, 'no movement in England and Scotland until after the Irish People had appeared.'⁸³ Even A. M. Sullivan had admitted the success of the Irish People beyond the Irish Sea: 'It swept all before it amongst the Irish in England and Scotland, almost annihilating the circulation of the Nation in many places north and south of the Tweed.'⁸⁴ The Irishman had brought the National Brotherhood to the Irish in Britain; less overtly but equally effectively the Irish People introduced to them the fenian organization. As with the National Brotherhood, and later the home rule movement, they flocked into the I.R.B. as the leading Irish activist

80 MS 333.

81 J. Warren [i.e. J. Stephens] to T. C. Luby, 7 Sept. 1863 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

82 MS 333.

83 MS 333.

84 Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 249.

organization of the moment, without giving much consideration to points of policy or principle. So when Luby toured Britain on organizational work in 1865, following in the wake of Rossa and Stephens, he found himself being obliged to address large groups of fenians who obviously had no appreciation of fenianism's distinctive policy of secrecy.⁸⁵

There was one extension of fenianism in the years 1863-5 which can hardly be connected directly with the Irish People. This was the systematic recruitment of Irish soldiers serving in various regiments of the British army stationed in Ireland, an enterprise entered upon by an eccentric Irish-American named Pagan O'Leary, initially in contravention of the express wishes of James Stephens. The project met with considerable success, at least in the sense that many individual soldiers were initiated. However the definitive study of the topic reaches the conclusion that

it is impossible to say how many fenian soldiers there were in Ireland or outside of it. There may have been some hundreds or some thousands, but, no matter how many there were, they were ineffective, largely because the fenian organization in the army was ineffective.⁸⁶

85 MS 331, MS 333.

86 A. J. Semple, 'The fenian infiltration of the British army in Ireland, 1864-7' (M. Litt. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1971), p. 170.

In particular the figures cited by John Devoy cannot be relied upon.⁸⁷

Obviously, the I.R.B. did not compile lists of its members, and neither did it keep any other kind of record which we could use to make a scientific analysis of its relative strength in various parts of the country. However, there does exist a corpus of recorded information on a group of known or suspected fenians that is large enough to be treated as representative. This information was compiled in Dublin Castle as a consequence of the suspension of habeas corpus for a period of more than two years from February 1866. The object of the suspension was to enable the authorities to avert a fenian rising by arresting and holding suspects, and, naturally, a file was maintained on the case of each prisoner.⁸⁸ There were over one thousand in all and it is this group which provides our sample. It is not of course a 'scientific' sample and its limitations must be clearly grasped before any use is made of it. The

87 Ibid., p. 167; Devoy, Recollections, p. 62.

88 The essential contents of these files were entered in three large bound volumes which, with an index volume, comprise the section of the Fenian papers referred to as Habeas Corpus Suspension Act: abstracts of cases 1866-8.

police and constabulary recommended the arrest of those individuals whom they judged to be active fenians. Obviously the thoroughness or accuracy of their information would vary from place to place, depending on many factors including chance. Those detained were those believed by the police to be fenians. However, allowing for all the possible causes of distortion, it seems reasonable to accept the sample as representative of the general fenian body, if only because of its size. It is extremely unlikely that at its greatest strength the I.R.B. had as many as one hundred thousand members in Ireland.⁸⁹ Accordingly, the total of arrests under the habeas corpus suspension act amounted to at least one per cent (and possibly two per cent or more) of the brotherhood in Ireland. So, in the absence of any better indicator, we can take the home addresses of these prisoners as a rough guide to the relative strength of fenianism on a geographical basis.

For the purposes of this chapter we have discounted those prisoners who are indicated to have come from Britain or America, unless it appears that they had returned to their native places after a short

89 See below, ch. 9.

exile. That leaves a total of just over one thousand. A breakdown on a provincial basis reveals a striking disparity:

LEINSTER : 44 per cent
 MUNSTER : 39 per cent
 CONNAUGHT : 11 per cent
 ULSTER : 6 per cent

However, comparisons are more meaningful at county level and when related to population. In fact we have related the number of arrests for each county to its Roman Catholic population as indicated by the census of 1861;⁹⁰ this is done by estimating the number of arrests per one hundred thousand catholics in each county. (See map on page 202 .)

Dublin emerges with a figure strikingly higher than any other county (112), a reflection of the prevalence of fenianism in the city (and perhaps to some extent a reflection of the concentration in the capital of activists from America and England who are not indicated as such in the records). Not very surprisingly, Tipperary (40) and Cork (35) are next highest. Less

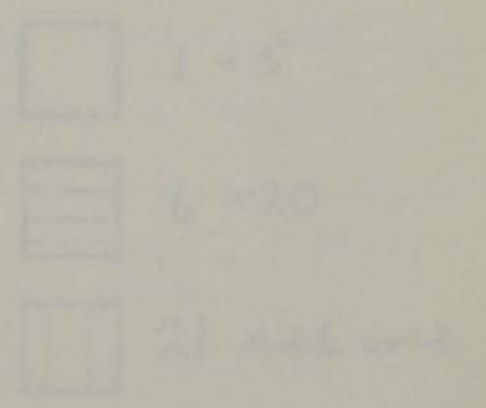
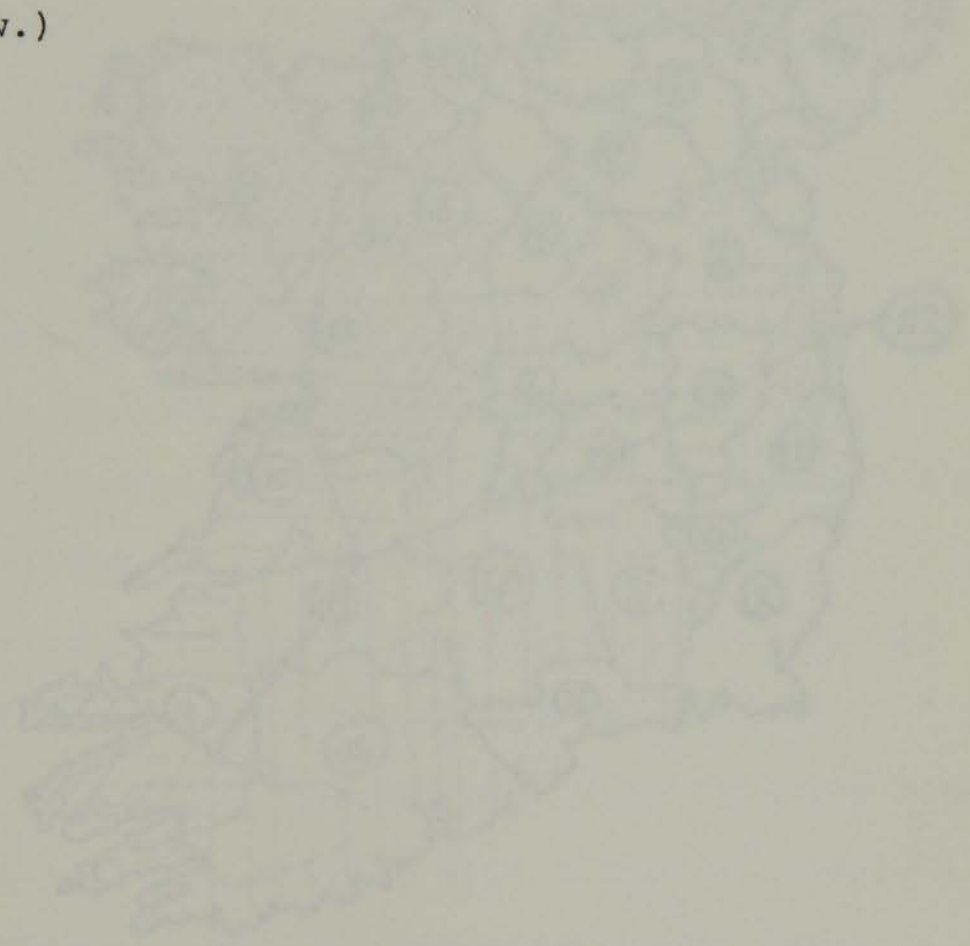
90 Census Irl., 1861.

predictably, Antrim (33) is in fourth position, due largely to a high incidence among the forty thousand or so catholics in Belfast. The figure for Limerick is 31, for Westmeath 28, for Kilkenny 21, and for Carlow 20. Most of the remaining counties of Leinster and Muster and four of the Connaught counties had from six to eighteen arrests per one hundred thousand catholics. Of the northern counties only Tyrone is in this category, and of the eleven counties with a figure of less than six, seven are in Ulster and three (Leitrim, Longford and Louth) border Ulster. The eleventh was Wexford, still mindful, perhaps, of 'ninety-eight.

In brief, then, the indications are that at its greatest extent the fenian organization existed in every county in Ireland, but that its strength was powerfully concentrated in Dublin and in a group of southern counties, while in the north (with the exception of Belfast) membership was sparse not just by reference to total population but even relative to the size of the catholic population.

(Because the I.R.B. consisted so predominantly of catholics it was thought best to relate the arrests to the catholic population figures, rather than the general population totals for each county. Otherwise the

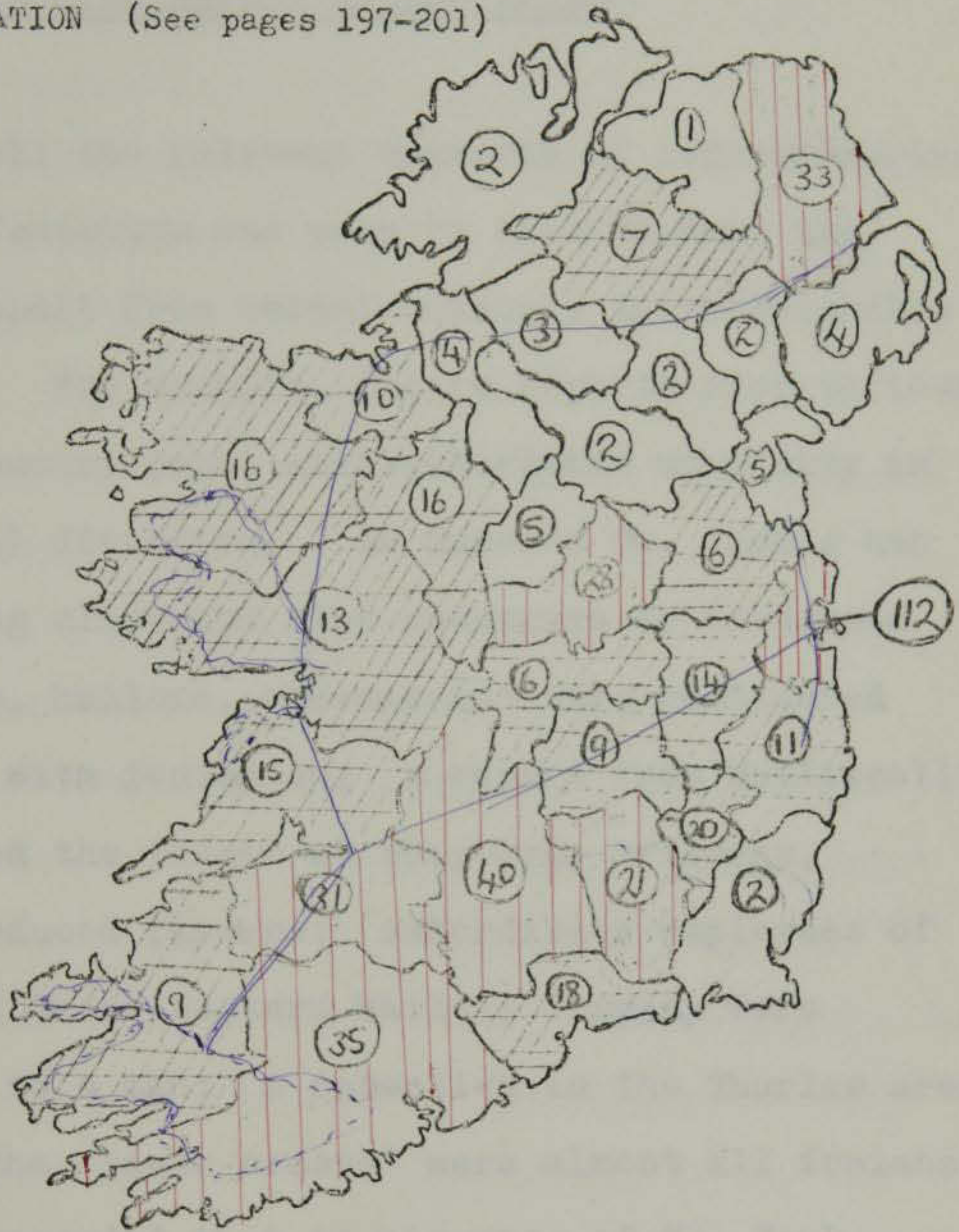
proportionate figures for the north-eastern counties would be considerably lower. There were protestant fenians in the 1860s but their numbers were so small that they do not distort our calculations. The subject of protestants in the I.R.B. is dealt with in chapter thirteen below.)



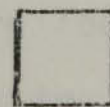
SUSPECTS ARRESTED, 1866-8 (UNDER HABEAS CORPUS

SUSPENSION ACT), PER 100,000 OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC

POPULATION (See pages 197-201)



KEY



1 - 5



6 - 20



21 and over

1. Constabulary reports, 1866-8, and 25 Oct. 1868, p. 2.

2. Journal of S. J. O'Neill, D.D. (S.J.), 1868, p. 104.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF FENIANISM

Almost all the relevant comments of contemporaries indicate that fenianism was seen by them to draw the bulk of its support from certain clearly distinguishable social groups. For example, police reports from various parts of the country point with remarkable unanimity in the same general direction. In Queen's Co. 'young men of the labouring class and also mechanics or tradesmen such as tailors, nailors, shoemakers' were considered to be infected with fenianism; a report from Ballincollig, Co. Cork pointed the finger at shopboys, artisans, servants and reduced farmers; subordinate employees of the Midland and Great Western Railway Company were suspect almost to a man; a detective in the Thurles area reported that the 'lower orders' were almost all fenians.¹ O'Neill Daunt recorded that in his area of Co. Cork those involved in fenian activities were 'country lads' and 'town shop-boys'.² Taking the country at large,

1 Constabulary reports, 30 Aug., 1 Sept., 6 Sept. and 25 Oct. 1865 (S.P.O., Reports on fenianism, 1864-5, nos 202, 214, 223, 239).

2 Journal of W. J. O'Neill Daunt, 26 June 1865 (N.L.I., MS 3041).

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T. D. Sullivan saw the I.R.B. as containing 'shopkeepers' assistants in our cities and chief towns, who have a little smattering ... of education', and a contingent from 'among the very poorest and most ignorant people'.³

Suspicion that this type of analysis might be biased by the prejudice or bigotry of enemies of fenianism is greatly eased by an even more striking, if less precise, comment of John O'Leary (recalled by Luby many years later) to the effect that 'he regretted our men belonged so much to the riff-raff'.⁴

As on the question of geographical distribution, the nearest approximation to hard statistical facts about the social composition of fenianism comes from the Dublin Castle files on those prisoners held without trial as suspected fenians. Fortunately, a Castle official⁵ who had an intimate knowledge of the genesis of these records prepared a return of the occupations of the prisoners in January 1870 - when the material was still virtually intact. He consulted the replies given

3 T. D. Sullivan to T. D'Arcy McGee, 18 Feb. 1862 (Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa), MG 27, I.E.9.).

4 MS 333, p. 58.

5 Samuel Lee Anderson, crown solicitor; see L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever: an Anglo-American dilemma (London, 1971), p. 212.

by the prisoners themselves upon arrest to the standard query about occupation, and found that 1077 had given a positive answer.⁶

He discovered that of this group almost five hundred (46.1%) were 'tradesmen, artisans, millworkers etc'. Many of these were entered as 'tailors', 'shoemakers' etc., and accordingly some of them might be shopkeepers rather than just tradesmen. But this reservation does not take from the impressive evidence that we have here for the numerical prominence of the artisan class in Irish fenianism in the mid 1860s. The addition of 23 bakers to this category (which seems logical, though they are listed separately by Anderson) brings the proportion of skilled workers to 48.3%. It would seem that townsmen of the labouring class, though also well represented, were of much less importance numerically in the I.R.B. : they account for 4.6% of the arrests. The inclusion with them of the nineteen porters would give a figure of 6.4%.

Occupations to which young men of humble origins might aspire on the basis of above-average affinity for

6 Summary of the occupations of the prisoners in custody under the lord lieutenant's warrant (S.P.O., 'F'papers, 5477R).

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the 'three Rs' at primary school come to a significant 9.2% of the arrests (consisting of 57 clerks and commercial assistants, 29 national school masters and 13 'school teachers and tutors'). By contrast, farmers and their sons represent a mere 5.6%, while agricultural labourers total 5.4%. Publicans and shopkeepers with their sons and assistants account for 128 of the arrests, or 11.9%. The 47 self-confessed veterans of the U.S. army, together with 21 ex-members of her majesty's army and navy, and 7 dismissed or pensioned constables, constitute 7% of those arrested. A number of other occupations are represented but each of them accounts for less than 1%, and their combined total comes to just over 6%.

It is clear, then, that fenianism was a movement which appealed strongly not to a wide spectrum of Irish society but to certain social groups. Was this because the groups in question were more nationalistic than others? There was, indeed, a recurring line in fenian apologetics to the effect that 'the people' (as opposed to the middle classes or the gentry) had a monopoly of patriotism.⁷ This was an acknowledgment of the limited

⁷ See, for example, Irish People, 5 Dec. 1863 and 23 Jan. 1864.

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appeal of the organization, but it is not a convincing explanation of it. We have argued already that fenianism did not interest the middle classes for the very good reason that it was not an appropriate mode of political action for a middle class in a liberal parliamentary milieu⁸; and we will now examine the movement to see if it did not have positive attractions for those lower down in the social hierarchy, irrespective of the intensity of their national feelings.

'After a while the secret part of the business was wearing away and we were making ourselves known pretty freely to one another.' Thus wrote John Daly of Limerick recalling, after an interval of nearly fifty years, his experience of fenianism in the mid-1860s.⁹ In fact there is very considerable evidence that a great proportion of the brotherhood departed at an early stage from Stephens's blueprint, to the extent of making themselves known as a distinctive group not just to each other but to the general public. On a visit of inspection to Carrick-on-Suir in 1860, Luby and Dan Macartie remonstrated with local leaders for apparent lack of

8 See ch. 5.

9 Irish Freedom, Feb. 1912.

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progress; next day, as they were boarding a car for Clonmel, 'a crowd of the boys' in military order marched into view, determined to impress the visitors with a spectacular farewell. Luby and his companion were relieved that the car moved off at once, for they had no desire to receive such a potentially embarrassing compliment.¹⁰ What interests us is the clear evidence that in one of the strongholds of the organization the local fenians were accustomed to marching and considered it proper to make a public display of their prowess.

Undoubtedly the same 'boys' were involved when, on a Sunday morning in October of the same year, a group of 'about fifty persons, mostly of the class of shop-assistants and tradesmen' arrived in the Co. Kilkenny village of Kilmoganny, from Carrick-on-Suir, travelling on a convoy of eight horse-drawn vehicles, with green ribbons in their coats, and to the accompaniment of a drum and some musical instruments.¹¹ After encountering a startled officer of the constabulary, and having explained that they were on the way to engage groups from Kilkenny city and Callan in a cricket match, they

10 MS 331, p. 89.

11 Irishman, 20 Oct. 1860.

proceeded to Dunnamaggin and duly met the other contingents. An unconvincing pretence of playing cricket was put up for a short while, to be followed by some hours of convivial conversation between the three groups; there is conflicting evidence as to whether the conviviality occurred inside or outside the public house.¹² On the way home the Carrick men shouted slogans of strong but indefinite political import.

There is no doubt that this was an outing for the Carrick fenians. A hostile newspaper comment on the episode some days later was headed 'Supposed political meeting at Dunnamaggin' and remarked, pointedly, that in the Carrick district the Phoenix Society was well known to have many supporters, and that 'instead of dying away it has been nurtured and carefully propagated'.¹³ In any event similar episodes in later years were demonstrably fenian ventures.

Thus a gathering (again under the guise of a cricket match) held at Dunnamaggin in October 1864 was reported in advance to Dublin Castle by the government's spy in the Irish People office, Pierce Nagle, who indicated

12 Irishman, 20 Oct. 1860.

13 Kilkenny Moderator, quoted in Irishman, 20 Oct. 1860.

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that it was a totally fenian project.¹⁴ On this occasion contingents came from Carrick, Kilkenny, Callan, Clonmel and Mullinahone.¹⁵ Cars were used for transport, there was fife and drum music to enliven the journey, and green ribbons, neckties and hatbands were much in evidence, while many green boughs were carried. At their meeting place the excursionists (confidently referred to in the police report as fenians) commenced a cricket match, but most of them quickly lost interest and scattered around the field in groups. The highpoint of their day was a picnic meal of which they partook to the number of about four hundred. As they ate, they were clearly distinguishable from an even larger number of locals, who flocked to the field attracted by the excitement.¹⁶ The vigilant constabulary noted the prominent part played by individuals known to them - and to us - as local fenian leaders, such as James Cody and Edward Coyne of Callan, and Rody Kickham of Mullinahone.¹⁷ Denis Dowling Mulcahy and John Haltigan may also have

14 Police report, 24 Sept. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 68).

15 Constabulary report, 3 Oct. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 66).

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

been present: they certainly were expected to attend.¹⁸

What are we to make of such demonstrations by an allegedly secret society? They make no sense in terms of official I.R.B. policy or objectives. We are led to the conclusion that fenianism fulfilled a social function, even, perhaps, one detrimental to its political strategy. It provided young men with a much-needed occasion for fraternal association and communal self-expression. (The whiff of conspiracy was a great attraction for such people, and it did not seem at all inconsistent with a desire for public show and re-assuring demonstrations of solidarity. In the pages that follow we will adduce many examples of groups of fenians indulging in activities that not only make a mockery of their supposed ignorance of one another's affiliation, but even make nonsense of their organization's objective of hiding its existence from the outside world.

Not only were the theoretical procedures of the I.R.B. flouted in this way, but, in addition, this was frequently done in the course of escapades, such as the picnics at Dunnamaggin, that made no contribution whatsoever towards the achievement of fenian aims.

¹⁸ Police report, 24 Sept. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 66).

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Notice must be taken of the undoubtedly significant fact that most of the important local leaders who were called to serve on the Irish People showed a strong taste for public demonstration, and for the social aspect of fenianism. Of none was this more true than of O'Donovan Rossa. Indeed his Phoenix Society, founded in 1856, should be seen as a precursor not of the silent army that James Stephens hoped to establish but of the mechanism of social expression for smart young artisans and clerks which, to a large extent, Stephens's organization became.¹⁹ The arrest of fenians, including Rossa, in Cork and Kerry in December 1858, as apparent Phoenix Society men, may indeed have been made possible largely because of the habit of openness encouraged by Rossa himself. If so, the fact made little impression on the Skibbereen man, for shortly after his release he was making public statements on national organization.²⁰ He directed a number of public demonstrations in 1863, including one (in support of the Polish rebellion against Russian rule) that involved a large body of men in military array, and with flags and lighted torches,

19 See S. Ó Lúing, Ó Donnabháin Rosa I (Dublin, 1969), pp 81-2.

20 Irishman, 5 Jan. 1860.

marching through Skibbereen in defiance of six magistrates.²¹ The demonstration may not have been composed entirely of fenians, but every available fenian under Rossa's influence was involved. Is it any wonder that Stephens, later in the year, grasped the opportunity to remove Rossa from Skibbereen to Dublin?

But the change of location brought no change of heart and we find Rossa once again organizing a demonstration in 1864. The opportunity was provided by Stephens's absence on a trip to America, and the occasion was a public celebration for the rededication of a church in Kilkenny city on 22 May. Following arrangements made by Rossa and Haltigan, contingents of fenians travelled on the various special excursion trains to Kilkenny and joined together with local members of the brotherhood to form a distinct and flamboyant section of the procession to the church. A few of the Dublin fenians, full of high spirits after the day, attempted to uncouple the last carriage of their homebound train - just for a joke among the boys.²²

21 S. Ó Lúing, Ó Donnabháin Rosa I (Dublin, 1969), pp 132-7.

22 MS 333, pp 15-16; Irishman, 28 May 1864; J. Devoy Recollections, pp 50-51 (where the date is wrongly given as 15 August).

Although James Stephens consistently discountenanced public displays of fenianism, even he abandoned at an early stage the principle that a fenian of the rank and file should be known as such only to his immediate superior. This was implicit in his proposal of early 1859 for Irish-Americans to come to Ireland as drill-masters:²³ obviously men could not drill together without being known to one another. In fact drill, and especially marching, became for many fenians not merely a means of preparation for military endeavour, but the medium par excellence of group expression; accordingly it tended to become less a matter of cautious nocturnal business and more a matter of carefree daylight display. John Daly recalled that he and his friends initially learned drill in the fields at night, but that after a while they began boldly to hold their exercises on Sundays.²⁴ Certainly, even the most circumspect programme of drill meetings would risk occasional discovery by a vigilant police force; however, the large number of cases noticed by the constabulary in 1864 and 1865 can be explained by the fact that many fenian groups felt, and behaved, not

23 MS 331, pp 13-14.

24 Irish Freedom, Feb. 1912.

merely like part of a secret army but *as* cliques of young men discovering personal identity and achievement in group display.²⁵ On a few occasions enough evidence was available to support charges in court.²⁶ After one such case had resulted in a number of convictions, the Irish People remarked that 'surely there is a time and a place for all things, and mid-day marching before a police barrack is neither rational as to time or place'.²⁷ Indeed at all times the Irish People sought to inculcate silence, patience and circumspection. In a particularly striking flight of fancy one of the leader writers declared that Irishmen (by which term he clearly meant the fenians) 'could now, like the people in the streets of Warsaw, see their brethren shot down and remain sternly silent till the moment and opportunity of vengeance would arrive'.²⁸ It was a vain hankering after the discipline of the ideal secret society.

No examination of the social aspect of fenianism would be complete without considering the few tantalizing

25 Constabulary reports (S.P.O. Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, passim).

26 Irishman, 20 Feb. 1864, 19 Mar. 1864 and 9 Sept. 1865.

27 Irish People, 26 Mar. 1864.

28 Irish People, 12 Mar. 1864.

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hints that can be found concerning the distinctive demeanour of some members of the movement. Pierce Nagle touched on the subject in a communication to the police in August 1864; there were, he said, no passwords or signs used by the society,

but the members often know each other in general by wearing their beard, and at the same time they meet each other by a stern look, and if met by the same they are ninety nine out of a hundred fenians; for a stern look in the eye will cause a man who is not up to this mark to look some other way. The general exception to this are the ?[gentry]²⁹ and government officers and these the fenians know well to avoid.

A fenian, Nagle continues, will not salute a nobleman or a clergyman, even if he happens to know him, unless he also happens to be in some way subject to him. All of this is done in conscious imitation of the 'yankee' fashion, 'as far as can be by those who never were in yankee-land'. And Nagle adds another interesting qualification: 'In out-of-the-way rural districts this rule will not hold good, but in towns and cities it is correct'.³⁰

Regrettably, the Dublin police authorities seem

29 In the MS copy of the informer's letter the word here is 'sentry', but the sense suggests it is a transcriber's error; the source is ~~the~~ a Police report, 19 Aug. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 44A).

30 Ibid.

to have recorded very little about how much of this kind of thing they noticed themselves. In May 1865, however, Superintendent Ryan put on record further information obtained from others:

I am informed that at present nearly all the drapers' assistants in Dublin have assumed an air of careless independence that renders [them] almost unmanageable by their employers, who are grown quite timid and almost afraid to rebuke them. In many cases they openly express their political sentiments and their minds seem imbued with revolutionary and democratic notions.³¹

An officer on special duty in Kilkenny some months later reported that a great number of men in the city were fenians and that they had 'a lot of swagger' about them.³² Despite their paucity, such references help greatly to illuminate the social aspect of fenianism.

We may deduce, then, that fenianism appealed most strongly to sections of the population that were ready for an organization which would provide members with a sense of personal fulfilment through identification with a group of their peers. So we find it flourishing in Dublin and Belfast, and in the towns and villages of Leinster and Munster, among young men who very often

31 Police report, 8 May 1865 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 157).

32 Police report, 21 Sept. 1865 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 203).

were already in contact with one another through their employment but who previously lacked any specific pretext for fraternisation. They were not necessarily more nationalistic (or more disaffected) than other sections of society, but simply more in need of organized means of communal self-expression. And they would probably have responded equally well to any congenial organization, even if its formal object was not national self-government. However, any such organization among a nineteenth-century European people with unfulfilled nationalist ambitions, would, whatever its formal object, almost certainly become a vehicle for nationalist feeling.

A striking and very relevant example of that was Fr Theobald Mathew's temperance movement, which provided large numbers of the populace from 1839 to 1845 with opportunities of experiencing the psychologically and morally uplifting effects of group solidarity and ostentatious self-discipline. In other words, it performed the same function as fenianism did for many in the 1860s, and, although its nominal purpose was not at all political, its practical consequences constituted the very stuff of popular nationalism.³³ A small

33 A. M. Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 45-6.

revival of the movement in Cork city and county in 1863 involved excursions and displays by St Finbarr's temperance band (wearing green and gold caps) and public meetings that were 'more political than temperance'.³⁴ Interestingly, the Phoenix Society, in its first stage, forbade members to take alcoholic drink.³⁵ At least one prominent fenian (Charles J. Kickham) was convinced that fenianism and temperance went hand in hand. Writing in 1865, for example, he waxed lyrical on the improved sobriety noticeable among young men where the Irish People was most read.³⁶ A common pledge of teetotalism could certainly consolidate the fraternal spirit, but so also could the conviviality of the public house, and, despite Kickham's wishful thinking, the general consensus among the fenians was in favour of the public house in preference to the temperance reading room. Indeed, most fenian business, from recruitment of members to business meetings, appears to have been conducted in public houses. The pub provided excellent cover; but, more than that, its conviviality was part of the very fabric of fenianism.

Not surprisingly, in view of its social dimension, fenianism is frequently mentioned in contemporary sources in

34 Irishman, 29 Aug., 26 Sept. 1863.

35 Statement by Robert Cusack, undated (S.P.O., Reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

36 Irish People, 17 June 1865.

connection with games and popular pastimes; what is surprising is the wide range of activities involved. References to cricket we have already seen. The constabulary reported from west Cork in the autumn of 1858 that suspected Phoenix Society organizers were constantly travelling the countryside engaged in coursing - 'a good means of meeting young fellows'.³⁷ An American officer on one occasion reviewed the Limerick city fenians on the local racecourse, where they were assembled in small groups posing as sightseers inspecting the jumps.³⁸ After a number of convictions for illegal drilling in the vicinity of Cork city had inculcated the need for caution, it was noticed that suspect groups of young men meeting near Glanmire carried a football which they played whenever a stranger was approaching near enough to observe their activities.³⁹ A police raid on a Dublin premises, where fenians had been meeting in large numbers at evening times, uncovered evidence of

³⁷ Constabulary reports, Bantry, 24 Sept. and 25 Oct. 1859 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, Secret societies, 1857-9).

³⁸ Irish Freedom, Feb. 1912.

³⁹ Constabulary report, 13 June 1865 (S.P.O. Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 179).

swordstick play, gymnastics and boxing.⁴⁰ Commenting on a hint that footrace meetings near Millstreet, County Cork, were being organized for fenian purposes, Wood, the inspector-general of the constabulary, declared sweepingly that he was 'quite confident that those persons going through the country as strolling players, and most of those attending races, football and cricket matches etc., are connected with fenianism'.⁴¹ When a group of about one hundred young men from Mullinahone (fenians beyond any doubt) went on one of their regular Sunday outings in the summer of 1863, an observer reported that some of them occupied themselves at 'leaping and stonethrowing'. Others took to dancing 'all the dances I know of except waltzing and the polka' with a group of girls who had accompanied them.⁴²

The affinity between fenianism and popular pastimes was much stronger than a superficial coincidence. For fenianism in its social aspect was performing, in a large number of Irish cities and towns, the function which in

40 Police report, 2 Dec. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 87).

41 Constabulary report, 4 Nov. 1866 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian papers, 'F'papers, F1423 and F3192).

42 Irishman, 11 July 1863.

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the mid-nineteenth century organized sport was beginning to perform in various European countries. In Ireland, at least as one commentator saw it in 1858, healthy popular recreations were being suppressed by landlords and clergy in the supposed interests of public order; this was particularly regrettable, he held, in the case of the ancient and excellent game of hurling, which was eminently worthy of promotion.⁴³ Attention should also be paid, he went on, to stick-play (the broadsword equivalent of fencing), skill at which had saved lives in the old faction-fighting days. When he went on to advocate the establishment of an organization, based on parish clubs, for the fostering of the two, he was, obviously, foreshadowing *the Gaelic Athletic Association of twenty-five years later*, but he was also pointing to a vacuum that, even as he wrote, was being partially filled by the I.R.B.

This particular aspect of fenianism was noted in 1865 by a Co. Cork aristocrat, Lord Fermoy, whose insight was sharpened by his fear of imminent political and social upheaval. He declared that one of the reasons for the progress of the dreaded organization was 'the want of amusement or rational employment of their leisure

43 Irishman, 2 Oct. 1858.

hours experienced by the young shopmen and such like of the country towns. We have no national game or sport, and cricket does not seem to go down well, and consequently in a country town there is no resort for the young shopman or artizan but the public house', or fenianism.⁴⁴

It was perceptive comment, even though attention to developments in other countries might have warned him (as hindsight tells us) that any nominally sporting alternative to fenianism would also have been a vehicle of nationalist feeling and propaganda, so that the end result, from Lord Fermoy's point of view, would not have been greatly improved.

On this, as on other points, Charles Kickham was closer to the sentiment of the rank and file than were other fenian notables such as Stephens, Luby or O'Leary. In an anonymous Irish People article headed 'National sports' (authorship clearly identified by the style), the Mullinahone man argued the case for the popular pastimes ('hurling, football and even dancing') that were being discouraged by the authorities.⁴⁵ If a score

44 Lord Fermoy to Lord Palmerston, 1 Sept. 1865 (Quality House, Broadlands MSS, Palmerston papers GC/GR 2577).

45 Irish People, 15 Oct. 1864.

or two of young men and women meet on Sunday afternoon, they are interrupted by magistrates and policemen. If they refuse to disperse, they are harrassed: names are taken and tenant farmers get the hint from the bailiffs next day to keep their sons at home. Kickham rejects the pretexts offered to justify this regime - respect for the sabbath and fear of vice and immorality - and affirms the determination of youth to have its fling:-

'Our fathers and grandfathers hurled and leaped and danced, and we cannot see why we should not do the same'. Kickham's comments bring us face to face with fenianism as a mode of protest against the all-prevading control of post-famine Irish social life, in which the civil authority and the catholic clergy co-operated. However, as an Irish People leader-writer, Kickham was required to inculcate secrecy in political affairs, and, accordingly, he continued his article with an exhortation that sports should not be turned into political demonstrations.

There was no need, he declared, for any public demonstrations whatsoever. But there is no mistaking where his heart lies.

In Dublin city in the 1860s, the I.R.B. was not the only society offering workingmen the opportunity of self-expression and independence through association.

There was also a collection of flourishing trade associations (in effect, embryonic trade unions), co-operating loosely from 1863 under the umbrella of the United Trades Association.⁴⁶ The trades, as they were generally referred to, provided fraternity, a certain amount of conspiracy, and, on suitable occasions, pageantry, with the members of each association, bedecked with badges, marching in order behind their own bands and banners.⁴⁷ And, as they also bear out our point about the inevitable nationalistic involvement of any popular movement under the circumstances of time and place, their relationship with fenianism is worthy of some consideration.

In fact there appears to have been a considerable overlap of membership between the two movements. Writing to Dublin Castle in August 1864, Pierce Nagle estimated, with what accuracy we can only conjecture, that fifty-five percent of the Dublin trade members were fenians.⁴⁸ But the I.R.B. never dominated the trades,

46 Irishman, 12 Dec. 1863; Andrew Boyd, The rise of Irish trade unions, 1729-1970 (Tralee, 1972), p. 50.

47 Irishman, 16 Nov. 1861; B. Mac Giolla Choille, 'Dublin trades in procession, 1864' in Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society, i, no. 1 (May 1975), pp 18-30

48 Constabulary report, 19 Aug. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 44A).

which, indeed, over a number of years were theatres of conflict between various nationalist factions. All appear to have joined gladly in the MacManus funeral, but the Catholic University demonstration of July 1862 stirred up some uneasiness within the ranks. This was, in effect, a show of strength by the Cullenite wing of Irish nationalism.⁴⁹ The greatly-desired participation of the trades was ensured by some well-executed diplomatic activity by one of the procession's organizers.⁵⁰ But a few weeks later, C. G. Doran, Denis Holland, and other stalwarts of the National Brotherhood, were plotting with a section of the trades to organize a public protest against parliamentary agitation (and so to show that not all the trade members had been enamoured of the university demonstration).⁵¹

As preparations were being made two years later for a procession to mark the laying of the foundation stone of the O'Connell monument in Sackville Street, the now numerous fenian element opposed participation by

49 See ch. 4 above.

50 Professor James Kavanagh (Irishman, 12 July 1862)

51 Irishman, 2 and 9 Aug. 1862.

the trades.⁵² However, the fenians' objections were over-ruled, while James Stephens, who might have given them a strategy to work to, was out of town.⁵³ It appears that once the decision had been made, fenian members loyally complied with the discipline of their trades and participated in the parade.⁵⁴

The career of John McCorry, journeyman bricklayer, and most prominent of Dublin tradesmen for much of the 1860s, illustrates the potentially confusing links between fenianism and organized labour. At public meetings, and in the letter columns of the nationalist press, McCorry was an enthusiastic and untiring purveyor of extreme nationalist rhetoric, in addition to being a fervent propagandist of trade organization. His obvious disaffection convinced the police that he was a fenian, and he was arrested with hundreds of others suspected of fenianism in the spring of 1866 under the habeas corpus suspension act.⁵⁵

52 Police report, 2 Aug. 1864 (S.P.O., Reports on fenianism, 1864-5, no. 39A).

53 Police reports, 19 Aug. and 3 Sept. 1864 (S.P.O., Reports on fenianism, 1864-5, nos 44A, 50).

54 Ibid.

55 Abstract of file on John McCorry, 1866 (S.P.O., Habeas corpus suspension act: abstracts of cases, 1866-8); police report, 29 Apr. 1865 (S.P.O., Reports on fenianism, 1864-5, no. 150).

Yet he was almost certainly not a fenian, but merely a sentimental nationalist who was very much at home in the National Brotherhood.⁵⁶

In the first half of the 1860s many parts of Ireland experienced a serious crisis due to a succession of bad winters and poor harvests, and it may well be asked to what extent the consequent misery and dissatisfaction contributed to the expansion of fenianism. The temptation to make the easy diagnosis of a causal connection must be resisted, for a number of reasons. Fenianism, as we have seen, enjoyed its first flowering in 1858 for political reasons, and it did this at a time when even the Nation could admit that the country was enjoying unaccustomed prosperity.⁵⁷ And the period of greatest fenian expansion began during 1863, the year in which the worst of the crisis came to an end.⁵⁸ Besides, the areas in which suffering was most severe (especially in Connacht) were far from being the chief strongholds of

56 Irishman, 13 May 1865, 19 Oct. 1867.

57 Nation, 17 July 1858.

58 The central relief committee concluded its work in the summer of 1863 (Irishman, 1 Aug. 1863).

fenianism; and the classes most directly affected by the distress (those involved in agriculture) were, in general, the least affected by fenianism. An economic development of possibly greater direct relevance to the classes most involved in fenianism was the industrial slump caused by the American civil war, 1861-5. The large-scale unemployment experienced in the cotton industry had, no doubt, some influence on fenianism among the Irish proletariat in Lancashire. In Ireland there was no comparable contraction, or at least scarcely anything that can be linked conclusively with the growth of fenianism. It may prove possible to detect some economic influences on the development of fenianism, but it seems clear that the main factors influencing it were political and social.

In fact, it seems that as a rule fenians tended to be recruited from among young men who were experiencing some modest prosperity. The camaraderie which distinguished fenianism in the early 1860s is more typically a product of affluence than of deprivation. According to John Devoy, ninety per cent of Mathew O'Neill's circle of one thousand members in Dublin city earned thirty shillings

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per week;⁵⁹ and, even if we must treat all Devoy's statistics with caution, there is no gainsaying the evidence that his statement provides concerning the comparative prosperity of many rank and file fenians. Further evidence comes from Luby, who found that, as a gentleman in straitened circumstances, he was unable to hold his own, financially, with the smart young wage-earners who constituted the 'new Dublin movement'; accordingly he was relieved to be able to pass a great part of the burden of maintaining regular social contact with them on to Joseph Denieffe, who was employed at the time at a good salary as foreman-cutter in a merchant tailoring house. 'So he could now meet and associate with youths like my recruits as often as he liked on equal pecuniary terms, incurring no humiliating obligations'.⁶⁰

Despite its close identification with certain sections of the lower classes, fenianism was not in any meaningful sense a socialist movement. James Stephens returned from Paris (in 1855 or 1856) inspired by a social idealism which he displayed freely.⁶¹ He was

59 Irish Freedom, Mar. 1913.

60 MS 331, p. 28.

61 MS 331, p. 3.

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scarcely an extremist by Parisian standards, but even so the reaction from his contacts in Ireland was universally hostile.⁶² For various reasons the country was particularly uninterested. ('Socialism ... fulfils neither our wants nor our wishes', was the verdict, in 1866, of John Mitchel, who declared that in all his life he had known only two Irish socialists.)⁶³ Stephens learned a lesson, and when he came to launch his organization he carefully kept his social theories out of sight. If he eventually found himself depending for support almost exclusively on 'the men of no property' it was not by choice, for he had canvassed the support of people from almost every social class.⁶⁴

Yet, despite its lack of a doctrinaire social policy, fenianism did pose a threat of social upheaval. Any successful Irish nationalist movement would necessarily involve the overthrow of the old protestant ascendancy, which for that reason dreaded fenianism as it had dreaded O'Connell. The catholic middle classes and the farmers were the obvious power to deal the coup de grace, and we

62 Ryan, Fenian chief, pp 63-4.

63 Irishman, 12 May 1866.

64 MS 331.

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have argued that by failing to come to terms with them Stephens virtually ensured the failure of his own movement; but the possibility, however remote, that the fenians might achieve something on their own was profoundly distressing for the middle classes.

The middle classes were not alone in being distressed by the prospect of a Fenian revolution. The Catholic clergy, too, were alarmed. They had long been the mainstay of the middle classes, and their support was essential to the success of any movement. In the Fenian era, however, the clergy were divided. Some were Fenians, some were not. The Fenian clergy were not only divided, but they were also divided from the middle classes. The middle classes were not Fenians, and they were not Catholic. They had a sense of being left out, and they were not Fenians. They had a sense of being left out, and they were not Fenians. They had a sense of being left out, and they were not Fenians.

In the event the clergy came to the fore, in the era of O'Connell. He was leading a spectacular political advance by a rising middle class of which the priests were themselves the most typical products. Besides, they served an institution that would thrive

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CHURCH AND POLITICS (TO 1865)

One of the most widely appreciated features of Irish public life in the nineteenth century is the prominence achieved by the catholic clergy as political leaders of their spiritual flocks. This clerical hegemony means that Irish nationalism of the period is, in an obvious sense, catholic. However, the link between catholicism and Irish nationalism is much more fundamental than that; in fact the two are not so much linked as fused together. The ancient suppressed nation to which the Irish masses considered themselves to belong, was, as they saw it, essentially catholic, and defined by its catholicism. They had a consciousness of being kept in subordination not simply as Irishmen, but as Irish catholics. And this feeling would not have been different if churchmen had for any reason held themselves aloof from politics.

In the event the clergy came to the fore, in the era of O'Connell. He was leading a spectacular political advance by a rising middle class of which the priests were themselves the most typical products. Besides, they served an institution that would thrive

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in proportion with the prosperity of that class. Whereas in so many other countries the welfare of the catholic church was bound up with the interests of old establishments, in Ireland the *typical political and social* developments of the nineteenth century would bring catholics to power and influence for the first time in *generations*. In Ireland, therefore, the church looked approvingly on at least some elements of that liberalism which in general it deplored. And O'Connell had the support of the great majority of the Irish clergy for his policy of standing on the whig side of the great parliamentary divide. The church was particularly enamoured of O'Connell's rejection of violence as a means of political progress; it was a policy that both clergy and liberator adopted through an intelligent appreciation of the facts of Irish political life, rather than on any general moral principle. The memory of 1798 was a constant warning that in the peculiar social and religious circumstances prevailing in Ireland the use of physical force could achieve nothing desirable. When, in the 1840s, O'Connell's policies were challenged by a group of young men who did not 'fear to speak of 'ninety eight', the general body of the clergy, like the great majority of the laity, stood firmly by the

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old leader and gladly identified with his 'Old Ireland'. In 1848 the Young Irelanders found the clergy to be the most effective opponents of their attempted rebellion. Churchmen opposed the Young Irelanders not only because they advocated the lunatic policy of physical force, but also because their thinking *appeared to be influenced by* advanced theories of nationality (given most typical *formulation* - by Mazzini) which, in their fullest expression, were inimical to christianity.

The Irish catholic bishops of the 'fifties and 'sixties were very much in the tradition of the O'Connell era, and this was especially true of Paul Cullen, archbishop of Dublin 1852-78, and throughout that period the most influential figure in the church in Ireland. Cullen did indeed introduce an important new line - much closer liaison with the policies and discipline of the Roman regime. Yet, while Pius IX was denouncing liberalism in all its forms, Cullen remained a supporter of the Liberals within the Westminster parliamentary system. The contradiction was merely superficial; the pope was formulating policy for the benefit of the church in Italy and continental Europe, the archbishop was looking to the welfare of the church in the special conditions of Ireland. Even

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when the important Liberals of the day were totally unsympathetic to everything Cullen worked for, he still was extremely unwilling to damage that party from which alone he anticipated measures for the benefit of Irish catholicism.¹ At the very least the Liberals were the antithesis of the Tories, whom he disliked so virulently as the party of the Irish protestant establishment, and whom he constantly and indiscriminately branded with the epithet 'orange'. Cullen would have nothing to do with the Tories even when pressed by English catholic leaders or by Rome itself.² Other 'Old Ireland' attributes too, he possessed to an extreme degree, such as opposition to political violence in the Irish context, and dislike of the doctrinaire nationalism of the Young Irelanders. In fact he attributed to the Young Irelanders a philosophy of undiluted Mazzinian revolutionism which scarcely any of them had ever adopted, and he made no exception even

1 E.g., Archbishop Cullen to Tobias Kirby, 3 Mar. 1860 (Patrick J. Corish, 'Irish College, Rome: Kirby papers; guide to material of public and political interest, 1836-61' in Archiv. Hib., xxxi (1973), p. 75; hereafter cited as Archiv. Hib., 1973).

2 Cullen to Kirby, 3 Feb. 1860 and 16 Mar. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, pp 94, 75).

of so patently catholic and respectable a gentleman as Charles Gavan Duffy.³ Cullen saw in Young Ireland the Irish version of that revolutionary nationalism which threatened the papacy and the church, and which he himself had witnessed desecrating the eternal city in 1848.⁴

The reaction of Irish catholics to the Italian crisis of 1859-60 is instructive on a number of points, especially concerning the content of Irish nationalism. Anticipating the 1859 war in northern Italy, both the Nation and the Irishman expressed great satisfaction. It would be 'the purest of all wars', fought for an idea⁵; and if even one new nation resulted it would be well worthwhile.⁶ As they were confident that a new northern Italian state could be established without interfering with the papal states, they could enjoy the luxury of advocating simultaneously the principle of nationality and the preservation of the temporal power of the pope. Later in the year, when it became clear

3 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 115-6.

4 Ibid.

5 Irishman, 23 Apr. 1859.

6 Nation, 14 May 1859.

that Italian nationalism and the temporal power could not co-exist, both papers expressed themselves in favour of the pope (though not without showing an awareness of the need to answer a charge of inconsistency).⁷

Their expressions of fealty were indicative of the mood of public opinion, for during the closing months of 1859, and at the beginning of 1860, large and enthusiastic crowds turned out for public meetings held throughout the country in support of the pope. Many of these were organized and addressed by bishops, but virtually every prominent politician on the popular side identified himself with the campaign, including The O'Donoghue, G. H. Moore, John Pope Hennessy and J. F. Maguire.⁸ Cullen's private comments were almost euphoric: here was proof that ultramontaniam had routed gallicanism from the Irish church;⁹ virtually the entire catholic party, he claimed, was united in the movement, and the intensity of feeling displayed should make the government more amenable to pressure from the bishops for concessions on

7 E.g., Nation, 8 Oct., 17 Dec. 1859; Irishman, 19 Nov., 10 Dec. 1859.

8 Nation and Irishman, Oct. 1859 - Jan. 1860, passim.

9 Cullen to Kirby, 9 Dec. 1859 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 73).

education.¹⁰ Significantly, a few catholics of the upper class were less than enthusiastic,¹¹ and for this there is a ready explanation: the popular enthusiasm for the pope was in effect a political passion - a manifestation of Irish (catholic) nationalism; aristocrats such as Lord Dunraven, Lord Castlerosse and the de Veres, were catholics living in Ireland, but they were not, in the political sense, Irish catholics.

As the pope's plight worsened, steps were taken to translate sympathy into something more useful. A collection was launched, diocese by diocese. (Cullen rejected the idea of floating a loan for the pope, on the ground that the Irish understood subscribing better than investing).¹² On Sunday 25 February 1860 nearly £11,000 was collected in Cullen's archdiocese,¹³ and by the end of

10 Cullen to Kirby, 9, 20, 27 Dec. 1859 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, pp. 73-4).

11 Documented in Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 47-8, which might, however, give a misleading impression of John Pope Hennessy's stand (see Nation, 19 Nov. 1859).

12 Cullen to Kirby, 22 July 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 78).

13 Irishman, 3 Mar. 1860.

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the summer nearly £80,000 had been collected nationwide.¹⁴
 The next step was to offer physical support. 'Let but the slightest arrangement be made, the least facilities be given, and help will flow out from Ireland to maintain against all foes the legitimate and time-honoured rights and possessions of the vicar of Christ.' Thus declared the Nation as early as October 1859, clearly hinting at the desirability of a military expedition.¹⁵ But it was not until the first quarter of 1860 that the papal government accepted the necessity of calling for volunteers from the catholic nations,¹⁶
 " Soon after the decision had been taken an Austrian military agent acting for the papacy reached Dublin and made his way to the office of the Nation to meet A. M. Sullivan.¹⁷ Together they travelled through the country, meeting other interested parties including Archbishop Leahy of Cashel¹⁸ and, it appears, Cullen.¹⁹

14 Cullen to Kirby, 28 July 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 79).
 15 Nation, 15 Oct. 1859.
 16 G. F.-H. Berkeley, The Irish battalion in the papal army of 1860 (Dublin and Cork, 1929), p. 6; (hereafter cited as Berkeley, Irish battalion).
 17 Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 211-12.
 18 Ibid., pp 212-13.
 19 C. O'Dwyer, 'Archbishop Leahy of Cashel (1806-75)', M.A. thesis, N.U.I., 1971, p. 521 (hereafter cited as O'Dwyer, 'Leahy').

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Soon arrangements were in hand for potential soldiers of the pope to be discreetly recruited and sent to Italy without rendering anyone liable for ~~punishment~~ under the foreign enlistment act.²⁰ 'A great enthusiasm to enlist in the pope's brigade took possession of all the youth of the country', wrote a Tipperary parish priest who was approached by no less than sixty volunteers, ten of whom he recommended for enrolment.²¹ The archbishop of Dublin reported in April that many young men were anxious to go fighting for the pope;²² two months later he described the enthusiasm as 'uncontrollable'.²³ He was himself less than enthusiastic although he was participating at least passively in the recruitment. Interestingly, his reservations were not due to qualms about the recourse to arms, but to fears (which proved to be well founded) that the affair was not adequately organized and that a great deal of the money collected earlier in the year would be expended

20 Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 213; Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 49-50.

21 Quoted in O'Dwyer, 'Leahy', p. 521.

22 Cullen to Kirby, 10 Apr. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 76).

23 Cullen to Kirby, 5 June 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 77).

for a less than satisfactory return.²⁴

Over one thousand of the Irish volunteers were constituted in Italy as the Battalion of St. Patrick, but they had time to learn little more than the rudiments of military art before the papal states were overrun by the Sardinians in September 1860.²⁵ In the brief but futile resistance to the invasion some of the Irish got (and took) the opportunity of displaying noteworthy courage, and an unknown number (probably a few score) were killed in action.²⁶ For the survivors the next stage was detention at Genoa by the victorious government of Victor Emmanuel.²⁷

Soon, however, popular feeling at home came to their rescue. This was stirred up by bitter accusations of cowardice published in the Times²⁸, and replied to in the Irish press by citations of heroism.²⁹ Early in October even Cullen was able to say that the story

24 Cullen to Kirby, 18 May, 1 June 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 77).

25 Berkeley, Irish battalion, pp 22-91.

26 Ibid., pp 107-215.

27 Ibid., p. 218.

28 Times,²⁵ Sept. 1860.

29 Nation, 22, 29 Sept. 1860.

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of Irish bravery had made such an impression that 100,000 men could then be recruited, if it would do any good.³⁰ Soon funds were being collected (with Cullen actively involved) to finance the repatriation of the volunteers.³¹ 'A song for the Irish brigade' had already been published in the Irishman.³² (They were constantly referred to by their sympathisers as 'the brigade' or 'the Irish brigade', although technically the term did not apply;³³ but it evoked memories of the wild geese.) The greater number of the returning volunteers reached Queenstown, on a specially chartered ship, from Le Havre, on 3 November.³⁴ A big reception awaited them there and in other places, and subsequently the various local contingents were welcomed home to their own areas.³⁵ In the village of Mullinahone the few dozen local men were the centre of extended celebrations that included

30 Kirby to Cullen, 5 Oct. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 79).

31 Irishman, 27 Oct. 1860; Cullen to Kirby, 26 Oct., 6 Nov., 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 80).

32 Irishman, 29 Sept. 1860.

33 Berkeley, Irish battalion, p. 22.

34 Irishman, 10 Nov. 1860.

35 Ibid.

214

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a soirée modelled on the Irish-American military balls. They executed military drill in the streets to the special delight of Charles J. Kickham, who composed appropriate addresses and delivered appropriate speeches. The brigade, he said, had done something to assert Irish nationality, it had proved to the world that 'a catholic Irish nation' still lived.³⁶ And he exhorted them to be ready to place their military experience more directly at Ireland's service when the opportunity would arise.³⁷

The story of the Irish papal brigade illustrates the essentially catholic nature of Irish nationalism, and the extent to which it was founded on instinctive feeling rather than on abstract theories about nationality, the popular will, or self-determination. And the brigade was the most tangible expression of the lack of sympathy between Irish nationalism and that of continental countries.³⁸

A considerable number of the brigade men subsequently

36 Ibid., 10, 17, 24 Nov. 1860.

37 Ibid.

38 On this topic see G. D'Angelo, Italy and Ireland in the nineteenth century: contacts and misunderstandings between two national movements, (Athlone, 1975).

became fenians, either in Ireland or in America.³⁹ (It is possible, too, that a few of them may have been previously-enrolled fenians who went along for the military experience, but there does not appear to be evidence that this occurred on any large scale.)⁴⁰

Fenianism provided the same esprit de corps and promise of adventure which they had found in the brigade; and the sense of identity involved in both was that of being an Irish catholic.

Archbishop Cullen, who did not realize that the pope's soldiers could so naturally become members of a secret society, noted that they had received a 'madly enthusiastic' homecoming reception.⁴¹ However, he appears to have been relieved when the business was over and done with, and he could devote his attention to the larger issues of Irish political life.⁴² It is to the role of the church (and especially of Cullen) in this arena that we must turn next.

39 Irishman, 22 Oct. 1866.

40 R. Dudley Edwards, 'The risorgimento and Ireland, 1848-70' in R. Dudley Edwards (ed.), Ireland and the Italian risorgimento (Dublin, 1960), p. 39.

41 Cullen to Kirby, 6 Nov. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 80).

42 Cullen to Kirby, 7, 27 Dec. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, pp 80-81).

As no leader of national stature appeared in place of O'Connell in the years after his death the authority and influence of the bishops became exceptionally important by the early 1850s. Cullen, with the great majority of the bishops, opposed the whigs in 1851-2, though it is not certain that he was ever fully happy with the policy of independent opposition as directed by Charles Gaven Duffy then and later in the 1850s.⁴³ What is certain is that he had a serious distrust of Duffy, in whom he saw the embodiment of Young Ireland, and therefore of infidel revolutionism;⁴⁴ and heaped on top of the churchman's fear of Mazzinianism was all the antagonism of the Old Ireland - Young Ireland split, which had been at its bitterest a mere five or six years before.

43 Whyte, 'Political problems', pp 17-19; see Cullen to Kirby, 30 Nov. 1852 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 44).

44 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 115-6.

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The defection of Sadlier and Keogh from the independent opposition party in December 1852 split the hierarchy apart, the majority, with Cullen, ignoring, or approving of, the breaking of the pledge, and more or less quickly reverting to their traditional support of the whigs. (Cullen was very soon soliciting, and obtaining, places for his friends in true O'Connell style.)⁴⁵ A minority of bishops and clergy, led by Archbishop MacHale, denounced the pledge-breakers.⁴⁶

As far as relations within the hierarchy were concerned, a concrete issue had emerged on which the mutual antipathies of the archbishops of Dublin and Tuam could be given expression. During the remainder of the decade relations between Cullen and the pro-Liberal clergy on the one hand, and the independent opposition politicians and their supporters on the other, deteriorated stage by stage.⁴⁷

As the end of the decade approached, Cullen and his friends had little or nothing to show for their

45 Whyte, 'Political problems', pp 15, 21-2.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., pp 24-38.

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support of the Liberals: indeed the few government concessions to Irish catholic opinion during the period had come from a tory administration (February 1858 - June 1859) courting the support of the independent opposition members. After the Liberals had been returned to power at the 1859 general election, exhibiting the strongest antipathy towards the papacy in its hour of trial, the Irish bishops were moved to begin agitation for concessions to the church in the field of education. In a joint pastoral issued in August they called for public meetings and petitions in support of their demands; and a policy of pressurising the government was further indicated by the suggestion that catholics should demand satisfactory promises before giving support to parliamentary candidates.⁴⁸ The bishops' appeal virtually coincided with the beginning of the MacMahon sword movement, and one initiative was probably as much inspired as the other by an awareness that the international situation was making politics potentially volatile. Despite the pastoral (and the impressive display of sympathy with catholic demands provided by the campaign of support for the pope in the later

48 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 62-5.

months of 1859), the general body of Irish Liberal M.P.s found it possible to ignore the bishops' new offensive on the education issue, and did nothing to embarrass the government. This left the bishops sharing common ground with the independent oppositionists and nobody else - much to Cullen's dismay. The only significant response by public representatives to the hierarchy's call was a meeting of support held in Dublin on 15 December 1859; fourteen of the sixteen M.P.s who requisitioned this meeting, and at least ten of the eleven who actually attended it, were members of the independent opposition group.⁴⁹ There must have been an air of good humour about the gathering, with the independent oppositionists savouring the irony of the occasion and enjoying their upstaging of Cullen. True, the episode would not increase their ability to achieve results, but it did suggest most pointedly that Cullen had been on the wrong track for most of the decade when he abandoned their policy, and put his trust in the whigs. The significance of the meeting of 15 December 1859 has not always been appreciated by later commentators,⁵⁰

49 Irishman, Nation, 17 Dec. 1859.

50 E.g., Whyte, 'Political problems', p. 38; Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 69-70.

but it was not lost on contemporaries.⁵¹ The leading article on the subject in the catholic-Liberal and pro-Cullen Freeman's Journal attempted most unconvincingly to dissimulate acute embarrassment.⁵²

Despite his own Young Ireland and independent opposition sympathies, A. M. Sullivan fervently wished to involve the hierarchy in the great national movement that he tried so hard to launch in the early 1860s. He was in effect taking cognizance of the fact that Cullen and the bishops *had influence over* an important section of nationalist public opinion.⁵³ In the spirit of reconciliation, he tried to act as a mediator in the MacManus affair.⁵⁴ The O'Donoghue, predictably, made overtures to Cullen on a few occasions.⁵⁵ But their hopes of conciliating the archbishop were in vain, for he remained stubborn and vindictive in his attitude towards Young Irelanders and independent oppositionists. His outrageously intransigent position is well indicated by his comment in December 1860 on the new national

51 Irishman, Nation, 17 Dec. 1859.

52 17 Dec. 1859.

53 Nation, 31 Aug. 1861.

54 See ch. 4, above.

55 E.g., The O'Donoghue to Cullen, 26 Sept. 1859, 27 Jan. 1861 (D.D.A., Cullen papers).

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movement expected to follow the national petition, and which The O'Donoghue and A. M. Sullivan fondly hoped he might support. It is summarised as follows by Dr Corish: 'I fear we are on the eve of a bad agitation here. Some who abused the bishops in 1854 are now coming out - G. H. Moore etc. - and, they are for a repetition of 1848.'⁵⁶ A leader of exceptional ability might have launched a comprehensive popular movement in the early 1860s, skilfully harnessing the different wings of the national party. In the absence of an O'Connell, James Stephens and Paul Cullen each had a veto over such developments, and it would be difficult to decide which of the two indicated 'thumbs-down' with greater vehemence.

Cullen would not be satisfied with a nationalist organization that was merely implicitly catholic, he would only be happy with one proclaiming specifically catholic objectives, and under the control of men without taint of revolutionism. When such an organization - the National Association - began to emerge in 1864, the archbishop gave it his blessing.

The highly successful catholic university demonst-

56 Cullen to Kirby, 7 Dec. 1860 (Archiv. Hib., 1973, p. 80).

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ration of 20 July 1862 was a source of encouragement to Cullen's political friends, the catholic-Liberal remnant of Old Ireland. The very next evening a group of them set up an association 'to proclaim Ireland's grievances', at a meeting at which Alderman John Reynolds of Dublin corporation figured prominently.⁵⁷ The Nation offered an unexcited word of welcome, while at the same time making it abundantly clear that this was by no means the comprehensive national organization so ardently desired: 'Its programme is far short of ours, but it goes to a certain extent on the same way with us, and so far it can be made to serve our cause.'⁵⁸ The association, however, appears to have done little, and within a few months its members involved themselves in a symbolic project, easier to carry out under the circumstances than anything practical could have been. This was the scheme for a monument in Dublin's main thoroughfare in honour of Daniel O'Connell, launched by the Freeman's Journal in September.⁵⁹ Others joined in too, for (as Gray of the Freeman well knew) nobody

57 Nation, 26 July 1862.

58 Ibid.

59 Freeman's Journal, Sept, 1862; Nation, 27 Sept. 1862.

who hoped for a concensus within Irish nationalism could refuse to pay lip-service (and a little purse-service) to the memory of the liberator. So the Nation⁶⁰ and the Irishman⁶¹ expressed approval, and Smith O'Brien subscribed five pounds.⁶² At the same time protestant and Conservative opposition was disarmed by appealing to the memory of O'Connell as the advocate of civil and religious liberty, while saying nothing of O'Connell the repealer. By adopting this line the Liberals, who were in a strong position on Dublin city council, were able to obtain that body's unanimous endorsement of the projected monument.⁶³ At a meeting in a Dublin hotel on 14 October to further the movement, A. M. Sullivan and William Kenneally of the Kilkenny Journal were present and were given committee places, but catholic-Liberals predominated; and a number of Dublin parish priests attended - a sure sign of Cullen's approval.⁶⁴

The more advanced nationalists did not meekly accept the movement's moderate complexion. John Blake

60 27 Sept. 1862.

61 11 Oct. 1862.

62 Irishman, 18 Oct. 1862.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

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Dillon indicated in a quiet, dignified manner that, although he accepted the plans of the organizers, nothing about O'Connell was more important to him than the great man's devotion to national independence.⁶⁵ The archbishop of Tuam was less urbane: he denounced the suppression of all mention of repeal, but undertook to subscribe, provided the monument was not intended to be an anti-repeal symbol.⁶⁶ Similarly, The O'Donoghue decried the attempt to celebrate emancipation and that alone.⁶⁷ P. J. Smyth got himself appointed to the central committee, and with assistance from A. M. Sullivan he fought tenaciously to give a more explicitly nationalist tone to the entire project, even to the extent of attempting to engineer MacHale's adoption as a trustee.⁶⁸ But, as the date of the first public demonstration in connection with the monument - the laying of the foundation stone - approached, the catholic-Liberal-Old Ireland faction was firmly in control, and this was the party that triumphed on

65 Ibid.

66 Irishman, 8 Nov. 1862.

67 Irishman, 29 Nov. 1862.

68 Irishman, 6 Dec. 1862, 10 Jan., 20 June 1863; Nation, 6 Dec. 1862.

8 August 1864.

Trades, societies, confraternities, schools, town councillors, and bishops, combined on that day to make the procession to the site chosen for the monument almost certainly the most impressive Dublin had ever witnessed.⁶⁹ The achievement was Gray's more than anyone else's - as the speeches fully acknowledged;⁷⁰ and success for Gray meant happiness for the archbishop of Dublin. MacHale had spared himself the embarrassment of the occasion by pleading a prior commitment to administer confirmation on Achill and Boffin.⁷¹ Another bishop, not especially remembered for his politics, stayed away because (as he told a correspondent) some of the leaders were too much infected by 'whiggery'.⁷² Nevertheless, no fewer than ten bishops took part in the procession, and at a banquet in the evening Archbishop Leahy of Cashel lauded O'Connell's union of

69 Freeman's Journal, 9 Aug. 1864; Irishman, 13 Aug. 1864.

70 Ibid.

71 Irishman, 6 Aug. 1864.

72 Bishop Dorrian to Kirby, 10 Aug. 1864 (P. J. Corish, 'Irish College, Rome: Kirby papers; guide to material of public and political interest, 1862-83' in Archiv. Hib. xxx (1972), p. 43; hereafter cited as Archiv. Hib., 1972).

liberty and religion, in a speech that at least hinted at the desirability of bishops, priests and people joining in another concerted public agitation.⁷³ In any event, the catholic-Liberals who had been pre-occupied by preparations for the O'Connell monument procession were now free to take up some other project: within six months they had set up the National Association, with the support of the hierarchy.

The available facts concerning the origins of the National Association have been presented in at least three separate comprehensive studies, two published⁷⁴ and one unpublished,⁷⁵ despite which some obscurity persists. It is important to put the association in the context of what we have seen above⁷⁶ about other attempts at national organization in the early 1860s. From 1858 onwards there had existed an obvious need for such organisation, and the foundation

73 Freeman's Journal, 9 Aug. 1864.

74 P. J. Corish, 'Cardinal Cullen and the National Association of Ireland' in Repertorium Novum, iii, no. 1 (1962); Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire.

75 O'Dwyer, 'Leahy'.

76 Ch. 5.

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of the National League in January 1864 indicated, paradoxically, that the more advanced nationalists had failed in their efforts to provide it, thus leaving the way clear for the catholic-Liberal wing to make an attempt. O'Neill Daunt, who was at least partly acquainted with the plans of The O'Donoghue and his friends, seems to have decided as early as mid-1863 that the country would have to look elsewhere for effective leadership, for, having contacted the English voluntaries, he wrote to Archbishop Leahy proposing an agitation on the subject of the established church.⁷⁷ The prospect of assistance from English radical elements was an extremely important factor in the genesis of the National Association. Gladstone's speech of 11 May 1864 in favour of the extension of democratic principles made a big impact in Ireland, and the Nation confidently represented the author as a future prime minister.⁷⁸ Given the aspects of the Irish and British background just referred to, it will be seen that we should beware of representing the National Association as a response to fenianism. It was partly

77 Daunt to Leahy, 8 June 1863 (Cashel Diocesan Archives, Leahy papers, 1863/43) cited in O'Dwyer, 'Leahy'.

78 Nation, Irishman, 14 May 1864.

that but it was much more as well. (Cullen, in writing to Propaganda, appears to have pleaded the necessity of providing an alternative to fenianism as an explanation for his involvement in the National Association;⁷⁹ but, of course, he had to provide a *convincing*, simple, and straightforward excuse to re-assure Romans who could not possibly understand that, in Ireland, the church's interests could be served by liberal politics.) Leahy rather than Cullen was the churchman most active in the behind-the-scenes negotiations that led to the formation of the association,⁸⁰ even though the hierarchy's public support obviously came principally as the result of a decision by Cullen. When the requisition for a public meeting to inaugurate the new association appeared, it was signed by the great majority of the Irish catholic bishops,⁸¹ and when the meeting took place, in the Rotundo, on 29 December 1864, the archbishop of Dublin was one of the principal speakers.⁸²

79 Cullen to Mgr. Barnabo, 6 Jan. 1865 (cited in Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 136).

80 O'Dwyer, 'Leahy', p. 287.

81 Irishman, 17 Dec. 1864.

82 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 141-51.

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The stated objectives of the new association were: reform of the law of land tenure, disendowment of the established church, and state support for denominational education.⁸³

The establishment of the National Association was an admission by all concerned that redress of grievances could not be achieved by co-operation with the existing government. Radical members of the Liberal party might be friendly, but Palmerston and the other Liberals actually in office had shown themselves over many years to be most unsympathetic, and the very setting up of the association was a declaration of opposition to them. Indeed the association's third rule laid down that candidates for parliament should be required to give a pledge not to support any party that had an unsatisfactory policy on the land and church questions.⁸⁴ So Cullen and his friends were once again on the same side of the fence as the independent oppositionists, and a reunion of the parliamentary representatives of catholic Ireland *seemed likely.* A few of the long-standing oppositionists (notably

83 Ibid., p. 150.

84 Freeman's Journal, 30 Dec. 1864.

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J. F. Maguire) had actually signed the requisition for the launching of the association.⁸⁵ That other members of the party would not be so co-operative was shown by MacHale's reply to an invitation to sign; without naming names, he bitterly refused to co-operate with those who had betrayed the similar movement of 1851-2 -obviously hitting at Cullen.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, great efforts were made in subsequent months to effect a reconciliation. The 'rules' dispute within, and on the fringes of, the association during 1865 was basically concerned with an attempt to devise a version of the third rule which would prove acceptable to all concerned. There was very little difference on principle, but considerable personal antagonism and great concern with face-saving. G. H. Moore and MacHale capriciously and self-righteously refused to trust a political organization patronised by Cullen and his friends. Cullen would not tolerate the injury to his pride - and the tacit admission of past mistakes - which would be involved in the use of the phrase 'independent opposition' in the association's rules, despite the

85 Irishman, 17 Dec. 1864.

86 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 141.

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fact that he was prepared in early 1865 to support a parliamentary policy virtually identical with independent opposition as practised.⁸⁷ His simultaneous rejection of independent opposition as being 'the watch word of an extreme, impracticable and unsound line of parliamentary policy' amounted simply to a refusal to let bygones be bygones.⁸⁸ On the other side, Moore and MacHale were equally unforgiving, and the hoped-for reconciliation under the auspices of the new association failed to materialize.

That failure effectively emasculated the National Association. Its impotence was amply demonstrated in the general election of 1865, when popular candidates went to the country almost as if the association did not exist. They presented themselves as independent oppositionists or Liberals, according to their previous attachments or the requirements of their electorates. Three prominent members of the association were indeed elected to parliament, John Blake Dillon for Co. Tipperary, Edward Synan for Co. Limerick and John Gray for

87 See *ibid.*, pp 163-4.

88 *Ibid.*

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Kilkenny city; but both Dillon and Synan had the phrase 'independent opposition' emblazoned on their election addresses. Overall, the oppositionists fared well: after a careful reckoning the Nation concluded that they had gained eight seats for a loss of three, leaving them with a total of eighteen.⁸⁹ That had little to do with the National Association. The tendency to represent the political successes in subsequent years of Irish catholic M.P.s, or of the Irish hierarchy, as achievements of the association must be resisted.⁹⁰ It did indeed continue to exist but, like the National League it was little more than a platform from which political statements could be issued when convenient.

From consideration of the ecclesiastical role in conventional politics in the period up to 1865 we turn now to the more written-about yet fundamentally less important question of the church's relationship with fenianism. On the principle that initial Responses are most revealing, it is interesting to note the

89 Nation, 29 July 1865.

90 E. R. Norman, The catholic church and Irish politics in the eighteen sixties (Dundalk, 1969), p. 17 provides an example of this.

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spontaneous reactions of a number of priests in the south, in the closing months of 1858, to their first intimations of the existence of fenianism in their parishes. On Sunday, 3 October, Fr John O'Sullivan of Kenmare, who had heard a few days before of the introduction of conspiracy to the town, strongly denounced from the altar 'the mischief and immorality of such a system, and its evil consequences to society'.⁹¹ He warned the local magistrates and Dublin Castle of what was happening, and, not content with that, he instituted a miniature inquisition to expose those implicated and force them to recant.⁹² Also on 3 October, the parish priest of Union Hall warned his parishioners about *an* abomination which menaced them from the direction of Skibbereen - a secret society.⁹³ It is not clear when pulpit denunciations were initiated in Killarney, but there, too, some young Phoenix men were induced during October to make a clean breast of their

91 O'Sullivan to Lord Naas, 5 Oct. 1858 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11187).

92 O'Sullivan to Naas, 11 Dec. 1858 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11187).

93 Constabulary report, Union Hall, 5 Oct. 1858, (S.P.O., Reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

involvement, as a consequence of which information was communicated to the authorities, probably by the bishop, Dr Moriarty.⁹⁴ At mass on 24 October Fr Sheahan of Bantry preached on the deference shown by Christ to the civil authorities and followed up with a denunciation of secret societies.⁹⁵

In Callan (Co. Kilkenny), another stronghold of fenianism in the early days, the parish priest delivered a warning to his congregation on 31 October concerning an illegal society which, as he had heard, was being established in the parish.⁹⁶ A few miles away in Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary, a similar warning against conspiracy was given a week later.⁹⁷ Further south along the Tipperary-Kilkenny border, a few miles from Carrick-on-Suir, the local catholic curate informed a member of the constabulary in December that

94 Moriarty to Naas, 13 Dec. 1858 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11187).

95 Constabulary report, Bantry, 25 Oct. 1858 (S.P.O., *Reports on secret societies, 1857-9*).

96 Constabulary report, Callan, 31 Oct. 1858 (S.P.O., *Reports on secret societies, 1857-9*).

97 Constabulary report, 8 Nov. 1858 (S.P.O., *Reports on secret societies, 1857-9*).

some bad and secret business was going on among the workers at the slate quarries.⁹⁸

This automatically hostile reaction to the secret society is most notable: it is as clear-cut as if the trouble were highway robbery or debauchery. Clerical opposition to fenianism must, therefore, be seen as something spontaneous, and not as the result of any process of deliberation (or of an anti-patriotic stand by Archbishop Cullen). Explanations for the antipathy are not difficult to find, for the agrarian secret societies had traditionally been the greatest obstacle to peace and order, and they constituted a potential threat to the development of a normal political society. The fact that fenianism was an organization of somewhat different calibre would not have dawned immediately on the outsider, and in any event the difference would scarcely have been considered an improvement. The great majority of the Irish catholic clergy understood instinctively that the easiest and surest way of maintaining their church's position, and achieving further advances was in the context of law-abiding liberal democracy. It is worth taking note of the readiness with which the churchmen alerted the civil

98 Constabulary report, 5 Dec. 1858 (S.P.O., Reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

authorities, for it illustrates the acceptance of a common concern for order in society. A few of the cases cited *highlight* the tendency of some clergy in this era to act as mediators between the authorities and the people, pressing the demand that the government and police should stand back and let them enforce law and order on their flocks. Thus, immediately after the Phoenix arrests in December 1858, Fr O'Sullivan of Kenmare was in communication with the chief secretary about the cases of the dozen or so young men from the locality who had been incarcerated. Having pointed out that he was refusing the sacraments to unrepentant members of the secret society, he declared that almost *everyone* of those arrested had been at Christmas confession and communion the previous week, which, he said, 'was prima facie evidence either of their innocence or of their having solemnly pledged themselves to disconnect themselves from the society'. Logically, he concluded with a plea for their release.⁹⁹

Like the government, and almost everybody else, the clergy assumed that the Phoenix arrests had exposed (and squashed) what was merely a local movement, and

99 O'Sullivan to Naas, 11 Dec. 1858 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11187).

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they seem to have lived in blissful ignorance of fenianism during the next few years, when it was in any case virtually moribund. The condemnation of secret societies issued by the bishops after a meeting in April 1861 may signify an awareness of what we now know to have been the stirrings of new life in fenianism.¹⁰⁰ Cullen, of course, would have been uneasy about the National Brotherhood launched a few weeks earlier, with its revolutionary rhetoric and rather suspect leadership, but it gave him little tangible cause for concern until it emerged as the (at least nominal) organizer of the MacManus funeral. Because Stephens's organization was still effectively anonymous, the National Brotherhood was given full credit for the growing evidence of revolutionary intrigue, and it bore the full brunt of episcopal assault in 1862 and 1863, with membership becoming a reserved sin, at least in Dublin;¹⁰¹ a meeting of the bishops in July 1863 condemned the brotherhood by name.¹⁰² The church had become well aware that a secret oath-bound society was in existence,

100 Irishman, 11 May 1861; Corish, 'Political problems', p. 6.

101 Ibid., p. 12.

102 Ibid., p. 13.

and (rather understandably) presumed that it was none other than the National Brotherhood. This set the scene for a series of public exchanges on the question of whether the National Brotherhood was bound by oath, with each side self-righteously sure of the correctness of its own case.¹⁰³ Indeed, the Brotherhood took on the episcopal challenge, and answered clerical attempts to crush advanced nationalist politics, long before the Irish People's more celebrated campaign was undertaken, and independently of the rather eccentric manoeuvrings of their vice-president, Fr Patrick Lavelle.¹⁰⁴ The details of Lavelle's conflict with Cullen have been recounted in a few places.¹⁰⁵ Lavelle argued much about the catholic doctrine of the right of revolt, but it seems clear that his primary motivation was a desire (shared with his archbishop, MacHale) to thwart the political pretensions of the archbishop of Dublin.

During 1863 the country at large became aware of the existence of Stephens's organization under the

103 Nation, 22, 29 Mar., 5 Apr. 1862.

104 E.g. Irishman, 15 Mar., 5 Apr. 1862; [printed] address of National Brotherhood of St Patrick, 24 Sept. 1863 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian briefs).

105 Corish, 'Political problems', pp 6-21; Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 97-105 and passim.

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name of 'the fenians', so with the arrival of 1864 Cullen had a clearer perspective on the opposition. As the fenians had just established their own organ, the Irish People, circumstances were ripe for the exchange of literary salvoes, Cullen's weighty pastorals being answered by numbers of penetrating leading articles from the pen of C. J. Kickham.¹⁰⁶ It was fire that Cullen brought on himself unnecessarily. Other bishops combatted fenianism unobtrusively; by virtue of not knowing the value of keeping quiet on the subject Cullen (like Moriarty)¹⁰⁷ became the object of long-lasting opprobrium. Besides, his campaign was almost certainly counter-productive, as it gave the fenians the kind of publicity that only comes with public controversy. And altar denunciations such as were levelled against the Irish People must be the answer to any circulation manager's prayers.

In extra-ecclesiastical politics generally, Cullen's judgment was often poor, but when dealing with

106 E.g., P. F. Moran (ed.), The pastoral letters and other writings of Cardinal Cullen (3 vols, Dublin, 1882), ii, pp 237-54, 255-65.

107 Notably his celebrated reference to the inadequacy of infernal punishments in the case of certain fenians (Irishman, 23 Feb. 1867).

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Young Irelanders or fenians his attitude was especially panicky and short-sighted. From 1864 he was seeking a condemnation of fenianism by name from the Vatican.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, Leahy of Cashel, although he considered the fenian society to be 'the worst ... ever to exist in Ireland', advised Rome against condemnation by name as it might be ineffective and would raise the cry that the pope was against Irish freedom.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, the Vatican followed the line suggested by Leahy until 1870, when Cullen eventually got his way.

Because of the attention that it attracted at the time, and because it has been cited so frequently since, we may have come to overestimate the importance of the conflict between the fenians and the clergy in the mid 'sixties. We tend perhaps to talk as if the fenians might have been scattered by the church but for an unusually courageous act of collective heroism. This assumes that clergymen, at least in Ireland, have, or had, the power to induce people to abandon political objectives. But neither in Ireland, nor elsewhere in Europe, not even during the 'ages of faith', has this been generally the case. Clergymen may arouse political emotions,

108 Corish, 'Political problems', p. 19.

109 O'Dwyer, 'Leahy', pp 440-42.

or they may channel them in certain directions, but they can scarcely ever induce the abandonment of those already strongly cherished. Preaching may have launched many crusades, but it never caused one to be abandoned. Accordingly, the most unprecedented thing the fenians could have done would have been to succumb to the clerical onslaught.

In modern Ireland the clergy have been generally in strong sympathy with the political aspirations of the catholic community. For a period in the nineteenth century they exercised to some extent the function of providing organization and leadership, but this was only because in the conditions of the time they were better placed to do so than was any other cadre. But they could not lead where the people did not want to go, and it is morally certain that more moderate nationalists would have repudiated clerical policy as readily as did the fenians, if the occasion had arisen. The farmers' defiance of papal and episcopal admonitions during the land war is a good indication of their regard for ecclesiastical authority when it happened to get in their way. In the case of the fenians in the 1860s, then, what needs to be explained is not how they resisted clerical pressure, but how they came to be at logger-

heads with the mainstream of nationalist opinion (including the clergy). Earlier chapters have, hopefully, thrown light on that.¹¹⁰

However, the intensity of the (mainly verbal) warfare between fenians and ecclesiastics was caused by the social factor. Cullen and Moriarty may have panicked irrationally even over the political aspect of fenianism, but it was the sight of the young men of the cities, towns, and villages, breaking away from the established system of social discipline and endeavouring to organise their own patterns of group behaviour that alarmed and upset the generality of the clergy, who were accustomed to having youth safely under the control of a system in the imposition of which they (the clergy) played a major part. Accordingly, they now applied every pressure available to them in an effort to break up the new organization. (The fenian oath provided an easy pretext for the use of spiritual weapons.)

The most direct conflict between priests and fenians took place at parochial level; policy statements in pastoral letters or leading articles were secondary to that. The main purpose of the Irish People being

110 See chs 3-7 above.

to persuade the fenians to hold together, it naturally had to give them moral support in their struggles with the parochial clergy. This it did by enunciating the doctrine of 'no priests in politics'.¹¹¹ Kickham, who did all the writing on the subject,¹¹² had been considering since 1848 the problem of how a catholic could counteract what he saw as the guilty errors of the clergy on political and social matters.¹¹³ He does not appear to have used the formula of 'no priests in politics' before writing for the Irish People, and it might seem reasonable to assume that it was suggested to him by his fellow-writers, O'Leary and Luby. However, he is just as likely to have picked it up from the policy statements of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick published during 1862.¹¹⁴

In fact the Irish People's attack on clerical authority, with its frequent assertions of respect for the spiritual functions of the priesthood,¹¹⁵ was scarcely

111 See Irish People, 26 Dec. 1863, 9, 16 Jan. 1864, and numerous subsequent issues.

112 John O'Leary, Recollections of fenians and fenianism, (2 vols, London, 1896), ii, pp 114-5.

113 Dealt with in R. V. Comerford, 'Charles J. Kickham (1828-82)' (M.A. thesis, N.U.I., 1972).

114 Irishman, 15 Mar., 5 Apr. 1862.

115 E.g., Irish People, 24 Sept., 31 Dec. 1864.

an adequate reflection of the strong views of O'Leary, Luby and Stephens, who, at least at this stage of their lives, were firmly in the anti-clerical and anti-catholic tradition of revolutionary nationalism on the continent. In this, of course, they were not typical of the fenians in general, scarcely a handful of whom possessed the revolutionary sense of l'infâme.

Standing up to the clergy - which is what the fenian rank and file did - did not in any way reduce their consciousness of being Irish catholics. (It appears that large numbers of those fenians who took part in the attempt at a rising in 1867 sought sacramental confession on the eve of intended battle.)¹¹⁶ Even if the fenians had constituted the dominant element in the nationalist community in the 1860s, retrospective speculation about the possibility of a rift between nationalism and catholicism during that decade would be wide of the mark. But in any event the fenians never achieved such dominance, or even the shadow of it. The farmers and the middle classes were more numerous and far more influential, and throughout the 'sixties they were

116 Cullen to Kirby, 8 Mar. 1867, and Dr Woodlock to Kirby, 11 Mar. 1867 (Archiv. Hib., 1972, p. 55); see also William O'Brien, 'Was fenianism ever formidable?' in Contemporary Review, 1xxi (1897), p. 658.

as close to the clergy, politically, as ever they had been.

This is an appropriate point at which to consider the only attempt made during the period under review to provide means of social expression for youth under the auspices of the church, namely, the Catholic Young Men's Society. The first unit of the organization came into existence in Limerick city on 19 May 1849 under the guidance of Rev Dr Richard O'Brien, later dean of Limerick.¹¹⁷ In subsequent years it spread widely throughout Ireland and among Irish communities in Britain. Each branch held regular meetings, marched in formation with banners to church on Sundays,¹¹⁸ and engaged in social activities such as lectures, soirées and amateur drama.¹¹⁹ The society offered members the opportunities for fraternization which were also the great attraction of fenianism, and, not surprisingly, some C.Y.M.S. members found their way into the younger organization at an early stage of its existence.

However, despite its obvious appeal for some

117 Irishman, 5 Feb. 1859.

118 Constabulary report, 8 Dec. 1858 (S.P.O., Reports on secret societies, 1857-9).

119 Irishman, 28 Dec. 1861, 24 Jan. 1863, 25 Mar. 1865.

sociable individuals, it proved difficult to maintain membership of both organizations simultaneously. This was because of the essentially religious character of the C.Y.M.S. In line with the general reform of catholic religious practice during this period, the society inculcated frequent reception of the sacraments, and enforced this through group pressure. Monthly confession was an obligation of membership, and that was intended to incorporate spiritual direction, and consequently a thorough baring of the soul.¹²⁰ Membership of a secret society would be even more likely to get mentioned during such an encounter than in the course of a normal approach to the tribunal, and the confessor would be in a strong position to insist on the moral obligation of resigning from the unlawful body and perhaps, even, of giving information about it to the police. In November 1858 Dr O'Brien issued a circular to all branches of his organization warning against secret societies, which is a good indication that he had received some reports of members having been tempted.¹²¹ Five of the six Callan men arrested in early January

120 Memoir on C.Y.M.S. (Dublin Diocesan Archives, Cullen papers, 1861).

121 Irishman, 20 Nov. 1858.

1859 as suspected Phoenix men (obviously fenians), were members of the local C.Y.M.S., and the information on which the police acted was supplied by a young man who had been himself in the conspiracy until brought to a realization of its evil in the confessional.¹²²

A resolutely non-political organization the C.Y.M.S. might seem, and that is an impression that would be confirmed by a reading of its regulations, which forbade the discussion of politics within the society.¹²³ However, as we have said before, any such society in nineteenth-century Ireland would, in the nature of things, become a hotbed of nationalist thought. When the future detective chief, John Mallon, came to Dublin in November 1858, to work in the Castle, he became involved, as a serious minded and sincere young catholic, with the C.Y.M.S. However, he soon found that his fellow members tended to let their conversation 'drift upon dangerous political lines', and in fairness to them and to himself he felt obliged to resign.¹²⁴

122 Irishman, 8, 15 Jan. 1859.

123 Nation, 28 Feb. 1863.

124 F. M. Bussy, Irish conspiracies: recollections of John Mallon (the great Irish detective) and other reminiscences (London, 1910), p. 17.

Indeed, it is doubtful if the ban on politics was ever intended to apply strictly. Its effect, and probably its intention, was to give the branch officers a pretext for quashing any political discussions of which they did not approve. O'Brien himself was a highly politicised individual, and in 1868 launched a celebrated declaration in favour of repeal.¹²⁵ The nature of his organization's ban on politics can be gauged from the following words of a branch secretary to an outsider who was being engaged for a lecture: 'You will of course know how to combine the avoidance of all party politics, to which our society is pledged, with the healthy and manly national tone which we have steadily tried to impress on all our proceedings.'¹²⁶

125 Thornley, Isaac Butt, p. 56.

126 J. MacCarthy, Cork, to J. P. Leonard, 25 Aug. 1862 (N.L.I., MS 10505).

CHAPTER NINE

THE FAILURE OF FENIANISM, 1865-7

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the extent and nature of the military threat posed by fenianism, and the reasons for the evaporation of that threat in the period 1865-7.

'Was fenianism ever formidable?', asked William O'Brien, three decades after the rising of 1867, in the title of a magazine article that purported to provide the answer.¹ O'Brien's reply to his own question laid much emphasis on the numerical strength of the organization and implied that at peak the I.R.B. may have contained at least 100,000 men.² Of course he had no hard statistical evidence on which to base a definite figure, and neither have we. Yet, there are some indications that make possible an approximate estimation.

It must be borne in mind that, despite the oath of initiation, the I.R.B. in the mid-sixties was not the kind of organization that could distinguish clearly

1 In Contemporary Review, 1xxi (1897), pp 680-93.

2 Ibid, p. 681.

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between members and all non-members. The importance assumed by the social dimension meant that some people drifted in and out according to circumstances.

In the autumn of 1864 the American fenians sent Philip Coyne to Ireland to investigate the position of the I.R.B. He was 'shown through' the organization by Stephens, a process that involved meeting individually with fenian centres and organizers, as arranged by Stephens, and hearing from each, under oath, a report on the number of men under his command. Before returning to America in December, Coyne had in this way obtained evidence for a total of just over 54,000 fenians in Ireland.³ However, Stephens claimed that he could have shown Coyne 70,000 and that he himself answered for yet another 15,000. On the basis of these rather suspect accretions he claimed that he could certainly rely on eighty to eight-five thousand men.⁴ Three months later in another dispatch to America Stephens claimed a membership of 112,000.⁵ In the meantime a local leader with whom Stephens

3 D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., pp 44-5.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, p. 51.

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vouchsafed to share some confidences picked up the figure of 129,000.⁶ Clearly Stephens was selecting the highest number that he thought might be believed by any particular listener or correspondent.

When Captain Thomas J. Kelly was sent from New York in March 1865 on a mission similar to Coyne's, it seemed as if the captain's bluff was about to be put to the test. Stephens side-stepped the problem by raising plausible difficulties about showing yet another envoy through the organization: it would sow doubt about the genuineness of American intentions, and might alert the police and provide them with easy information. So Stephens arranged for Kelly to see evidence of fenian enthusiasm without allowing him to make a head-count.⁷ The next inquisitor sent by O'Mahony, General F. F. Millen, was kept in the dark on the same pretexts for some months, but eventually began to be 'shown through' the organization during July 1865. He obtained sworn evidence for the existence of something in excess of 50,000 fenians, and that figure included a number of circles in England.⁸ Yet, at the end of

6 [Undercover] constabulary report, Carrick-on-Suir, 23 Feb. 1865 (S.P.O., *Reports on fenianism, 1864-5*).

7 D'Arcy, *Fenian movement in U.S.*, pp 54-8.

8 MS 5964.

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May, he had heard Stephens claim that 140,000 men had been sworn into the I.R.B. in Ireland.⁹ Obviously there were difficulties in the business of bringing all the centres from their respective localities to one or more places of rendezvous, even in small numbers at the time; but making a good impression on the Americans was of such vital importance to Stephens that we must presume that he spared no effort at the task.

Accordingly, if Coyne and Millen got evidence for little more than 50,000 I.R.B. men, we cannot assume that the organization's membership in Ireland in 1864-5 greatly exceeded that number. Apart from the ordinary membership, the number of fenian recruits in the British army in Ireland and in the Irish militia have often been cited in support of the argument for the strength of fenianism.¹⁰ Canvassing of soldiers in an organized fashion was initiated in late 1863 or early 1864 by Patrick ('Pagan') O'Leary, an Irish-American with military experience who took up this project in spite of the strong opposition of Stephens. The sound basis of Stephens's objections was demonstrated when, in

9 MS 5964

10 E.g., by William O'Brien, *loc. cit.*

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November 1864, O'Leary was arrested in Athlone on the evidence of some members of the local garrison whom he had attempted to seduce from their allegiance.¹¹ Nevertheless, Stephens appointed another organizer, William F. Roantree, to continue O'Leary's work. Roantree was arrested in his turn, and was succeeded as fenian organizer of the army by the subsequently famous John Devoy, who held the position from October 1865 to February 1866.¹² Devoy's published recollections of this fenian infiltration have been cited frequently in the past.¹³

However, recent research, already referred to, has cast serious doubt on Devoy's claim that during his period ^{in charge} 8,000 of the regular soldiers in Ireland were fenians.¹⁴ Apparently the evidence will support no statement more definite than that there were some hundreds or thousands of fenians in the army.¹⁵ (It

11 A. J. Semple, 'The fenian infiltration of the British army in Ireland, 1864-7' (M. Litt. thesis, T.C.D., 1971), pp 47-52.

12 Ibid., p. 39.

13 Devoy, Recollections, pp 128 and foll.

14 Semple, op. cit., pp 161-6.

15 Ibid., p. 170.

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is likewise impossible to discover just how many members of the militia were infected by fenianism, but official concern on the subject is clearly shown by the fact that the annual training sessions were dropped in 1866 and 1867.)¹⁶ In any event, it would be a mistake to assess the significance of fenian infiltration of the forces in terms of the proportion of the army in Ireland involved. Devoy in effect claimed that almost one third of the soldiers in British service in Ireland were fenians.¹⁷ However, an unofficered third of the rank-and-file does not constitute one third of an army, and the only officers of her majesty's forces who took the fenian oath were a handful of N.C.O.s. To make any impact as a fighting force the fenians, whether they were tinkers, tailors, soldiers or sailors, were going to need a corps of leaders with military experience. They were also going to need arms and ammunition.

Outside of a few proclaimed districts there was, in the early 1860s, no legal barrier to prevent the fenians or anyone else, as individual citizens, from

16 Ibid., p. 31.

17 Ibid., p. 161.

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each acquiring a gun and ammunition. The Nation, on a number of occasions, advocated the arming of the nationalist population in this manner.¹⁸ The same paper expressed regret that, having acquired guns, individual citizens in Ireland could not join together in volunteer corps as the law allowed in England.¹⁹ The fenians were unlike the armed force longed for by the Nation in that they did not supply their own arms; and for that reason they were not, in the technical sense, volunteers. Socially, they tended to belong to the classes which produced the manpower of the militia, willing to be soldiers but unable to afford arms. While fenians were generally not from the very lowest income groups the rank and file were far removed from the financial self-sufficiency that enabled their contemporaries, the English volunteers, to arm themselves with Enfield rifles (and bayonets) that, in 1861, could cost up to five pounds and ten shillings each.²⁰

From the beginning it was Stephens's intention that his American backers would provide the funds to

18 E.g. Nation, 4 and 25 June, 19 Nov. 1859.

19 Nation, 28 May 1859, 1 Sept. 1860.

20 Irishman, 25 May 1861.

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purchase military supplies for the Irish fenians,²¹ who, in fact, appear to have done little about arming themselves in the early years. There were some exceptions: Hugh Brophy, centre of a large circle composed mostly of employees of the Dublin building trade, insisted that his men make regular subscriptions to an arms fund, from the proceeds of which rifles were bought for allocation to individual members by ballot.²² Stephens appears to have actively discouraged the acquisition, or at least the importation, of arms until 1864, when a change becomes evident, apparently as the result of uneasiness within the organization.²³ Here we have another one of the many issues on which the motivation of the devious fenian chief is difficult to fathom. It seems likely that he was initially opposed to arms acquisition because it might alarm the authorities, and also because he could not himself conveniently take full charge of the business. For it cannot be stressed too often that the overriding consideration with Stephens at all times was the

L.R.B. 21 Stephens to Doheny, 1 Jan. 1858 (quoted in Denietfe, pp 159-60).

22 MS 333.

23 John Daly in Irish Freedom, Feb. 1912; John Devoy, ibid., Apr. 1913.

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maintenance of his own authority. That was the inspiration behind most of his policy lines, and neither the initial opposition to arming nor the subsequent advocacy of it is likely to have been an exception. As with the launching of the Irish People in 1863, so in 1864 a programme for the provision of arms would create the illusion of progress, and silence, at least for another while, all those who, according to Devoy, were at this time 'grumbling at lack of preparations'.²⁴ It is far from certain that Stephens attached very great importance to this venture from the point of view of the external strategy of the I.R.B. He knew that he could only get arms in the numbers needed if they were sent, or brought, from America, or if he received from America the massive sums of money that would enable him to make large-scale purchases himself.

General Millen it is whom we must thank for our most reliable account of the scheme that actually operated, without, in the event, ever obtaining satisfactory financial aid from the Fenian Brotherhood.²⁵ Stephens, inevitably, was in overall control. Under him,

24 Irish Freedom, Apr. 1913.

25 MS 5964.

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Brophy (previously purchasing on his own initiative) was given responsibility for firearms - an excellent example of Stephens's tactical style. Responsibility for ammunition was entrusted to a young Trinity student with a flair for experimentation, Edmund O'Donovan, son of the celebrated Gaelic scholar. Denis Cromien, another Dublin centre, had charge of a machine for the manufacture of percussion caps. A fourth appointment encourages the suspicion that the entire business should not be taken too seriously: Michael Moore, a blacksmith with a workshop near the centre of Dublin city, was commissioned to produce pike heads. This, in the age of the Enfield rifle!

But Enfield Rifles were indeed procured in some quantity. They were purchased discreetly, and quite legally, in various English cities, and transferred with similar discretion in 'knocked-down' form to Dublin, usually labelled as 'nail-rod iron'. The guns (as also the pikes) were passed on to circles *that* had paid in advance, usually after a representative had been interviewed by Stephens, who was clearly seen as the dispenser of armaments.²⁶ By early 1865 Stephens

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had given at least some of his provincial supporters the impression that he had sufficient rifles to arm the entire organization stored away in Dublin timber yards.²⁷ The end of the American civil war in April 1865 caused a depression in the arms market with the result that it was eventually possible to buy a rifle and bayonet at twenty five shillings - excellent value by comparison with Moore's pike-heads at two and six-pence (or five shillings with a handle).²⁸

The centres who answered to Millen under oath for fifty thousand men in the summer of 1865, swore to a total of six thousand stand of arms.²⁹ It was a figure which would have included all the rifles supplied by Stephens to that date, and probably a much larger number of other weapons, many of them no doubt very antiquated pieces. Six thousand assorted firearms with very little ammunition patently would not suffice for the work ahead, and accordingly Millen suggested that the fenians should concentrate all their resources on a surprise

27 Constabulary report, Carrick-on-Suir, 23 Feb. 1865 (S.P.O., Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 107).

28 MS 5964.

29 MS 5964.

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seizure of the military arsenals in Dublin city, which would, he reckoned, yield arms for one hundred thousand men. Stephens rejected the idea with the barbed remark that he could arm one hundred thousand in three weeks if he had the money (that is, as promised by Millen's American friends).³⁰

Taken on its own then, the I.R.B., at the peak of its strength in 1865, was not a very formidable military threat to British power in Ireland. It was a loose, undisciplined, social organization rather than a tight military one, it had a totally inadequate and inappropriate command structure, and it was very poorly armed. Nevertheless, it had the potential of assuming strategic importance in the event of British involvement in a foreign war; divorced from the possibility of such a war, military fenianism was nothing but a charade. As a shrewd observer (O'Neill Daunt) remarked in 1866, 'if England were emptied of troops by some foreign war such as that in the Crimea, the Stephens gang would have a much better chance of making head in this country'.³¹

30 MS 5964.

31 Journal of W. O'Neill Daunt, 7 Dec. 1866 (N.L.I., MS 3041).

What exactly the fenians might do under those circumstances would obviously depend on the course of events, but it is easy to conjure up some of the possibilities. They could, for example, have prepared the way for a foreign invasion, as the Italian secret societies in the papal states had done by demoralizing the forces of authority during the summer of 1860. Disruption which in peace time might be easily dealt with could assume crucial importance in a fluid international military situation. The potentialities of fenianism in such circumstances would be all the greater because in Ireland paramilitary organization of the propertied and middle classes - on the lines of the English volunteers - was discouraged by the authorities (for the very good reason that it would inevitably give rise to sectarian warfare). Accordingly, there was no readily available stabilizing agent apart from the government's security forces. One does not need to have James Stephens's powers of imagination to visualize how the fenians, by default, might have become the generally accepted defenders of the interests of catholic-nationalist Ireland in the event of a great international upheaval; or how such an organization might be used to exploit a crisis of civil authority.

From 1858 to 1860, or 1861, an Anglo-French war seemed imminent, and thereafter, until 1870, it was at least a remote possibility. A clash between Britain and the United States was widely forecast during the civil war and for some years afterwards. The revolutionary potentiality of fenianism was related directly to the possibility of such international war. Stephens, who knew this only too well, introduced the idea of fenian action independent of foreign war merely as a device to influence the internal workings of the organization. The sense of impending action was necessary in order to preserve his own hegemony. It was all part of the amazing confidence trick which in retrospect caused a disillusioned Charles Kickham to declare that 'the organisation was built on lies'.³²

Stephens found it necessary to bluff not only the home organization but also the American wing. From the Fenian Brotherhood he required, before all else, a large and constant supply of money to lubricate the moving parts of his conspiracy. In this he was confronted by a difficulty that Michael Doheny had summed up in striking terms in 1858: 'If a successful

32 Quoted in Irish American (New York), 4 Apr. 1925.

blow were struck in Ireland fifty million sterling could be raised here in two months. But to prepare for such an event you could not raise fifty cents.³³ This necessity of having on hands a project with high visibility in order to attract Irish-American subscriptions (a truth demonstrated over and over again in subsequent history) was very inconvenient for Stephens, as he could achieve nothing spectacular in Ireland in advance of an international crisis, and he needed dollars to prepare himself for taking advantage of such a crisis. Such dilemma and frustration were occupational hazards of fenian leadership. Indeed Stephens and O'Mahony for a number of years were like two occupants of a stationary swing-boat, capable of propelling one another to spectacular heights, if only one of them could provide the initial momentum.

O'Mahony was in an especially difficult and ambiguous position, and one with which he did not have the psychological capacity to cope. He had to assess critically the reality behind Stephens's confident claims for the extent of the Irish organization, and at the same time he was obliged himself to present to

33 Doheny to W. S. O'Brien, 20 Aug. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446).

his fellow Irish-Americans as inspiring a picture as possible of the preparedness of the homeland. One of his devices for dealing with the problem was the sending of successive envoys (such as Coyne, Kelly and Millen) to inspect and report on the I.R.B., something that greatly annoyed Stephens who, however, was usually able to win the confidence of the investigator and stifle his critical faculty.³⁴ One of the emissaries who did not see things the captain's way, P. J. Cantwell, was hounded from the organization by Stephens, and black-guarded in the same unscrupulous manner as A. M. Sullivan.³⁵

The Fenian Brotherhood could collect but little money for Stephens in the early years because the imagination of Irish-America had not been touched. As the American fenians trooped off in their thousands to fight in the civil war they tended to discontinue their subscriptions.³⁶ 'One hundred and thirteen pounds from the whole American organization in a whole year!', exclaimed an indignant Stephens writing to O'Mahony in April 1862, ^{and} adding that people in Ireland could not

34 See e.g., D'Arcy, pp 22 etc.; MS 331; MS 333.

35 MS 5964.

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understand why those joining the army did not continue to subscribe.³⁷ It is, therefore, something of a mistake to see the mass recruitment of fenians into the American army, where they could learn all the arts of war, as the answer to Stephens's prayers, for in the short term it had the very undesirable result of pushing the I.R.B. into the background and depressing its income. In the longer term, the civil war offered to fenianism not just military training for tens of thousands of Irish Americans but - because of Britain's apparent partiality towards the rebellious confederates - greatly increased prospects of Anglo-American war and of 'England's difficulty'. That would be the answer to Stephens's prayers ... if he could wait for it.

After more than two years of warfare, and with no end in sight, John O'Mahony, giving way to pressure, convoked the first ever convention of the Fenian Brotherhood, which met in Chicago in November 1863.³⁸ There emerged in the aftermath of the Chicago gathering a distinguishable group who wanted to make American fenianism more of a 'going concern' by giving it some immediate

37 D'Arcy, p. 27.

38 D'Arcy, p. 33.

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objectives and pre-occupations.³⁹ This implied criticism of O'Mahony, who was waiting singlemindedly for the end of the civil war and the subsequent arrival of 'Ireland's opportunity'. Dishonouring, in characteristic fashion, his obligations to O'Mahony, Stephens encouraged the dissidents, for the obvious reason that they seemed likely to improve the flow of cash. Their first major venture was the so-called Chicago fair, running for a week from 28 March 1864, at which Irish-Americans purchased hundreds of items with sentimental or symbolic appeal for the nationally-minded emigrant.⁴⁰ Many of these treasures were dispatched to Chicago from the Irish People office in Dublin, including pikes from '48 and '98, blackthorn sticks, bog oak ornaments, 'an old coin of the time of St. Patrick', 'two dozen arrows found near Dingle and supposed to belong to Fionn MacCumhail', and a toothpick belonging to Daniel O'Connell!⁴¹

Stephens crossed the Atlantic to attend the Chicago fair, and set out afterwards on a tour of the states, visiting the circles of the fenian organization,

39 D'Arcy, p. 39.

40 Ibid, p. 40.

41 Irish People, 5 Mar. 1864.

and paying particular attention to Irishmen in the armies of the union.⁴² He aroused very great enthusiasm by offering the prospect of early action: Ireland, he declared, would rise in 1864 if England became embroiled in the war over Schleswig-Holstein, but in any event Ireland would rise before the end of 1865.⁴³ It was the reckless promise of a gambler, and in the short term it paid handsome dividends. During and following Stephens's tour of 1864, American fenianism experienced rapid expansion. When the second convention of the Fenian Brotherhood met at Cincinnati in January 1865, two hundred and seventy three circles were represented - an increase of more than two hundred on the Chicago gathering of fourteen months earlier.⁴⁴

At Chicago O'Mahony had put through resolutions that affirmed his own and the American organization's independence of Stephens, and we can see in Stephens's 1864 tour a campaign to undo the work of Chicago in that respect.⁴⁵ Stephen's success can be measured by the terms of a document which, —————→

42 D'Arcy, p. 40.

43 Ibid.; MS 5964.

44 D'Arcy, p. 47.

45 Ryan, Fenian chief, p. 196.

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before his return to Ireland, he was able to prevail upon O'Mahony to sign. It provided for the institution of a deputy head-centre who would be a full-time organizer (and of course a serious embarrassment to Head Centre O'Mahony), and for direct communications between ^{American} local centres and Ireland, thus by-passing O'Mahony even in the matter of transmitting money.⁴⁶ O'Mahony was able to prevent the enforcement of this agreement, but the very fact that he had to sign it *initially* shows what an impact Stephens had made. The secret of Stephens's success was his promise of action in 1865, a promise that was re-iterated on his return to Ireland.⁴⁷ Even O'Mahony had been induced to assent formally to it, although he knew that it was utterly foolhardy.⁴⁸ Driven by various pressures, but most notably by the determination to maintain his personal *authority*, Stephens had placed fenianism in a dangerously committed position where only external events beyond his control - an international war involving England - could save the organization from disaster.

46 D'Arcy, pp 42-3.

47 MS 333.

48 D'Arcy, pp 42-3.

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With the ending of the American war in April 1865 Stephens and others probably felt that the great bluff was going to be saved. For it was almost an article of faith in some Irish and Irish-American circles that the government at Washington would want to go to war with Britain as soon as it had crushed the confederates.⁴⁹ The belief had been nurtured by American officials intent on encouraging recruitment of Irish-Americans to fight for the union.⁵⁰ Because it never came to pass, anticipation of an Anglo-American war may in retrospect seem to have been naive, but in 1865 and the following years it was reasonable enough to envisage outstanding disagreements between the two powers leading to war. Fenianism itself became in due course a further subject of Anglo-American contention, but the Americans, despite appearances, had no desire to go to war with England.⁵¹ This was realised in British diplomatic circles within weeks of the ending of

49 See, e.g., Irishman, 12 Apr. 1862, 18 Apr. 1863, and police report, 5 Sept. 1864 (S.P.O., Fenian police reports, 1864-5).

50 D'Arcy, pp 63-4.

51 See B. Jenkins, Fenians and Anglo-American relations during reconstruction (Ithaca, 1969).

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the civil war,⁵² but it did not appear so clearly to Irish-Americans, partly because they were deceived by politicians who wished to exploit their prejudices for the sake of internal American electioneering purposes.⁵³

Fenians in Ireland looked to the tens of thousands of their fellow-countrymen who were being demobilised from the union army for active support in the coming fight. The end of the American war, and the reiteration of Stephens's assurances that 1865 would be the year of action, combined to create during the summer and autumn a widespread expectation of aid from across the Atlantic, usually predicted for harvest-time.⁵⁴ Stephens continued to act as though confident that the course of history could not fail to live up to his promises. Reassurance was added to reassurance, and every preparation that resources permitted was made. In compliance with the wishes of Stephens, O'Mahony began to send over experienced military men to officer the army of Irish

52 British consular report, New York, 5 May 1865 (S.P.O. Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 167B).

53 D'Arcy, p. 98, 174-5.

54 Constabulary reports, 29 May, 29 Aug., 21 Sept. and 25 Oct. 1865. (S.P.O. Fenian police reports, 1864-5).

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fenians about to take the field. One hundred and twenty arrived during June and the three following months.⁵⁵

Another phase of Stephens's programme of preparation was the proclamation in America of the 'final call'. It was issued on 5 August 1865 by O'Mahony who, despite grave misgivings, had succumbed to relentless pressure from Stephens.⁵⁶ As an indication of imminent action it induced Irish-Americans to part more freely with their money, so that funds were soon on the way to Stephens in record amounts.⁵⁷

The solidifying conviction of the fenians that a day of reckoning was at hand communicated itself to others. These included the Irish authorities, who struck on 15 September 1865, arresting suspected leaders, especially those who had made themselves conspicuous by working for the Irish People. Stephens remained free for the moment. He wrote to O'Mahony next day a letter demanding further financial supplies, but adding that if word of his own arrest was received no

55 MS 5964.

56 D'Arcy, p. 70; John O'Mahony to Frank Mandeville, New York, 4 Dec. 1866 (N.L.I., MS 5018).

57 D'Arcy, p. 72.

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more money should be sent from America.⁵⁸ The proverbial dog in the manger might be made to appear unselfish when compared with James Stephens. He was eventually arrested - on 11 November 1865 - and even in prison he contrived to pursue his policy of 'wreck or rule' vis-a-vis the organization. After the apprehension of the captain, the military council moved to fill the leadership vacuum (for which absolutely no provision had been made), appointing General Millen provisional head of the organization. Word of this was sent to Stephens in Richmond prison through his sister-in-law; on her next visit she received from him a pencilled note ordering Millen to proceed at once to the United States and to return with the first expeditionary force, but not a moment sooner.⁵⁹ Before Millen had his trunks packed, Stephens had been rescued from prison, on the night of 23 November 1865.⁶⁰

Much as Stephens undoubtedly appreciated his freedom, it had the one disadvantage of depriving him of the most plausible of all excuses for not honouring

58 D'Arcy, pp 76-7.

59 MS 5964.

60 Ibid.

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his promise of action before the end of 1865. For, with five weeks of the year remaining, the great majority of the centres, and ^{of} the American officers in Dublin, favoured, and indeed expected, a rising.⁶¹ The organization was virtually intact and morale was high, while the incarcerated scribes of the Irish People were no loss in military terms. Yet, Stephens knew that a successful rising was impossible, and as he had no interest in self-sacrificing symbolic gestures, there was nothing he could do. Joseph Denieffe and John Devoy have left two less-than-satisfactory accounts of Stephens's contacts with his leading subordinates in late November and December 1865, but the picture that comes across is one of the captain in brilliant tactical form endeavouring, during carefully stage-managed meetings and interviews, to make his men feel that they have participated in the decision to postpone action.⁶² Stephens had failed to deliver on his oft-repeated promises, and as a consequence irreparable harm had been done to the credibility of fenianism. Yet all was not lost; the arrests, including the brief

61 MS 5964.

62 Denieffe, pp 126-7; Devoy, Recollections, pp 88-97.

imprisonment of Stephens himself, provided at least a partially convincing pretext for the postponement. Stephens retained sufficient credibility to support one further round of solemn promises. For the purpose of launching that, he made his way once again to America, reaching New York on 10 May 1866.⁶³

For months John O'Mahony had been reaping the bitter fruit of Stephens's earlier opportunism. The 'men of action' within American fenianism (so strongly encouraged by Stephens in 1864) remained just that, and once the prospect of the promised insurrection in Ireland had been clouded by the arrests of September 1865 they had lost interest and had turned instead to the idea of an invasion of Canada, which the American president and secretary of state, for their own electoral ends, had led them to believe they would condone.⁶⁴ One result was a schism in the Fenian Brotherhood, with the 'men of action', otherwise known as the senate wing, separating from a rump, led by O'Mahony, that remained true to the nominal objective of fenianism - insurrection in Ireland.⁶⁵

63 Ryan, Fenian chief, pp 228-42.

64 D'Arcy, p. 84.

65 Ibid., p. 103.

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As the preparations for a Canadian offensive progressed O'Mahony was forced, in order to retain his following, to acquiesce in plans for a counter attraction - the attempt to occupy for the United States the disputed island of Campo Bello. The result was the disgrace of the O'Mahony wing and the squandering of its financial resources,⁶⁶ so that it was in an unenviable condition indeed when Stephens took direct control of it after his arrival in New York in May 1866.

Stephens revived the organization by means of the ominously familiar promise of action in Ireland before the year's end. He realized better than ever by now that only an Anglo-American complication could make this feasible. He may have been given false hopes in this regard by contact with Seward, the secretary of state, who, like other American politicians, was most willing to give verbal encouragement to fenian prejudices during 1866, as part of the competition for the Irish vote in the mid-term elections of that year.⁶⁷ Which or whether, Stephens was probably desperate enough to resort to the well-tried formula. A promotional tour

66 D'Arcy, pp 135-9.

67 Ibid., pp 169-75.

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during the summer and early autumn yielded almost sixty thousand dollars.⁶⁸ The momentum of the campaign led inexorably to a final rally at which, on 28 October, Stephens indicated that his next public appearance would be in Ireland, at the head of a revolutionary army.⁶⁹ At home the fenian body was once again tense with anticipation, or at least outsiders waited anxiously as the deadline approached. 'Business of many kinds is greatly checked', reported the Nation,⁷⁰ which denounced the expected rebellion not because of its effects on business, but because it was so obviously doomed to failure.⁷¹ When Stephens re-appeared among the New York fenians in mid-December advocating another postponement of action, he had discarded the last shreds of his credibility.⁷² Throughout the remaining thirty four years of his life he was never once an important figure in Irish political life.

Stephens was deposed from leadership of the

68 D'Arcy, p. 224.

69 Ibid., p. 214.

70 1 Dec. 1866.

71 Nation, 29 Nov. 1866.

72 D'Arcy, p. 218.

O'Mahony wing of American fenianism and from his leadership of the I.R.B. by some of those to whom he had assigned important military roles in the promised insurrection, notably Colonel Thomas J. Kelly.⁷³ Meanwhile, since Stephens's departure, the I.R.B. had evolved the beginnings of a structure of representative leadership such as the captain had always deliberately suppressed.⁷⁴ Because of the suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland, the embryonic authority tended to establish its headquarters in England, and it was to England too that Colonel Kelly and his military associates directed their course in January 1867. Kelly had been in close contact with the I.R.B. from early 1865 and must have been as well aware of its resources and prospects as anyone apart from Stephens. It is interesting to enquire why he was now determined to set off a rising that had no prospect of success. The most likely explanation is that, unlike Stephens, he allowed awareness of the fact that without early action the I.R.B. would disintegrate, to overrule calm assessment of the military and political realities.

73 D'Arcy, pp 218-24; ^{Ryan,} Fenian chief, p. 246.

74 See ch. II below.

Granted the impossibility of success, we may still ask why the failure of the rising of March 1867 was quite so pathetic. One part of the answer is that Stephens had exercised personal control of communications within the I.R.B., and the emerging democratic leadership had not had anything like sufficient time to establish a new network. Edward Duffy, nominated by Stephens (before leaving Ireland in 1866) as his deputy, had the best hope of conveying directives through the old channels, but he opposed the 1867 plans for a rising.⁷⁵ But even a categorical directive from Stephens himself would scarcely have produced a full turn-out of fenians without some evidence of that foreign aid whose expectation was an essential factor in the psychology of the rank and file of the I.R.B. And of course, action by the government at a number of points was another crucial factor.

Insistence on the fact that the fenian threat was not defeated but rather failed to materialise should not diminish appreciation of the work of Dublin Castle to avert it. These labours are dealt with at length in Dr O Broin's Fenian fever,⁷⁶ and fall into

⁷⁵ Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii (1967), p. 161.

⁷⁶ L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever: an Anglo-American dilemma, (London, 1971).

three main categories: the obtaining of information through spies and informers, the disposition of military strength in Ireland in such a way as to provide the maximum deterrent to rebellious activity, and the incarceration of known and suspected fenians.

The authorities do not appear to have been aware of the existence of fenianism as a widespread conspiracy in Ireland much before the beginning of 1864. The term 'fenianism' does not appear in the annual indexes to the registered papers of the chief secretary's office until 1863.⁷⁷ (Dublin Castle, like the press and the general public, scarcely ever referred to Stephens's organization as the I.R.B.) Before that, manifestations of fenianism were interpreted as small scale remnants of the supposedly moribund Phoenix Society, or as the work of the National Brotherhood.⁷⁸ It was the publicity surrounding the Chicago convention of the Fenian Brotherhood that alerted the government of the United Kingdom to the seriousness of American

77 Index to papers, 1863-4 (S. P. O., Chief secretary's office, Registered papers).

78 E.g. Kilkenny Moderator quoted in Irishman, 20 Oct. 1860, and report on the state of Ireland, 1863, by the inspector-general of constabulary (N.L.I., MS 915).

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fenianism, and to the existence of an associated and hitherto unrecognised organization in Ireland.⁷⁹

About the same time Pierce Nagle, a disillusioned I.R.B. man, offered his services as an informer to the authorities. For over a year and a half he maintained constant contact with the men of the Irish People office, and passed much valuable information thus acquired to the police.⁸⁰ While knowledge of the doings of the American fenians were easily acquired, the authorities had little enough inside information about the I.R.B. before September 1865, apart from Nagle's contribution. Once the Irish organization began to disintegrate, informers became more numerous, the most important, if not the most publicised, of them being no less a personage than General Millen, who had been very genuine in his revolutionary intentions before becoming disillusioned with Stephens.⁸¹ Thanks to informers, and the work of police spies, the authorities, from late 1865 onwards, knew almost everything that they

⁷⁹ See, e.g., constabulary report, Mullinahone, 26 Dec. 1863 (S.P.O., C.S.O., Registered papers, 1864/12151).

⁸⁰ Police reports, 1 June 1864 etc. (S.P.O. Fenian police reports, 1864-5); D'Arcy, pp 65-6.

⁸¹ MS 5964.

needed to know about the doings of the I.R.B. and of course they had advance knowledge of most aspects of the 1867 rising.⁸²

Thoroughgoing military measures were taken in the period 1865-7 to anticipate invasion of Ireland or internal insurrection. Warships were posted around the coast.⁸³ On land, the number of infantry regiments was almost doubled, the total number of troops being raised from less than 18,000 in October 1865 to almost 26,000 in March 1866.⁸⁴ The disposition of the forces was revised so that from September 1865 garrisons were established in many towns which had not experienced a military presence for years.⁸⁵ And flexibility was further increased at the time of the brief fenian hostilities in March 1867 by the establishment of 'flying columns'.⁸⁶ One military measure not taken (notwithstanding John Devoy's often-quoted assertion on the subject) was the systematic removal abroad of regiments

82 L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever, pp 119 and ff.

83 Ibid., pp 97-8.

84 A. J. Semple, 'The fenian infiltration of the British army in Ireland, 1864-7', pp 15-17.

85 Ibid., p. 21.

86 L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever, p. 159.

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infected by fenianism.⁸⁷ Fenianism in the army was combatted vigorously, not in that way, but by means of close surveillance and by the use of courts-martial.⁸⁸

Better remembered are the trials of the Irish People staff, leading to many convictions for treason felony, and long sentences of penal servitude. Another series of trials followed the rising of March 1867. However, the great majority of fenians who suffered incarceration did so not following any judicial proceedings but under the terms of the habeas corpus suspension act, which from February 1866 allowed the Irish authorities to imprison suspects by warrant of the lord lieutenant.

87 Devoy, Recollections, p. 62; A. J. Semple, op. cit., p. 167.

88 Ibid., passim. col. 1300.

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CHAPTER TEN

GLADSTONE AND BUTT, 1864-70

A fresh wind filled the sails of independent opposition in 1864-5, for, as we have seen, the thing itself, if not the name, was the basis of the National Association, and advocates of independent opposition ipso nomine notably improved their position in the general election of 1865.¹ There was a definite reason for this renewed vitality. Opposition to Palmerston's government was encouraged by the prospect of the radical wing of his party coming to power and reversing the old man's apparent policy of contemptuously ignoring Irish catholic demands. Significantly, John Bright was invited to attend the inauguration of the National Association, and, although he did not attend, he sent a message of support.² He had probably earned his invitation by a speech in the commons on 11 March 1864 that was clearly an overture to the popular side in Irish politics.³ Gladstone, of course, was the crucial figure: the chancellor

1 Ch. 8 above; Nation, 29 July 1865.

2 Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 305-6.

3 Hansard 3, clxxiii, col. 1880.

of the exchequer's declaration in favour of the extension of democratic principles, made in the commons on 11 May 1864, aroused great interest in Ireland, even though it made no specific reference to the country.⁴ This interest increased when, later in the year, he began to acknowledge the existence of a sense of grievance across the Irish Sea.⁵ Accordingly, by the end of 1864 the offer of parliamentary support in return for commitment to the amelioration of Irish popular grievances - which was the essential independent opposition formula - seemed likely to be taken up without much further delay. Those who had stood by that formula over the years were about to be vindicated, while those who disliked long, patient waiting could now join in the struggle in anticipation of quick success.

In this context it seems fair to number John Blake Dillon among the carpetbaggers: almost certainly it was the prospect of early worthwhile achievement that roused him from his long period of lethargy and induced him in 1864 to support actively the launching of the National Association, and in 1865 to get himself elected to parliament. As an M.P. he retained his new-found sense of purpose, and was

4 Times, 12 May 1864; Irishman, Nation, 14 May 1864.

5 Times, 15 Oct. 1864.

soon the unofficial leader of the Irish members in the popular interest.

The death of Palmerston in October 1865 seemed to open the way to reform. With prospects now better than ever, Dillon during the autumn made plans for a meeting in Dublin of Irish M.P.s on the popular side. It eventually took place on 5 and 6 December.⁶ At least twelve of the twenty-two who attended had been elected as independent oppositionists and they included The O'Donoghue, Maguire and, of course, Dillon himself. Others present included Gray.⁷ The meeting produced a series of fourteen resolutions which basically reiterated the independent opposition promise of support for the government if it adopted satisfactory policies on the church, land and education questions. Dillon, and Gray, may have been hoping for something more from the meeting, perhaps for a declaration that progressive policies were advocated by a sufficiently important section of the Liberal party to justify a promise of support for the Liberal government. As it was, one of the resolutions referred to the 'advanced' section of that party as largely sharing 'our political views' and being sympathetic with

6 Nation, 14 Oct., 16 Dec. 1865.

7 Freeman's Journal, 8 Dec. 1865.

'our efforts'.⁸ The very fact that it was necessary to meet for a second day suggests that the proceedings were not merely perfunctory, and subsequent developments would suggest that the major subject of debate must have been whether independent oppositionists had sufficient grounds to declare themselves in support of the government. In the event the resolutions did not commit them. Accordingly the Nation, which had been opposed to the meeting beforehand, had no pretext for proclaiming betrayal; nevertheless it did make snide reference to the fenian-style 'secret congress' of the M.P.s.⁹

The independent oppositionists were faced once again by their characteristic dilemma in the spring of 1866, when parliamentary life began to revolve around Russell's reform bill. Many whigs were uneasy about the proposed extension of the franchise, and the government was clearly going to stand or fall on the issue. It was the classic situation for the application of independent opposition principles, for voting on the reform bill would in effect be a test of confidence in the government, and irrespective of the desirability of the measure being debated, the government should be opposed, unless it had adopted a satisfactory

8 Freeman's Journal, 8 Dec. 1865.

9 Nation, 16 Dec. 1865.

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policy on Irish questions. Faced with the same dilemma just seven years earlier, the independent opposition members had divided almost equally.¹⁰ In 1866 Dillon was determined to ensure that they would as a body support the government.

The Nation of 14 April pointedly reminded its readers that the government had failed Ireland on the land, church and education questions, thereby insinuating that the independent oppositionists were obliged to vote against the administration in the forthcoming divisions on the reform bill. Dillon gave his reply in a letter addressed to the next weekly meeting of the committee of the National Association but clearly intended for public consumption. He had decided, he said, to give unconditional support to the government's bill, because the extension of the franchise which it proposed would ensure the continuing rule of the Liberal party: and that, he implied, was essential for the realisation of Ireland's hopes.¹¹ Gray's Freeman drove home the message: the constituencies should put pressure on members who might be thinking of opposing the government; Gladstone had said that henceforth Ireland should be governed in accordance with its wishes:— Was that to be rejected?¹²

10 See ch 1 above; Whyte, Indep. Ir. party.

11 Freeman's Journal, 19 Apr. 1866.

12 Ibid., 24 Apr. 1866.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Dillon's letter was that he spoke in it for The O'Donoghue as well as for himself. A dismayed Nation leader writer subsequently protested that the chieftain of the Glens had left Ireland, only a short while before, still determined to remain independent of, and in opposition to, the government.¹³ The day of decision came for all on 27 April, with the vote on the second reading of the reform bill. One independent oppositionist (McKenna, of Youghal) voted against; two abstained - Corbally of Co. Meath and Greville of Co. Westmeath; all of the others supported the government.¹⁴ It is to 27 April 1866 and not to any date in the late 'fifties that we must look for the demise of the independent opposition party in parliament.

Of course it could be argued that circumstances justified the shift. True, the government had not committed itself to any specific measures regarding Ireland, but with Gladstone in the ascendant - and with his position likely to be greatly strengthened by an extension of the franchise - prospects had never been better. (Already a bill was on its way to the statute book that would modify the parliamentary oath required of catholics.)¹⁵ Neverthe-

13 Nation, 5 May 1866.

14 Ibid.

15 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 294.

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less the Nation insisted that principle had been violated. But Charles Gavan Duffy, an originator of independent opposition in the 'fifties, stated in a public letter to Dillon that he too would have voted for the reform bill (although, as the Nation pointed out, he did not seek to prove that this would be in accordance with his old independent opposition principles).¹⁶ In any event, the protests of the Nation of 1866 lost much of their weight when they were repudiated by the two surviving founders of the paper, Duffy and Dillon.

The vote of the popular Irish members on 27 April 1866 is of considerable significance as the effective inauguration in parliament of that phase of alliance with the Liberals which produced *disestablishment*. It was, in addition, of great immediate consequence, for the government's majority in the voting was a mere five, so that victory would have been impossible without the concerted support of Dillon and his colleagues.¹⁷ Dillon's work was almost at an end, for he died suddenly in September 1866,¹⁸ but his feats of leadership during a career of little more than one year at Westminster entitle him to a special niche in

16 Nation, 9 June 1866.

17 Nation, 5 May 1866.

18 *Ibid.*, 22 Sept. 1866.

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Irish parliamentary history. However, even before his death, progress towards his goal appeared to have been blocked by the overthrow of the government on 18 June in a vote on the committee stage of the reform bill. The anti-government majority of eleven included eight Irish liberals.¹⁹ Six of these, however, were whigs who, with their fellow 'Adull-amites', revolted against the government because they were opposed in principle to further democratization of the franchise. Only two of the eight - McKenna, and McEvoy of Co. Meath - were independent oppositionists: Dillon's 'new departure' was holding firm.²⁰

While the conservatives were in office, from July 1866 to December 1868, the predominance of the radicals within the Liberal party became an accomplished fact. And to say that is, indeed, to understate the significance of what was happening. For during those years the party was transformed into the spearhead of a mass movement for reform that made Gladstone, in a very definite sense, the first popular parliamentary leader in British history.²¹ The man who did most to whip up and inspire this movement, John Bright, did not ignore the great potential for discontent of

19 Hansard 3, clxxxiv, coll 641-3 (18 June 1866).

20 Ibid.

21 J. Vincent, The formation of the liberal party, 1857-68 (London, 1966) pp 192-4, 227-32.

the Irish portion of the kingdom. His studied reservations about the usefulness of the suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland in February 1866 earned him the honour of an engraved portrait in the Irishman.²² When he visited Dublin later in the year, it was evident that Bright commanded the support of a far wider spectrum of Irish catholic political opinion than any living Irishman. He was hailed by the Nation,²³ the Irishman,²⁴ and the Freeman's Journal, which proclaimed that he was the first Englishman to make himself thoroughly popular in Ireland.²⁵ The O'Donoghue and Dean O'Brien were among the speakers at a Rotundo banquet in his honour; he was received by Archbishop Cullen; he met a delegation from the Cork Farmers' Club; and he addressed a gathering of the Dublin trades convened in the Mechanics' Institute by John McCorry.²⁶

It was not simply because Bright and Gladstone offered the prospect of legislation in favour of popular and catholic demands that their movement evoked so warm a response in Ireland, though of course that was an essential factor. But there was in addition the fact that the Irish catholics had

22 Irishman, 3 Mar.

23 Nation, 3 Nov.

24 Irishman, 3 Nov.

25 Freeman's Journal, 31 Oct.

26 Irishman, Nation, 3, 10 Nov. 1866.

been attuned since the time of O'Connell (certainly since the repeal campaign) to the kind of democratic mobilization of the masses and the middle classes that England was experiencing in *grand style* in the second half of the 'sixties. (And, of course, Ireland in the 1860s had, like England, a popular press that largely owed its very existence to Gladstone's legislation on paper duty.)²⁷

Yet there was no widespread public agitation in Ireland in line with the reform campaign in England in the second half of 1866 and the early part of 1867. The reason was that the fenian scare was paralysing more conventional political activity. A gradual change is noticeable in the months after March 1867. The events of 5 March and subsequent days established conclusively that there was not going to be a serious fenian rebellion, and obliterated a mirage that for almost two years had mesmerized Irish popular politics. Democratic politics had been an impossibility while revolution (or consequent state repression) threatened to take control of the fortunes of the country; now that the threat had passed there was scope once again for public meetings, speechmaking, demonstrations, and all the paraphernalia of parliamentary democracy. In May the

²⁷ See J. Vincent, The formation of the liberal party, 1857-68 (London, 1966), p. 229, and ch. 6 above.

government in effect reassured the country that normality had been restored, by commuting the sentences of those condemned to death for their part in the attempted rising.²⁸ The entire fenian episode appeared to have passed over without notable tragedy or the serious exacerbation of bitterness.

Rather confusingly, the popular agitation which became possible from about mid-1867 onwards concerned itself to a considerable extent with the question of fenian prisoners. Understandably, but quite mistakenly, this display of sympathy with the prisoners has been interpreted as retrospective approval of the attempted fenian rising. However, it was only after they had proved themselves to be incapable of launching rebellion that the fenians evoked *really noteworthy* evidence of sympathy among their fellow-Irishmen. The change which came about is well illustrated by the different funerals accorded to some suspected fenians detained by virtue of the habeas corpus suspension act. John McGeough died in Belfast jail in March 1866 and was buried without any public demonstration.²⁹ After the death of William Harbison in the same prison in September 1867, an

28 Times, 28 May 1867.

29 Irishman, 31 Mar. 1866.

estimated 30,000 to 40,000 took part in his funeral.³⁰ The following month another demonstration of massive proportions marked the funeral in Limerick of one William Kelly, recently released after a year of imprisonment without trial which was popularly supposed to have caused his death.³¹ Given that volume of support up to March 1867, the fenian organization would have been all but invincible. The crucial point is that the fenians received no such tokens of esteem until after the collapse of their revolutionary efforts. After March 1867 they no longer represented a threat of violent revolution by a section of the lower classes, but were invested - especially those of them in prison - with the role of symbolising all the grievances of the Irish catholic community.

It was in this capacity that the fenian prisoners attracted the public sympathy of John Bright, who, on 3 May 1867, presented to the house of commons a petition concerning the treatment of fenian convicts in English prisons.³² The petition owed its origin to a campaign launched in the Irishman on 16 March with the publication of a letter of O'Donovan Rossa smuggled from prison and alleging that he himself was

30 Freeman's Journal, 16 Sept. 1867; Irishman, 21 Sept. 1867.

31 Ibid., 12 Oct. 1867.

32 Hansard 3, clxxxvi, coll 1929-33 (3 May 1867).

being subjected unfairly to the bread-and-water diet. Far more startling charges appeared on 13 April. Details were given of the alleged vindictiveness of prison officers, the fatiguing labour in the quarries at Portland, nauseating chores in the prison laundry, dampness of cells, uncongenial diet and the death of one prisoner due to inadequate clothing.³³ These allegations were reported in full in the London Morning Star³⁴ and induced a group of English radicals to formulate the petition presented to parliament by Bright. In the commons on 3 May it was supported by at least five of the members representing the popular Irish cause, including Gray and Maguire. The latter quoted the Irishman allegations at considerable length.³⁵ On the same occasion Blake of Waterford, a former independent oppositionist, had a question down for answer by the chief secretary for Ireland on the same subject.³⁶ The concern of these inveterate opponents of fenianism for the welfare of the convicts is clear evidence that these same convicts had come to represent something other than fenianism.

The understanding that fenianism as such had ceased

33 Irishman, 13 Apr. 1867.

34 Ibid., 27 Apr. 1867.

35 Hansard 3, clxxxvi, coll 1945-87 (3 May 1867).

36 Ibid., coll 1933-4.

to be a serious factor in the political situation underlies the popular reaction in Ireland to the deaths of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien in November 1867. The executions were seen as the violation by the government of the unspoken understanding that drastic measures had been abandoned on all sides. (The government was expected to take the accidental killing of Sergeant Brett in good part, and of course they might have done so but for English public opinion.) Resentment was fuelled by the apparent defects of the trial. Even an Irish catholic so detached from popular prejudices as was O'Neill Daunt could use the term 'judicial murder' when entering the executions in his diary.³⁷ Almost spontaneously, many of the clergy celebrated requiem masses for the deceased.³⁸ Popular feeling was expressed in public demonstrations that were soon formalized as ersatz funeral processions.³⁹ On Sunday, 1 December, tens of thousands walked in Cork city, while smaller demonstrations took place in other towns.⁴⁰ An ad hoc committee was formed in Dublin, with John Martin as chairman, to co-ordinate

37 Journals of W. J. O'Neill Daunt, 26 Nov. 1867 (N.L.I., MS 3041).

38 Irishman, 7 Dec. 1867; Nation, 28 Dec. 1867.

39 Irishman, 30 Nov. 1867.

40 Ibid., 7 Dec. 1867.

preparations for a procession in the capital.⁴¹ On 8 December 30,000 'mourners' marched through Dublin in cruel weather conditions, following a route that took them past such significant locations as St. Catherine's church, the old parliament building and the site of the O'Connell monument, ending outside Glasnevin cemetery. After an address by John Martin, silent respects were paid at the grave of MacManus.⁴² No banners were carried, but contingents from the various trades could nevertheless be distinguished among the marchers. The banners had been ruled out in an attempt to maintain the fiction that the procession was of a funeral and not a political character, but green ribbons or sashes were carried by most of the marchers.⁴³ Midway through the following week the government ended a period of dithering on the subject by proclaiming the impressive series of 'funerals' planned for the following Sunday throughout the provinces.⁴⁴ At the same time Martin and others were summoned to court in connection with the Dublin demonstration.⁴⁵

41 Freeman's Journal, 7 Dec. 1867.

42 Ibid., 9 Dec. 1867.

43 Ibid.

44 L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever: an Anglo-American dilemma (London, 1971), pp 206-7.

45 Irishman, 14 Dec. 1867.

In subsequent months both A. M. Sullivan and Richard Pigott were sent to jail for the publication of seditious material in their newspapers.⁴⁶ The Nation had been from the start in the forefront of the protest against the executions and on 7 December it carried the words of T. D. Sullivan's 'God save Ireland' which soon became the anthem of Irish nationalism.

Of course there must be no question of seeing any of this as evidence of even partial conversion to fenian principles on the part of either public figures, such as John Martin and A. M. Sullivan, or of the public at large. The unrest in Ireland in 1867-8, which found a convenient focus in the fenian prisoners and especially the Manchester martyrs, must be seen as an Irish version of the contemporary English campaign for popular democratic rights orchestrated by John Bright and ultimately given parliamentary expression by W. E. Gladstone.

There was never any serious likelihood that Irish public opinion would not follow the lead given by Dillon and his colleagues in 1866 when they placed their trust in the Liberals. In March 1868 Gladstone consolidated his position with the Irish catholics by his parliamentary motion in favour of disestablishment of the Irish church.⁴⁷ But the

46 Irishman, 22 Feb. 1868.

47 Nation, 21 Mar. 1868.

Conservative government which had carried through reform of the English franchise in 1867 was also showing sensitivity to Irish catholic grievances. Negotiations were instituted on the long-standing problem of university education,⁴⁸ legislation was enacted to remove remaining grievances about oaths of office (including the Maynooth oath),⁴⁹ and during the summer of 1868 the last prisoners held under the habeas corpus suspension act were released.⁵⁰ If the tories failed to win gratitude it was not for want of effort but because, as Gladstone was to discover in due course, no government could satisfy the demands of the Irish populace.

In the summer of 1868, however, Gladstone personified hitherto unparalleled concession to the Irish popular will, and although that will was still very inadequately represented in the electoral lists it was sufficient, when allied with the traditional Irish whig interest, to procure for Gladstone sixty-five Irish seats in the general election of November 1868. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in the following year in a manner most satisfactory to Irish catholic opinion was a major victory for catholic nationalism, although the proportions of that victory have tended to be obscured, partly because nationalist propagandists have wished to play down

48 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., p. 244 and ff.

49 Ibid., p. 296.

50 Official diary kept in the crown solicitor's office, Dublin Castle, 29 July 1868 (N.L.I., S. L. Anderson collection, MS 5965).

the confessional, catholic aspect of Irish nationalism. It must be admitted that contemporary Irish catholics seem to have made little enough of the great boon conferred on them, if one is to judge by the speed with which they became disillusioned with Gladstone. Eaten bread may be soon forgotten, even if it has been devoured with much relish. The process of disillusionment, and the emergence of an alternative vehicle of agitation in the form of the home rule movement, have been documented authoritatively by Dr. Thornely.⁵¹ Nevertheless there are a number of points worth making, especially in the perspective of what we have seen of Irish politics since 1858.

As Thornley demonstrates, popular support for the Liberals in the 1868 election was not as monolithic as it might appear from a simple reading of the election results. While no candidate seeking the vote of a catholic could repudiate Gladstone, it did not follow that everyone who accepted his offer on the ecclesiastical question was happy to be associated with the Liberal party.⁵² The underlying reality was that the long-standing split between the catholic-Liberals and the independent oppositionists represented a divergence of attitude and attachment more fundamental than the tactical issue which defined it. Accordingly, even

51 Thornley, Isaac Butt, chs 1-3.

52 Ibid., p. 45 and foll.

when the independents had no pretext for maintaining their stance of opposition, they still found themselves and the Liberals clearly distinguishable and mutually antagonistic. Indeed, the Liberals used their temporary advantage to oust a number of sitting oppositionist M.P.s in the 1868 election.⁵³ The division extended to the rank and file of catholic voters, so that an important section of Gladstone's Irish support in 1868 was mentally prepared to repudiate the Liberal government as soon as any pretext presented itself. A pretext was found in the refusal to give an amnesty to all the fenian convicts. (Gladstone had pardoned more than half of them within three months of coming to office.)

In general, Gladstone's Irish catholic supporters in parliament were as eager as anyone else to have public opinion given the satisfaction of an amnesty. They realised that the best way of achieving this was by tactful and patient persuasion; and, in any case, they wished the entire business to redound to the credit of the government.⁵⁴ The Amnesty Committee formed in the autumn of 1868 was associated with this policy of tact, whereas the breakaway Amnesty Association, founded in June 1869, was dedicated to confrontation.⁵⁵ The series of defiant monster meetings

53 Ibid., p. 52.

54 See The O'Donoghue to Gladstone, 9 Aug. 1869 and J. F. Maguire to Gladstone, 17 Sept. 1869 (British Museum, Gladstone papers, Add. MSS 44421 and 44422).

55 See Irishman, 13 Feb., 19, 26 June, 3 July 1869.

held in August, September and October was not calculated to improve the chances of an amnesty and one doubts very much if any of the leaders imagined that it would. These months really witnessed a cleverly-timed political agitation nominally concerned with amnesty but actually designed to rally anti-government feeling among the populace.⁵⁶ If the government had yielded to the amnesty campaign, it would have been betraying the catholic-Liberals; and the victors would not have been the fenians, but the leaders of the amnesty campaign, especially Isaac Butt. The call for amnesty was formally rejected by Gladstone on 18 October 1869, in a letter which pointedly remarked that some of the meetings appeared to be demanding as a right that which could only be granted as an act of clemency.⁵⁷ Seeing that there was nothing more to be gained, Butt called off a campaign which had been short and spectacular and, in its own way, a success. After a lengthy period during which nobody presumed to demand amnesty, Dublin city council on 23 November 1870 petitioned the government in very reasonable terms to consider releasing the fenians before the onset of winter.⁵⁸ The

56 See reports in Irishman, 14 Aug. - 6 Nov. 1869.

57 Irishman, 23 Oct. 1869.

58 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 52, 89-91.

prime minister replied favourably, and in January 1871 the main body of fenian convicts (including Luby, O'Leary and Devoy) released.

The amnesty campaign established, among other things, that, despite the 1868 election and disestablishment, the newly emerged British liberal party was not going to satisfy the requirements of the Irish catholic populace in the matter of political organization. As in the earlier years of the decade, there was obvious scope for a new nationalist movement. And once again there was to hand an informal group of mostly self-appointed leaders of opinion, who felt that they had the qualifications to provide what was required. To a remarkable extent even the personnel was unchanged. True, The O'Donoghue was not involved: after his adhesion to the Liberals in 1866 he never again reverted to the independent line of which he had for long been the most prominent exponent. However, G. H. Moore (again an M.P. since 1868) was there from the old independent opposition group, as was Blake, the member for Waterford.⁵⁹ John Martin was again writing long letters to the nationalist press.⁶⁰ O'Neill Daunt was displaying once more some of

59 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 52, 89-91.

60 Ibid., p. 56.

his carefully-husbanded energy.⁶¹ W. S. O'Brien was dead, but his county and clan were represented by the catholic dean of Limerick, who almost equalled him in enthusiasm for the pure principle of nationality.⁶² A. M. Sullivan, and the Nation were again to the fore.⁶³ Richard Pigott, the latest proprietor of the Irishman, like Denis Holland in the early 'sixties could not be ignored, and yet was somehow less than fully acceptable. P. J. Smyth, (who had run the Irishman during some of the intervening years) was once again trying in vain to impress his ideas on others.⁶⁴ The very similar mixture might have similarly failed to produce results but for the addition of Isaac Butt.

Every re-reading of Thornley's work brings fresh appreciation of the dexterity and political acumen displayed by Butt in the years 1868-70 as he prepared the way for the founding of the Home Government Association. G. H. Moore was a most useful associate up to the time of his death in April 1870, but it would be a mistake to think that, if he had lived, the abrasive Mayoman could have seriously challenged Butt for the leadership of the emerging home rule movement.

61 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 83, 88.

62 Ibid., pp 79-82.

63 Ibid., pp 83, 91.

64 Ibid., p. 105.

Throughout his career Moore had been a sign of contradiction, whereas Butt in 1868-70 was having as much success as any statesman might hope for in the attempt to be all things to all men.

Subsequent chapters on the I.R.B., and the *land question*, will help to elucidate various aspects of Butt's achievement, but it must be emphasized that the essential element in his success was the appeal of his position to the tradition of independent opposition which seemed to have been crushed in the 1868 elections, but which revived as disillusionment with Gladstone developed. The conflict of the home rule movement in its early years with the catholic-Liberals was almost a re-run of earlier contests between independents and Liberals.⁶⁵ Cardinal Cullen's opposition to the movement (as MacHale's support for it) must be viewed in the light of this.⁶⁶

At the end of 1870 it was still by no means clear that home rule would in due course oust the catholic Liberals. Indeed, the results of the two by-elections in which the new formula was tested during the year suggested the opposite.⁶⁷ The popular success of home rule began just after our period

65 Ibid., p. 110 and ff.

66 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire., pp 416-20.

67 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 110-11.

had come to an end, with John Martin's victory in the Meath by-election of January 1871. The story of how the home rule movement absorbed not just the catholic Liberals but the entire Irish Liberal party does not, then, concern us here, but it is a story that will be better understood if the role of independent opposition in the 1860s is appreciated.

When Gladstone, in opposition, was putting to the commons, in March 1868, his resolutions on the disestablishment of the Irish church, Disraeli challenged him to state why he and his party had not brought forward legislation on the subject when they were in office two years before. The answer of any accomplished politician to such a question, under such circumstances, would be unlikely to amount to 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'. Gladstone's reply had as its main point the assertion that 'circumstances were not then ripe in so far as we did not know so much then as we do now with respect to the intensity of fenianism'.⁶⁸ That remark (together with subsequent attempts to explain it) has been interpreted to mean that it was fenianism that induced, or forced, Gladstone to grant disestablishment. However, Gladstone cannot have been talking on this occasion of the military threat of fenianism

⁶⁸ Quoted in Dublin Review (new series), X (Apr. 1868), p. 498.

as this was clearly less impressive in the early months of 1868 than it had been two years earlier when things were bad enough for the Liberals to suspend habeas corpus in Ireland. The words themselves suggest as much: 'intensity' is not a quality that one predicates of a military organization.

From about the middle of 1867 onwards there was an extension of the connotation of 'fenian' and 'fenianism' in contemporary usage, especially that of government officials and English politicians and English newspapers. Thus, these terms were applied to examples of nationalist activity and sentiment which were neither directed by the I.R.B. nor inspired by its principles. In fact they were used indiscriminately to refer to the upsurge of popular nationalist feeling which had no intrinsic connection with fenianism but found a convenient emotional focus in the imprisoned leaders of the defeated fenian movement. Fenianism in this extended sense had indeed grown in 'intensity' between early 1866 and early 1868. And it was fenianism in this sense that brought about disestablishment. But to state this is to affirm that Gladstone's policy of 'justice for Ireland' was evolved in response to democratic demand, and not in response to the military threats of the I.R.B.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE NEW FENIANISM, 1867-70

Speaking at the unveiling of the Kickham memorial in Tipperary town, in November 1898, John O'Leary made a distinction between the 'old fenianism' of the James Stephens era, which he himself had 'told all about' in his Recollections, and the 'new fenianism', post-1867, about which he expected his hearers to be less well informed.¹ Though it is not the exact point he was making, O'Leary's words can serve to remind us that the I.R.B. of, say, 1869 is the successor, rather than the continuation, of the I.R.B. of, say, 1865. Bearing that in mind, we will be on the lookout for any discernible qualitative differences as we study the history of fenianism in the closing years of the decade.

Government of the organization by committee had been averted by Stephens only with the greatest difficulty, so that when his credibility collapsed finally, at the end of 1866, the early emergence of collective leadership could be anticipated. Stephens's deputy in Ireland at this time, Edward Duffy, was in poor health, and not in any position to fight a rearguard action on behalf of the disgraced

1 Tipperary People, 2 Dec. 1898.

principle of autocracy.² Colonel Thomas J. Kelly would no doubt have liked to inherit Stephens's dictatorial authority when he was put in charge of affairs, but he was obliged to accept that not only Stephens, but also his methods, had been superseded.

The feelings of shame and betrayal felt by men who had believed, and repeated, the solemn promises of action before 1 January 1867 induced a group of centres in London to band themselves into a self-constituted directory with the single-minded objective of showing the flag early in the new year.³ Their circles were in Ireland but they themselves had fled to Britain where they were safe from the threat of arbitrary arrest under the habeas corpus suspension act - a consideration which was to influence the movements and location of leading fenians until well into 1869. The standing of this directory cannot be determined with great precision but the members felt confident enough to threaten the American military men waiting in Ireland and Britain with the cutting off of I.R.B. money supplies unless they went along with the idea of an immediate show of force, independently of any further trans-atlantic aid. The

2 Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868, quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), p. 161.

3 Summary of progress of fenianism up to 1868 (N.L.I., Larcom papers, MS 7517 ; hereafter cited as MS 7517).

Americans refused to entertain such a reckless idea, with the exception of the newly arrived Captain John McCafferty, who was admitted as a member of the directory and played a prominent part in the formulation of its rather desperate and short-sighted plans.⁴ McCafferty had been in the forefront of the rebellion against Stephens in New York but had left that city before the deposition of the chief. News of that development when it reached London about mid-January caused the directory to pause, pending the arrival of Kelly. The pause was brief: Kelly and his associates were in London before the end of the month but failed to make any impression on the directory which went ahead with preparations for a raid on the military arsenal at Chester.⁵ At least one thousand fenians turned out on 11 February to take part in this venture, an indication that the directory had considerable influence, at least among English-based fenians.⁶ One of them, however, John Joseph Corydon, warned the authorities in advance, thus sabotaging whatever chances of success the affair may have had. The Chester fiasco, followed as it was by the arrest of McCafferty, spelled the overthrow of the directory. However, Kelly already had

4 MS 7517.

5 Ibid.

6 L. Ó Broin, Fenian fever, p. 127.

another committee with which to cope.

This consisted of one representative from each of the four provinces - Edward O'Byrne (Leinster), Dominic Mahony (Munster), William Harbison (Ulster) and Edward Duffy (Connaught).⁷ They seem to have been chosen by some electoral process, but no details of this have survived, nor is there even any certainty about when it commenced or who organized it. The one certain point is that these delegates considered themselves to have very extensive authority over the I.R.B., for, having met at Kelly's lodgings in London on 10 February, they established what purported to be a provisional government. It is not certain that all four of them were members of this government which did include at least one other area representative, probably of some section of the organization in Britain.⁸ Kelly had resigned all executive power to the delegates and one of the first moves of the provisional government was to co-opt him as a member.⁹ Recognition was also accorded to his leading military aides, but it is doubtful if they too were co-opted, as has been suggested, since the provisional government did not at this stage exceed six in number.¹⁰ Whatever its

7 MS 7517.

8 Ibid.; Irishman, 31 Aug., 14 Sept. 1867.

9 Irishman, 14 Sept. 1867.

10 Irishman, 31 Aug. 1867; D'Arcy, Fenian movement in U.S., pp 251-2.

composition, the provisional government, on or about 10 February 1867, made the decision which led to the attempted rising of 5 March.¹¹ The fact that Edward Duffy actively discouraged the outbreak is symptomatic of the futility and confusion of it all.¹²

Shortly after the attempted rising Kelly promoted the reconstitution of the provisional government, and the selection of replacements for those who had been arrested (and whom, it was subsequently alleged, he tried to use as scapegoats for the disaster).¹³ The new body had but a short life, its dissolution being brought about by Kelly after the majority had gone against him on an important point of policy.¹⁴ Straightaway he assumed the title chief executive of the Irish republic (C.E.I.R.) which had been devised originally by the Fenian Brotherhood to denote in typically high-sounding American style, the position of James Stephens in the Irish organization. On a visit to Ireland in the summer of 1867 he showed signs of adopting the dictatorial style to match Stephens's title, and he

11 MS 7517.

12 Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868, quoted in Briefne, iii, no. 10 (1967), p. 161.

13 Irishman, 31 Aug. 1867.

14 Irishman, 29 Aug. 1868.

attempted to gather into his own hand all the threads of communication within Irish fenianism.¹⁵ Meanwhile, a determined attempt to take over control of the I.R.B. was being made from another direction.

Following the 1865 split in the Fenian Brotherhood, Stephens had allied himself unreservedly with the O'Mahony wing, subsequently presided over by John Savage. He denounced the senate wing publicly and privately, and even refused to meet two envoys sent across the Atlantic by Roberts late in 1865.¹⁶ When Stephens himself took control of the O'Mahony wing, animosity was increased to the utmost intensity. The failure of March 1867 enabled Roberts and his friends to argue plausibly that the I.R.B. had hitherto placed its trust in the wrong set of Irish Americans. Seizing his chance with remarkable speed, Roberts had despatched two discreet envoys to Ireland before the end of April. The secretary of the senate wing, Daniel O'Sullivan, followed on 10 May.¹⁷ They induced a respectable number of I.R.B. activists in Ireland and Britain to accept that the best prospects for the future lay in co-operation with the Roberts faction, and by early June they had assembled a

15 Irishman, 31 Aug. 1867.

16 Irishman, 26 Oct. 1867.

17 [Robert Anderson], 'Fenianism: a narrative by one who knows' in Contemporary Review, xix (1872), p. 638.

contingent of them in Paris, there to meet Roberts himself.¹⁸
In return for promises of money, arms and general fraternal support these I.R.B. men agreed not only to acknowledge Roberts's organization as the one, true fenian brotherhood, but also to give him in effect ultimate authority over the home organization. The agreement provided for the setting up of an elected body to generally direct affairs in Ireland and Britain, and to be called the supreme council - possibly the first use of that term in the context of fenianism.¹⁹

Success for Roberts's initiative would obviously spell the end of Colonel Kelly's authority in the I.R.B., if only because he was so closely identified with the O'Mahony-Savage wing. Indeed it seems probable that he broke up the provisional government precisely because they were responding positively to Roberts's suggestions.²⁰ In an attempt to secure his position and offset the Paris agreement, Kelly held a convention of the I.R.B. in Manchester on 17 August 1867.²¹ Like the Paris gathering, the Manchester convention

18 Ibid., p. 639; Irishman, 29 Aug. 1868.

19 [R. Anderson], 'Fenianism: a narrative by one who knows' in Contemporary Review, xix (1872), p. 639; Irishman, 29 Aug. 1868.

20 Irishman, 31 Aug. 1867.

21 MS 7517 is the source of the precise date.

had rather doubtful credentials as a representative body (for one thing it seems to have been dominated by British-based fenians), but it was much larger, with perhaps a few hundred participants.²² Kelly seems to have had himself ratified as C.E.I.R. without too much difficulty, but disillusionment with his American friends was evident, and, no doubt by way of compromise with those who were leaning towards acceptance of the Roberts overture, it was resolved to seek out the 'honest' members of both wings of the Fenian Brotherhood and co-operate with them.²³ The arrangements made for the management of I.R.B. affairs indicate that American military officers (such as was Kelly himself) were still quite numerous and very much involved in his plans: they included Richard O'Sullivan Burke, William Mackey, Timothy Deasy, Michael O'Brien and Edward O'Meagher Condon.²⁴

Fortified by the Paris agreement, Daniel O'Sullivan set about the task of arranging seven credible district conventions (four in Ireland, three in Britain) to elect the members of the supreme council. At a congress of his American brethren on 3 September he was able to report the

²² Irishman, 29 Aug. 1868; Devoy, Recollections, p. 238.

²³ Ibid., p. 239.

²⁴ Ibid.

successful conclusion of two of these. An ambitious young I.R.B. member who attended this congress as an observer, John O'Connor Power, was commissioned to assist O'Sullivan in the completion of his task.²⁵ Completed it was in due course, with the aid of judicious expenditure, but with a result profoundly disappointing to the source of the money expended - Roberts. For, once assembled, the delegates at the various conventions, while clearly happy to establish elected and responsible government within the I.R.B., displayed great hostility to the prospect of that body being subject to control from America. Thus, according to one source, when the centres from the north of England convened to elect their supreme council representative, they gave their chosen man firm instructions not to recognise any American faction whatsoever.²⁶ O'Connor Power went along with this trend, if he did not actually encourage it.²⁷ The adoption of this 'plague on both your houses' attitude reflected a strong movement of feeling in the fenian ranks, but it also contained an element of compromise with those

25 [R. Anderson], 'Fenianism: a narrative by one who knows' in Contemporary Review, xix (1872), pp 639-40.

26 Letter to the editor, Irishman, 8 Aug. 1868.

27 [R. Anderson], 'Fenianism: a narrative by one who knows' in Contemporary Review, xix (1872), p. 641.

who were fundamentally sympathetic towards the O'Mahony-Savage wing and would never countenance support for Roberts.

When the supreme council met for the first time in Dublin, on 13 or 14 February 1868, O'Sullivan was excluded on the pretext that he did not represent any district of the home organization. Power however was admitted, a probable indication that he had secured election by one or other of the district conventions, that for Connaught possibly. At the meeting Power was one of those who advocated the adoption of an independent line in dealing with the Americans. Immediately afterwards O'Sullivan upbraided him, and informed him that his services would no longer be required, and that no more money would be forthcoming.²⁸ The first known public statement of the supreme council, issued in April 1868,²⁹ probably after a second meeting, this time in Manchester,³⁰ proscribed any attempt by Irish-Americans to interfere in the running of the I.R.B.

Copies of this particular document, with an addendum, were posted up surreptitiously on the night of Saturday 27 June 1868 in numerous villages and towns throughout Ireland

²⁸ Memorandum to the Irish government, 18 Feb. 1868 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11188).

²⁹ Message from the I.R.B. supreme council to the Irish people, 24 Apr. 1868 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 2906R).

³⁰ Police report, 7 Mar. 1868 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11188).

and Britain,³¹ apparently as a demonstration of the extent of the supreme council's authority.³² But despite its propaganda efforts, the supreme council of 1868 was not destined to have a long career. No details of its demise appear to have been put on record, but it was superseded in the summer of 1869 by another supreme council, which on 18 August 1869 adopted the first known I.R.B. constitutional document.³³ An 'address of the I.R.B. supreme council to the people of Ireland' was issued in January 1870 on the occasion of 'the re-assembling of the supreme council for this its second session', a clear indication that the session of 18 August had been its first.³⁴ The same document dwells on the confusion that reigned in the I.R.B. before the 're-constitution' of the supreme council and contrasts this with successes achieved during 'the past six months'. The supreme council referred to here, and

31 Irish Times, 30 June 1868; constabulary reports, 28 June 1868 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 2919 R, 2922 R, 2924 R, 2944 R, 2990 R).

32 Irishman, 8 Aug. 1868.

33 Constitution of the I.R.B. supreme council, 18 Aug. 1869 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6001 R).

34 Address of the I.R.B. supreme council to the people of Ireland, Jan. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6317 R); despite the dating of this document, the meeting it refers to almost certainly took place on 27 Dec. 1869: police report, 30 Dec. 1869 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 5388 R).

whose system of election is described, consists of eleven members, whereas it is certain that the supreme council of February 1868 consisted of only seven.³⁵ (The constituencies had not changed but the four Irish provincial representatives of the new body had ^{elected,} in committee, ~~appointed~~ four honorary members, who then had equal standing with themselves.) It emerges then, that about the middle of 1869 new supreme council elections were held, and a fresh start made. From the recollections of John Daly it is evident that preparations for such elections were in train when he returned from America to Limerick in the early summer of 1869.³⁶

It was news of the release of the first batch of fenian convicts in March 1869 that induced Daly to end the exile that he had entered upon in fear of imprisonment for his part in the attempted rising of two years earlier.³⁷ It seems probable that the same amnesty influenced the re-organization of the I.R.B. and its supreme council in subsequent months, as it set some of the more prestigious fenians free to lend the weight of their authority to the work. James O'Connor and J. F. X. O'Brien were two of

35 [R. Anderson], 'Fenianism: a narrative by one who knows' in Contemporary Review, xix (1872), p. 640; Irishman, 8 Aug. 1868.

36 Irish Freedom, Sept. 1912.

37 Ibid.

them, and they had both disagreed with Stephens and his style.³⁸ They were enthusiastic for a new system that offered a hope of success for the cause (not to mention the prospect of authority and influence for able and ambitious young men - especially if they happened to have served prison sentences for treason or treason-felony). O'Brien played a trump card against anyone who might have raised objections to a new system when he announced that from his prison conversations with John O'Leary and T. C. Luby he had ascertained beyond any doubt that these two worthies were opposed to the revival of Stephens's regime.³⁹ The most venerable of those actually released, C. J. Kickham, was of the same opinion, and though he did not, it seems, state so publicly, his private statements would have been influential.⁴⁰

The prospect of an I.R.B. without Stephens brought forward a number of remarkable men (mostly young) to take an active part in fenian affairs from 1867 onwards, and especially in the establishment of the successive supreme councils. They included James J. O'Kelly, John O'Connor Power, John O'Connor (younger brother of James), Joseph P.

38 Above, p. ; Irishman, 26 June 1869.

39 Irishman, 5, 12, 19 and 26 June 1869.

40 Kickham to John O'Mahony, 28 Sept. 1869 (Catholic University of America, Washington, Fenian papers).

McDonnell, Charles G. Doran, T. N. Underwood, Fr Charles ('Kit') Mullen, John C. Waters, John 'Amnesty' Nolan and Richard Pigott, who was immensely useful as proprietor of the Irishman. It was a gathering of the young and the enthusiastic, almost analagous with the Young Ireland group of twenty-five years earlier. Some of them we know to have been sworn fenians before 1867, of others we cannot be certain; but none of them appears to have been a contented and whole-hearted participant in the work of the old regime. Stephens frustrated such men.

Not all of them, of course, remained useful allies of the supreme council. The first to cause serious trouble was Mullen, a very eccentric curate from the diocese of Meath, who had a popular-nationalist following in the mid-lands, which for a number of years in the early 'sixties he enrolled under the banner of the National Brotherhood of St Patrick.⁴¹ Ever eager for a more prominent role than anyone who knew him well was willing to grant him, he had attended the Paris conference of June 1867 as the representative of Leinster, and became a member of the first supreme council.⁴² Perhaps because he resented the abandonment of

41 See various items among papers of Joseph P. McDonnell, 1863-4 (S.P.O., Fenian briefs).

42 Memorandum to the Irish government, 18 Feb. 1868 (N.L.I., Mayo papers, MS 11188).

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that body, he did not give his allegiance to the reconstituted council, and maintained an independent organization in the midlands, extending perhaps into Co. Armagh.⁴³ As late as April 1870 he was maintaining contact (through envoy) with American fenians and apparently still paddling his own canoe.⁴⁴ The following month, however, he was reported to have made his peace with the supreme council, but it is by no means clear when a final reconciliation was achieved.⁴⁵

A potentially more serious threat to the supreme council's monopoly came from the old warrior - James Stephens. Inevitably, he still had many admirers among the fenians. Unfortunately for him, most of them were probably of the lower ranks. The bright young men with pretensions to having a voice in affairs had, as a body, turned against him. Yet even there he still had a friend or two: one of them actually produced a newspaper in Dublin for some months in 1869, in opposition to the Irishman.⁴⁶ Yet Stephens was never for long without contacts in Dublin and he was ready

43 Summaries of police reports, 1867-71 (S.P.O., Fenianism: index of names, 1866-71).

44 Ibid.

45 Police report, 21 May 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6450 R).

46 T. F. McCarthy's People of Ireland, Sept. - Dec. 1869.

to exploit any opportunity to present himself once again as a credible leader. For some time during 1870 his prospects were thought to have improved. The collapse of the French empire raised all the old uncertainties about Britain's political and military relations with Europe. Stephens immediately cast himself as the man who could obtain the support of an incoming French republican government for the establishment of an Irish republic.⁴⁷ In the autumn of 1870 the police in Dublin saw much undeniable evidence of a revival of Stephens's party. Large meetings were held in public houses, at which letters from the captain himself were passed from hand to hand. Money was being subscribed liberally. A concert held in the Rotundo on 7 November to raise funds for Stephens realized £80.⁴⁸ However, the situation in France soon lost all appearance of promise even for the most deluded Irish nationalist, a serious dispute developed within the Stephens group in Dublin, and before the end of the year metropolitan police intelligence indicated that the supreme council had regained the initiative.⁴⁹

47 Police report, 22 Sept. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6852 R).

48 Police reports, 19 Oct., 8 Nov. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6903 R, 6956 R).

49 Police report, 7 Dec. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 7019 R).

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On 18 August 1869 those tendencies towards representative government, long present in the I.R.B., and that were to be expected in an organization professing devotion to democratic principles, had borne fruit in the 'constitution of the Irish republic'. All authority was vested, ultimately, in the elected eleven-man council. That council would freely elect its president, secretary and treasurer, who together would constitute the executive body: the entrusting of executive power to any single individual was explicitly proscribed.⁵⁰ As a further precaution against the emergence of one domineering leader, it was provided that in the execution of their collective functions any two of the officers could over-rule the third. Almost all the proper functions of the president and the executive were subject to the approval of the supreme council. Each of the seven members representing an electoral division had certain executive powers within his own division (i.e. an Irish province, the north of England, the south of England, or Scotland), which powers he shared with two other elected officials. And at county level authority was again exercised by an elected officer.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Constitution of the I.R.B. supreme council, 18 Aug. 1869 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6001 R).

⁵¹ Ibid.

There were, however, many serious limitations on the democratic character of this system. All of those elected to county or provincial authority, and all members of the supreme council, were deemed to be elected 'finally', or 'permanently', and could only be removed from below by an initiative on the part of two-thirds of the relevant electors. A member of the supreme council could also be deposed by a two-thirds majority of his fellows. The election of a member of the supreme council, on the rare occasions that it would be called for, would be made by an ad hoc committee of five elected from among, and by, the county or district centres of the province or electoral district. As these in turn would have been elected for life by the ordinary centres of their respective areas, the supreme council existed at three removes, at least, from universal suffrage. Indeed, the constitution is silent on the credentials of the ordinary centre and gives the rank and file members no guarantee of any say either in his appointment or in that of any other official. It is doubtful if any nominally republican establishment, with the possible exception of that presided over by the doge of Venice, ever devised a system more obviously designed to give protection against ephemeral movements of popular opinion. To make a relevant contrast, this constitution of 1869 paid far less respect to the principles of universal suffrage than did contemporary

British electoral law. The Stephens autocracy had been replaced not by democracy but by safely entrenched oligarchy.⁵²

Such drastic changes in structure and government meant that the I.R.B. under the supreme council, especially from August 1869, was a radically different kind of organization from that presided over by James Stephens. The spirit of the old I.R.B. was that of a popular movement, the tone of the new I.R.B. was that of an élite. True, there are some indications of a revival of fenian social activities after the restoration of habeas corpus in March 1869, but they are scarce.⁵³ The received image of the fenians as a small band of dedicated, determined revolutionaries, patiently biding their time, does not fit the reality of the I.R.B. before 1867. It does come much closer to fitting the I.R.B. of 1869.

The seriousness of the 'new fenianism' shines through much of its activities, especially in the early years which concern us here. Members were now expected to make regular financial contributions, most of which went towards the purchase of arms. Indeed, it seems that a fenian would not

52 In 1873 the I.R.B. acquired a constitution that was significantly more democratic on a number of points. (See text of the amended constitution of the I.R.B. and of the supreme council, 17 March 1873, in I.H.S., xix, no. 75 (Mar. 1975), pp 313-7.

53 E.g., police report, 26 Jan. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 5599 R).

achieve full status in the organization until he had subscribed the price of a gun for himself.⁵⁴ Arms were purchased in England and shipped to Ireland, in a business-like fashion previously unknown in the I.R.B., under the direction of people such as Michael Davitt. Arms committees were active in the Irish port towns.⁵⁵ In January 1870 the authorities were informed from many sources that the fenians were better armed than ever before.⁵⁶ During the year a total of seventeen cases of arms (some of them containing up to a dozen rifles) were intercepted on their way to destinations in Ireland, and Dublin Castle was left to speculate on how many others were getting through.⁵⁷

The prospect of immediate action that had been so important in the heyday of fenianism was not available to bear up the fenians of the post-1867 era. What was not changed was the attitude of looking on any potential antagonist of Britain as a potential ally, and looking forward to 'England's

54 Constitution of the I.R.B. supreme council, 18 Aug. 1869 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6001 R); Irish Freedom, Nov. 1912.

55 Police report, [1870] (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6939 R).

56 Police report, 26 Jan. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 5599 R).

57 Return of arms surreptitiously brought into Ireland for fenian purposes [1869-71] (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6890 R).

difficulty'. As early as 1870 the supreme council was reported to have made contact with Russian agents with a view to co-operation in the event of British involvement in a war over the eastern question.⁵⁸ It was this attitude which above all else distinguished the fenian outlook from that of the emerging parliamentary movement under the guidance of Isaac Butt.

The type of people who had comprised the vast bulk of the fenian following in 1864-5 found an outlet for their political emotions after 1867 in the renewed public agitation of those years, which agitation, as we have seen, centred on the Manchester martyrs and amnesty, and led on to the home rule movement. Unlike James Stephens in his prime, the new leaders of the I.R.B. were in no position to strangle constitutional political effort, and they scarcely would have wished to, even if it were possible. Under those circumstances there was scope for an understanding between the I.R.B. and the popular parliamentarians. It was the kind of understanding which The O'Donoghue, John O'Mahony, and so many others had sought in 1864-5, and which had been frustrated by the megalomania and ambition of James Stephens.

G. H. Moore was one of those who had been most eager for co-operation in 1864, and there is unmistakable evidence

⁵⁸ Home Office to under secretary, Dublin Castle, 22 Dec. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 7058 R).

that he gave considerable encouragement to the setting up of the supreme council and then to its reconstitution. But it is not certain that he ever actually took the fenian oath.⁵⁹ He encouraged fenianism because he believed in the principle of having physical force as a back-up for the political opinions of a people: he had at one time even considered the establishment of a volunteer force on his own initiative.⁶⁰ The I.R.B. was not exactly what he had in mind but it was sufficiently similar to appear very attractive; at least it was the nearest possible approximation to the volunteering ideal.

The concept may not have had the same personal attraction for Isaac Butt. Nevertheless, he was sufficiently astute as a politician to realize the value of good relations with the fenians. His work for so many of them as defence counsel made contact comparatively easy.⁶¹ (A police informer actually got the impression that Butt was being offered the leadership of the fenian movement at this time.)⁶²

59 Michael McDonagh, The home rule movement (London, 1920), pp 115-6; Devoy, Recollections, p. 322; M.G. Moore, An Irish gentleman: George Henry Moore, his travels, his racing, his politics (London,), p. 350.

60 Ibid., pp 280-98.

61 Sullivan, New Ireland, p. 340; see Thornely, Isaac Butt, pp 90-93.

62 Police report, 29 Apr. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6344 R).

This sets the scene for a relationship which provides some headaches for the historian of the 1870s⁶³ and lies outside the scope of the present work. But it may be worth remarking that the opposition of Kickham and O'Leary to co-operation with the home rulers was at worst passive, being based on fear of fenian loss of identity and high-principled disdain for the inevitable sordidness of parliamentary politics. But they never interfered with the efforts of the politicians. By contrast, James Stephens had plotted and actively striven to sabotage the work of nationalist politicians, not in self-defence, or in support of any principle, but out of unadulterated selfishness. Already, by 1870, some fenians had experienced the thrill of active participation in electoral politics. But any success whatsoever that a fenian might have in such matters would not be success for fenianism. This was true even of O'Donovan Rossa's victory in the Tipperary by-election of 25 November 1869.⁶⁴ Little over a month later, indeed, the supreme council issued a general prohibition against I.R.B. participation in parliamentary elections.⁶⁵ The nomination of Charles

63 See T. W. Moody, and Leon Ó Broin, 'Select documents: XXXII The I.R.B. supreme council, 1868-78; introduction' in I.H.S., xix, no 75 (Mar. 1975), pp 293-5.

64 See below, p.

65 Address of the I.R.B. supreme council to the people of Ireland, Jan. 1870 (S.P.O., 'F' papers, 6317 R).

Kickham for the Tipperary by-election of February 1870 was in contravention of this ban, and it was done against Kickham's wishes.⁶⁶ Fenian participation in electoral campaigns before May 1870 merely helped to highlight the need for a constitutional nationalist party; after May 1870 it could at best help to strengthen that party. The I.R.B. did not benefit in either case.

It is necessary at this stage to say something of fenian contacts with radical and socialist groups, most of which, little as it was, took place in 1867 and after. The proclamation adopted by the provisional government on 19 February 1867, for publication once the proposed rebellion would have been successfully launched, could give the impression that fenianism was part of a radical international movement:

We intend no war against the people of England. Our war is against the aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish, who have eaten the verdure of our fields; against the aristocratic leeches, who drain alike our blood and theirs. Republicans of the entire world, our cause is your cause; our enemy is your enemy; let your hearts be with us. As for you, workmen of England, it is not only your hearts we wish but your arms. Remember the starvation and degradation brought to your firesides by the oppression of labour. Remember the past; look well to the future; and avenge yourselves by giving liberty to your children in the coming struggle for human freedom.⁶⁷

66 T. P. O'Connor to Kickham, in Irishman, 5 Mar. 1870.

67 Irishman, 9 Mar. 1867.

These sentiments, however, were inspired not by principle but by an opportunistic response to the circumstances in which they were penned. In London Colonel Kelly had made contact with some republican-minded members of the Reform League, and they had offered him the prospect of support if he could convince them that the fenian movement was anti-establishment and anti-monarchical rather than anti-English.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, the alliance failed to materialise, and the standard attitude of radicals such as Bradlaugh and Odger, when fenianism became a topic of debate in England during 1867, was to condemn the movement and its methods, but at the same time to denounce the injustices allegedly at the root of Irish disaffection.⁶⁹

Fenianism attracted the interested attention of Karl Marx for a number of years, and he supported the campaign for amnesty.⁷⁰ He made the young fenian, Joseph P. McDonnell, a member of the general council of the International Workingmen's Association as representative of Ireland.⁷¹ James

68 MS 7517.

69 E.g., Irishman, 9 Nov. 1867.

70 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Ireland and the Irish question (an anthology) (Moscow, 1971) pp 151-9.

71 Cormac Ó Grada, 'Fenianism and socialism: the career of Joseph Patrick McDonnell' in Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society, i. no 1 (May 1975), pp 31-41.

Stephens had become a member of the International, apparently in 1866;⁷² there was scarcely anything about it that he would have found intrinsically objectionable, and he might have devoted his great talents to serving it if he was himself its leader. In the period after his release in January 1871 John Devoy joined the International, attracted perhaps by the association's record of campaigning on behalf of fenian prisoners.⁷³ O'Donovan Rossa also felt gratitude, but it moved him to nothing more than some words and gestures of thanks.⁷⁴ In general the members of the supreme council were similarly uninterested in socialism. Their semi-official organ, the Irishman, viewed the emergence of the Paris commune with grave disquiet. Red republicanism, it declared, was the greatest enemy of the true variety.⁷⁵

^{Ryan,}
72 Fenian chief, p. 236.

73 Devoy's post bag, i, 42.

74 D. Ryan, 'O'Donovan Rossa and the reds' in The Bell, x (), pp 425-30.

75 Irishman, 12 Nov. 1870.

CHAPTER TWELVEPOLITICS AND THE LAND QUESTION, 1858-70

Following the secession of the Ulster contingent in 1853,¹ the Tenant League survived through the middle years of the decade, suffering occasional losses but nevertheless in a relatively stable condition. It was not a very impressive body, representing only a handful of counties, and being grossly deficient in local organization. Yet, it was keeping alive at a political level a question that in one form or another was of immense concern to the country. And in 1857 business was conducted with as much or as little vigour as in previous years : the credentials of independent opposition candidates in the general election were observed, a tenant right bill was sponsored in parliament, and supporting petitions organized in the country.² Admittedly, Gray of the Freeman's Journal broke finally with the league, but his support had for some years been less than whole-hearted, and the league still had the faithful Nation and Tablet to rely on.³ There

1 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 158-9.

2 Ibid., pp 136-7; Nation, 30 May 1857.

3 Whyte, Indep. Ir. party, pp 136-7.

were no real indications of the dissolution that was only a few months away, and which happened informally and almost un-noticed.

By early February 1858 the Nation was expressing alarm at the lack of league activity in the country.⁴ The league's central committee meeting at the end of March issued a desperate call for support from 'every member and sympathizer'.⁵ The Nation re-echoed this appeal and declared that it was time to renew the vigour of the parliamentary party. But a few sentences further on in the same leading article the writer admitted, implicitly, that circumstances had undergone a fundamental change, by declaring that he would not in future ask any tenant to risk disaster - as so many of them had done in recent general elections with the encouragement of the Nation - by voting contrary to the dictates of a menacing landlord.⁶ Some months later, announcing a general meeting of the Tenant League for 17 August, the same paper proclaimed that the organization would have to make a new start on that occasion, or else go out of existence.⁷

4 Nation, 6 Feb. 1858.

5 Nation, 3 Apr. 1858.

6 Ibid., 10 Apr. 1858.

7 Ibid., 7 Aug. 1858.

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The meeting, which ran to a second day, provided nothing other than a clash between G. H. Moore and J. F. Maguire, M.P. on parliamentary tactics.⁸ There appears to be no evidence of any subsequent general meeting of the league. In September the Tablet transferred to London, lamenting 'the absence of all political movement in Dublin'; during its Irish period it had been more closely associated with the Tenant League than with any other aspect of politics.⁹

The banner of tenant-right was unfurled at a number of political gatherings in County Cork during the following months, but the driving force behind these meetings was an attempt to organize machinery for the support of independent opposition candidates in future elections.¹⁰ This same impetus towards the provision of an effective County Independent Club was at work in Tipperary and culminated in an important meeting in Thurles on 14 February 1859. An assembly of parish priests and catholic middle class persons from the county was joined by The O'Donoghue, M.P., M. J. Blake, M.P., G. H. Moore and A. M. Sullivan. The time-hallowed

8 Nation, Irishman, 21 Aug. 1858.

9 Tablet (Dublin), 11 Sept. 1858; Tablet (London), 18 Sept. 1858.

10 See Nation, 25 Sept. 1858, 5 Feb. 1859.

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demand for tenant-right was brought forward, but only to be quite explicitly demoted in favour of a call for parliamentary reform, and particularly for the ballot. Both The O'Donoghue and Moore declared that all immediate hopes of tenant-right were in vain, something that had been true for a long time, but the announcement of which, under the circumstances, amounted to an obituary for the Tenant League.¹¹

The return of agricultural prosperity in the mid-1850s is an obvious explanation for the comparative debility of the league throughout most of its career, but there was no economic causation for its sudden death in 1858. That was brought about rather by changes in the political atmosphere. The sense of international crisis that galvanized Ireland in 1858 and subsequent years made agitation about tenant-right seem irrelevant, as far greater issues appeared to be at stake. The possibility of change in the constitutional status quo was in the air, and if that became a reality the context of the land question would be completely changed. The importance of political (as against economic) circumstances as an influence on agrarian agitation is further established by examination of developments in the 1860s.

11 Nation, Irishman, 14 Feb. 1859.

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The harvests of 1860, 1861 and 1862 were disastrously bad, and, combined with bad winters, they caused a serious trough in the rising graph of agricultural prosperity that stretches from the early 'fifties to the late 'seventies. There was serious hardship at every level of rural society, and the position began to improve only with the harvest of 1863.¹² Even then, evictions continued to rise, reaching a climax in 1864 with an annual total three times as great as that of 1860.¹³ From 1862 to 1864 the number of agrarian outrages recorded by the police was notably higher than in the years before or after.¹⁴ In particular, in the spring and early summer of 1862 there was a spate of agrarian murders in Counties Tipperary and Limerick.¹⁵ But the failure of any political campaign for the security of tenants to emerge, either during the crisis, or - as happened in the case of the great famine - in the years

12 Cullen, Econ. hist. Ire. since 1660, pp 137-8; for some details see Nation, 25 Aug. 1860, 6 Feb. 1862, 11 July 1863 and Irishman, 5 May 1860, 16 Aug. 1862 and 1 Aug. 1863.

13 Return by provinces and counties ... of cases of evictions which have come to the knowledge of the constabulary in each of the years from 1849 to 1880, inclusive, p. 3, H.C. 1881 (185), 1xxvii, 727.

14 Return of outrages reported to the Royal Irish Constabulary office from 1 January 1844 to 31 December 1880, pp 9-15, [C 2756], H.C. 1881, 1xxvii, 895-901.

15 See, e.g., Nation, 26 Apr., 3, 24 May 1862.

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immediately following, is remarkable. The nearest approach to it occurred in Westmeath. A gathering of the catholic clergy of the county in January 1863 launched a requisition for a tenant-right meeting that eventually took place on 10 February in Mullingar.¹⁶ A. M. Sullivan and J. B. Dillon travelled from Dublin to attend - a sure indication that the event seemed to have some potential. However, a letter from The O'Donoghue discounted the usefulness of the formal objective of the gathering - a petition to parliament for tenant-right. There was no use, he insisted, in petitioning the London parliament, the only hope was in organization.¹⁷ In subsequent months the Westmeath committee appears to have concentrated on giving adverse publicity to the activities of any landlords who presumed to treat their tenants unsympathetically.¹⁸ At the same time a county tenant-right committee was in existence in Meath, and it was active at least to the extent of issuing demands for changes in the land laws.¹⁹

The palpable loss of interest in tenant-right

16 Irishman, 17 Jan., 14 Feb. 1863.
 17 Ibid.
 18 Irishman, 20 June, 18 July 1863.
 19 Nation, 4, 18 Apr. 1863.

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agitation must not for a moment be presumed to indicate a lack of concern about the agrarian question or even a wish to subordinate it to a more comprehensive nationalism. Throughout the period under review almost every single newspaper on the popular side displayed an unflagging preoccupation with questions of tenancy, land ownership and landlord-tenant relations. The Freeman's Journal, Nation and Cork Examiner, together with a host of provincial journals, were constantly vocal on these subjects; the Irishman from the beginning proclaimed its concern for the 'wrongs of the peasantry'.²⁰ There is overwhelming evidence that the aspirations of the popular party and the desire for national institutions were universally considered to include a thorough overhaul of the land-owning system. Despite differences in emphasis, popular newspapers and politicians were conscious of being enrolled in support of a widespread and ineluctable struggle against 'landlordism'.

Reaction to agrarian outrages is very instructive. In the editorial columns of the Irishman, the Nation and numerous provincial papers it is marked by large measures of what might be called ambivalence. Explicit approval

20 Irishman, 17 July 1858.

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of criminal acts was carefully avoided -indeed they were often deplored-, but sympathy was at all times extended to the perpetrator. His side of the story was visualized, and irresistible provocation thereby established.²¹

Despite their undoubted sympathy with the killers, the editors (and the politicians) would certainly have preferred that the murders did not take place, if only because they realized that unco-ordinated acts of outrage were as likely to retard as to promote the broad advance against landlordism. Thus, when the earl of Derby was threatening wholesale eviction on the tenants of his Doon estate in 1859, the Irishman admonished them against indulging in assassination, or other 'spasmodic and irrational' acts of resistance; they should, instead, set about defending themselves in an organized and logical fashion.²²

Even with political agitation on the subject in abeyance, the nationalist press continued to discuss the land question. The Irishman is particularly interesting in this respect. For example, on 12 May 1860 it carried anonymously, in a column set aside for outside contributors,

21 See Irishman, 17 July 1858 on murder of Ellis, Nation, 10 May 1862 on murder of Maguire and 30 May 1863 on murder of Grierson.

^{Ibid.}
22 [^]8, 15 Oct. 1859.

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a proposal that the government should put out Ireland's landed proprietors and give ownership to the tenants, who, it was suggested, could pay off the debt in annual instalments equivalent to half their previous rents. The influence of John Bright is discernible here, and indeed almost all the positive proposals that were made from time to time owed much to him, or to the English freehold land societies, or to some other British source. A leading article by J. E. Pigot in the Irishman of 16 June 1860 denouncing the obduracy of the landlords is more typical of the indigenous contribution to the debate. The people, he wrote, were not inclined to press to the ultimate their rights to the land that 'God gave to their ancestors for ever', and would be satisfied to be left live in peace, but the landlords had decided on a war to the death. This type of simplification and caricature is in line with the overall attitude of nationalist propagandists in the Irishman and elsewhere.

The statements and attitudes of John O'Leary in his later career have done much to foster the notion that fenianism was in some way too pure or high-principled to be greatly concerned with anything as meretricious as land ownership, while it had a country's soul to save, and a nationality to vindicate. This amounts not so much to a fabrication, as to misrepresent-

ation of one or two noteworthy truths about fenianism. There was among the fenian intelligentsia a small group under the influence of Thomas Davis's romantic ideas about social relations. Through Davis they had been brought, in the 1840s, into contact with the contemporary English re-action - represented in different ways by Disraeli and Carlyle - against utilitarian industrial society. The hankering after an imaginary past when all classes lived in mutually-beneficial harmony, before the advent of the serpent, or the institution of the 'cash nexus', is one aspect of the complex legacy of Young Ireland. It influenced both O'Leary and Charles J. Kickham (and largely explains why both of them failed, despite lifetimes of thought and writing, to work out a coherent political philosophy). Insofar, then, as they subscribed to belief in a feudal Eden, they were distanced from more popular Irish attitudes to the country's landed proprietors, and could berate them not simply for being landlords but only for being bad landlords.

O'Leary and Kickham had very considerable influence over the Irish People, but they did not dictate its general editorial line on the land question. This was more reminiscent of the doctrines of James Fintan Lalor. Peasant proprietorship was declared on many occasions

to be the ideal and inevitable solution.²³ The 'pretended rights of a few thousand' individuals could not stand in the way of progress : in future the landlords and not the people would be emigrating.²⁴ 'Who are the rightful owners of the soil? The answer is easy, the people'.²⁵ Far from being part of any happy primitive dispensation, landlordism had been imposed by conquerors, on England in 1066, and subsequently on Scotland - where it had been used to depopulate the Highlands - , and on Ireland - where it would also in due course exterminate the Gaels unless they resisted effectively.²⁶ T. C. Luby was the member of the Irish People staff most likely to have formulated these sentiments: the short-lived Tribune, of which he had been editor, had been imbued with a similar tone.²⁷

The land question is rendered complex - even more so than political issues - by the ambiguity of many of its attendant formulae and slogans. Did Lalor and Luby mean the same thing by peasant proprietorship?

^{Irish People,}
 23 ^ 7 May, 25 June, 2, 30 July, 13 Aug. 1864, 8 Apr. 1865.
^{Ibid.,}
 24 ^ 25 June 1864.
^{Ibid.,}
 25 ^ 9 July 1864.
^{Ibid.,}
 26 ^ 16 July 1864.
 27 See Tribune (Dublin), 3 Nov. 1855.

Did fenian and non-fenian readers of the Irish People understand the same thing by its declarations for peasant proprietorship? Peasant proprietorship might seem on the face of it to be the ultimate degree of tenant-right, and at least one leading article in the Irish People seems to accept the identification.²⁸ Yet, for thousands of fenian supporters the desired solution of the land problem was seriously inimical to 'tenant-right'.

One of the very few hints of this ambiguity to be found in the Irish People occurs almost as an obiter dictum in an article on electoral politics. Why so much about tenant-right and so little about anybody else's right?, it asked rhetorically, before pointing out that although the tenant farmers were oppressed their plight was not nearly as bad as that of the 'labourers and mechanics'.²⁹ A flowing period further on in the article, about 'once-happy hearths' and 'the out-spreading hawthorn of the happy long ago' supports O'Leary's conjecture of later years that Kickham was the author.³⁰ His romantic social ideas supported the creator of Mat

²⁸ IRISH PEOPLE,
'Tenant-right' 8 Apr. 1865.

²⁹ Irish People, 1 Apr. 1865.

³⁰ See O'Leary, Recollections of fenians and fenianism (2 vols, London, 1896), ii, 142-3.

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the Thrasher in a life-long emotional concern for the welfare of the pre-proletarian lower classes. It was more than concern, it was a positive delight in their qualities and way of life, not simply in theory, but as he found them in Mullinahone. Whereas his feeling for the landlords tended to isolate Kickham from practically everyone except John O'Leary, his sympathy for the artisans and labourers gave him a bond with the fenian rank and file that was stronger even than that of James Stephens.

Kickham never explained how a self-governing Ireland would go about securing the economic well being of his beloved tradesmen and farm labourers. Mat the Thrasher found prosperity in the un-idyllic occupation of cattle-jobber,³¹ but it is more than hinted that a man of his qualities deserved to own land.³² Significantly, if the land laws ensured justice and security, Mat's wife would have brought him a farm, for she was the only child of an evicted tenant. And significantly again, her father was the son of a weaver, Phil Morris, who, in the good old days, had been able to provide his son

31 C. J. Kickham, Knocknagow, or the homes of Tipperary (33rd impression, Dublin, 1957), p. 576.

32 Ibid., p. 131.

with sufficient money to marry into the farm.³³ Kickham, it would seem, on the evidence of Knocknagow, saw the procurement of land as the ideal 'happy ending' for the landless. And that was in accordance with the attitudes of many of his fenian friends.

Like the shadow of international crisis, the threat of a revolutionary re-allocation of land is a forgotten aspect of the early and middle 1860s, and is of crucial importance for understanding the politics of the period. There is evidence, from 1858 onwards, of the prospect of obtaining land being held out as an inducement to prospective fenian recruits.³⁴ At the highpoint of expectation in 1865 a County Kilkenny landlord eavesdropped on some fenians rehearsing their plans; following a discussion of attacks on police barracks, one of the company, a labourer, mentioned that, of course, he would be obtaining land.³⁵ Labourers were important, but not exceptionally so, in the I.R.B. because, whatever their desire for land, they did not have the time or opportunity for social contacts enjoyed by more strongly fenian groups.³⁶

33 Ibid., pp 310-11.

34 E.g., constabulary report, Skibbereen, 27 Feb. 1858 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Secret societies, 1857-9).

35 Constabulary report, 16 Sept. 1865 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, 1864-5, no. 260).

36 See ch.7 above.

It is unlikely that the Dublin tradesmen were moved by any strong inclinations to become cultivators of the soil; it is less easy to be certain about the clerks and the shop-assistants, many of them, no doubt, younger sons of farmers. What is certain is that artisans in rural towns and villages - the slators, and nailors, and tailors, and cordwainers and so forth, of such places as Kickham's Mullinahone - would have had a strong desire for possession of land, especially as the gradual decline of the old crafts rendered their circumstances constantly more precarious.

A more surprising source of demand for Irish land was among the communities of exiles in Britain and America. A prominent figure among the Irish in Glasgow, writing in 1864, denounced the landlords of Ireland and expressed the hope that the men of '48 and the exiles of the famine would be able to return home; he expected this to be a bloody business.³⁷ The sober and far from radical J. E. Pigot had written on the same subject in an Irishman leader during the previous year. An Anglo-American war, he held, was inevitable; and, he continued, it was common knowledge in Ireland and in England that when it

37 Draft address by P. S. Banaghan, 11 Apr. 1864 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian briefs).

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happened Irish exiles would return in arms. And it was not going to be a matter of a military force from among the exiles coming to give a hand to those still in the old land. Irish freedom having been achieved, what he called 'the exiled millions' could return to Ireland in peace; but, in any case, he proclaimed, come they would.³⁸ There was nothing exclusively fenian about this idea, but for those inspired by it, fenianism must have seemed like the formula for success. It would be difficult to tell just how seriously American fenian leaders entertained the idea of a reversal of the famine exodus. But in any case they tended to be strong advocates of a radical solution of the Irish land question. Michael Doheny stated his position succinctly in a letter to Smith O'Brien in 1858: 'I favour abolition of Irish land-lordism, and I would put a limit on the amount of land one person could hold so that the land would be brought within the reach of all'.³⁹

Fenian designs on the land must have appeared to the landlords to differ^{only} in intensity, if at all, from the demands of tenant-righters. For the tenants it was a

38 25 Apr. 1863.

39 Doheny to O'Brien, 20 Aug. 1858 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 446, item 3058).

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very different matter. Land for labourers and other landless folk could only be acquired by taking it from existing occupiers. But the farmers obviously preferred to hold on to what they had rather than take their chances in a fenian redistribution, even if they were to be guaranteed full proprietorship of whatever would be left to them afterwards. The prospect of famine exiles returning must have been particularly upsetting, as so many farmers had expanded and consolidated their holdings by annexing the properties of neighbours forced to emigrate during the bad years. It is easy enough to comprehend the viewpoint of the substantial farmers in the Midleton area who were reported in November 1865 not to be making their customary fertilizer purchases for that time of year, and to be saying that whoever would have the land in the springtime could manure it. A Cork-based resident magistrate who was transferred to Monaghan found the same uneasiness afflicting the farmers of that county.⁴⁰

Any statements that Stephens may have made on the subject would undoubtedly have served to encourage the

40 Constabulary report, Cork, 30 Nov. 1865 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, Fenian police reports, no. 366; Breandan Mac Giolla Choille, 'Fenians, Rice and ribbon men in Co. Monaghan, 1864-7', in Clogher Record, vi, no. 2 (1967), p. 237.

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acquisitive instincts of the landless. Stephens's published account of the fenian attitude to the agrarian question was written for the Weekly Freeman⁴¹ in the wake of the Land League and does everything possible to line up himself and the early fenians with the militant tenant interest that by 1883 was the predominant driving force of Irish politics. However, not even Stephens could successfully carry off so blatant a misrepresentation. He had to advert to a clash of interests between 'the labourers and mechanics' on the one hand, and the tenantry on the other, although he seeks to give the impression that he himself was always sympathetic towards the tenants.⁴² Summing up, he presumed to place himself on the successful platform of the 1880s:

It was my decided resolve, as well as that of nearly all who worked under me in the I.R.B., that if we were able to raise Ireland to the position of a nation, we would at the same time raise the Irish farmer to the position of Irish landlord...

And then the all-important qualification - the minimum that verisimilitude would demand - is quietly added: '... subject to a just and legitimate division of Irish property'.⁴³

WEEKLY FREEMAN,
 41 16 Oct. 1883 and foil.
 42 Ryan, Fenian chief, pp 64-5.
 43 Quoted in Fenian chief, p. 65.

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When, in 1856, Stephens visited an old friend of his Paris days, named Joseph Rivers, who had become tenant of the rich farm lands of Tybroghny Castle in Co. Kilkenny, a serious dispute arose between them on agrarian and other issues. Undoubtedly, the vehemence of Rivers's arguments was due to the farmer's instinctive reaction against the notion of a re-allocation of land.⁴⁴ Rivers branded Stephens as a socialist and a communist, a point which serves to remind us that the fenian leader's policies were inspired by some appreciation of the doctrines of the advanced radical thinkers of the age. However, progressive theories about the role of society or the state in controlling natural resources^{would} have been incomprehensible to the labourers and mechanics of mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, especially with reference to land. To them 'the land for the people', and of course the peasant proprietorship advocated by the Irish People, meant simply land for everyone to be held in unthreatened security. Stephens learned the lesson quickly and took care that socialist rhetoric did not come between him and his followers.

Apart, then, from its unsuitability on purely political criteria, fenianism was anathema to the Irish

^{Ryan,}
44 [^] Fenian chief, pp 63-4.

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middle classes because it threatened the security of the tenant farmers. The shopkeepers, the clergy, the lawyers and the doctors were unequivocally on the side of the farmers, being, almost without exception, bound to them by relationship or by financial interest.

Inevitably, tenant-right was one of the demands of the National Association.⁴⁵ As a by-product of the association's rules dispute a new Tenant-Right Society was established in County Meath in 1865 with the active co-operation of the local bishop, Nulty.⁴⁶ It was a development that reflected a continuing attachment in the county to the forms of the old Tenant League. But it was motivated chiefly by resentment against the party that had abandoned independent opposition in the 1850s and was now attempting, by means of the National Association, to steal the oppositionists' clothes. It was politically inspired: there could be no serious questioning of the commitment of Dillon, Gray, or even Cullen, to reform of the land laws. And in the circumstances of 1865 there was no possibility that the new society, any more than the new association, could promote any effective political agitation on the land question.

When normal politics were resumed a few years later

45 Norman, Cath. ch. & Ire.

46 Nation, 22 Apr., 2 Dec. 1865.

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the tenant-right question could once again be posed realistically, but it had to give precedence to two other issues, disestablishment and the fortunes of the fenian prisoners. When the Irish catholic electors contributed so handsomely to Gladstone's victory of December 1868 they acted in the belief that 'justice for Ireland' involved a satisfactory solution of all three problems. On the land issue there had been unmistakable tokens and promises, such as the Russell government's mild but definitely pro-tenant Irish land bill of 1866, an outspoken declaration for tenant purchase by Bright on his visit to Dublin in 1866, and more careful speeches from Gladstone, such as that delivered at Southport on 19 December 1867.⁴⁷

If genuine hardship had produced an increase in agrarian violence earlier in the decade, the same result followed in 1868-70 from the tenants' conviction that their grievances had been acknowledged and that they need no longer endure the impositions of landlord power. The outrageous and exceptional provocation afforded by the actions of William Scully tends rather to obscure this aspect of the famous Bullycohey affray of 14 August 1868 when the tenants resisted by force of arms the

47 E. D. Steele, Irish land and British politics: tenant-right and nationality, 1865-70 (London, 1974), p. 63, (hereafter cited as Steele, Land and politics).

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serving of grossly unjust notices-to-quit.⁴⁸ On the last day of the same year, a few miles to the other side of Tipperary town, a landlord named George Cole Baker was shot dead.⁴⁹ Discussing the background to this murder the Irishman did not attribute the assassin's grievance to any selfish or acquisitive action or intention on Baker's part; his offence was that he had decided a dispute about landholding between two brothers. He died for exercising the landlord's feudal power of arbitration in a society that rejected it as an anachronistic imposition.⁵⁰

Throughout 1868 and the early part of 1869 the disestablishment question dominated popular politics. With satisfactory ecclesiastical legislation on the way to the statute book by the early summer of 1869, the time was opportune for pressing other demands. The government would be turning its attention next to the land problem, and so it was time to organize and orchestrate a campaign on that question, to ensure that the most far-reaching reforms possible would be won. The work already being

48 The episode is described vividly in Sullivan, New Ireland, pp 363-73.

49 Irishman, 2 Jan. 1869.

50 Ibid., 9 Jan. 1869.

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done by farmers' clubs in the south would have to be intensified and extended.

Gladstone had already set free almost fifty fenian convicts, and a continuation of the tactful, undemonstrative campaign of the Amnesty Committee in co-operation with the catholic Liberal M.P.s seemed the obvious way to achieve further releases. However, as we have seen, a section of the committee, including Isaac Butt and John Nolan, seceded to form the Amnesty Association, which deliberately guided public sympathy for the prisoners away from the path of patience and reticence to that of protest and declamation. The change of policy predictably, and demonstrably, delayed the releases that were being demanded, but it was not necessarily ill-judged, as the real objective of the Amnesty Association was on a different plane and involved exploiting, rather than alleviating, the plight of the prisoners. Butt, Nolan, G. H. Moore, and an indeterminable number of other leaders were clearly working to ensure an early rupture between Irish public opinion and the government that had granted disestablishment.

The amnesty campaign attracted public attention to such an extent that agitation on the agrarian issue was considerably retarded. That was in line with the wishes of the amnesty movement organizers: the Liberal

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government that had conceded a church act so eminently satisfactory might, if matters developed in a certain way, make eminently acceptable changes in the land laws and win itself the continuing support of the majority of the Irish electorate, whereas Butt's prime objective was to alienate the government from Irish popular feeling. To a certain small section of activists opposition to a tenant-right campaign was justified on the basis that if the farmers were satisfied they would lose interest in nationality;⁵¹ Butt, of course, had much too keen an appreciation of both nationalism and the farmers to subscribe to this simplistic view. He was concerned with directing Irish public feeling, not in the direction of nationalism (where it had for long been well and truly headed), but away from Liberalism, and so to a position where co-operation with the Irish conservatives would be possible. The Nation, which was at least as eager as Butt to foster the spirit of nationality, did not show any enthusiasm for the strategy of the Amnesty Association and gave but muted accounts of the monster meetings, apart from the particularly impressive climax of the series at Cabra on 10 October.⁵² The Nation's

51 See J. B. Kennedy, Limerick, to Butt, 6 Dec. 1869 (N.L.I., Butt papers, MS 10415).

52 Nation, 16 Oct. 1869.

unhappiness was caused by A. M. Sullivan's realization that a golden opportunity was being lost of pushing to the limits the concessions long sought for the tenantry and now acknowledged by the prime minister of the day to be to some extent deserved. During this period it repeatedly urged efforts to organize the tenants and vocalize their demands.⁵³

Of course, Butt never repudiated tenant-right; he had established himself a few years earlier, by his pamphleteering, as its most effective propagandist,⁵⁴ and he was in 1869 merely subordinating it to a higher cause. The farmers' clubs looked to him as their natural leader, and he was careful not to disown them or lose their confidence. He went along with them as they set about the formation of a national organization, and he dominated the meeting in Tipperary town on 28 September¹⁸⁶⁹ at which the Irish Tenant League was inaugurated. The league made no great impact, however, due undoubtedly to silent sabotage by Butt.⁵⁵

The most effective attempt at agitation on the land

⁵³ See *ibid.*, 17 July, 28 Aug., 4 Sept. and 2 Oct. 1869.

⁵⁴ Especially with his Land tenure in Ireland: a plea for the Celtic race (Dublin, 1866).

⁵⁵ See Irishman, 9 Oct. 1869.

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question in the crucial months of 1869 was directed without any very extensive formal organization by Gray of the Freeman's Journal. Despite its abandonment of the original Tenant League, and of independent opposition, in the mid-'fifties, Gray's paper had remained at all times an advocate of the demands of the farmers, appropriately enough for a paper that circulated largely among the catholic middle classes. It was, apparently, largely due to the instigation of the Freeman's Journal that tenant-right demands began to get an airing on the platforms of amnesty meetings in the autumn of 1869.⁵⁶

As the great majority of the participants would just as readily have taken part in a campaign for tenant-right, or any other emotive issue, as for amnesty, speeches on tenant-right were enthusiastically received. The clergy (who were prominent in many amnesty demonstrations) and other local leaders were long-standing supporters of tenant-right. Soon joint amnesty/tenant-right meetings were being held and by November demonstrations called simply in the name of tenant-right were becoming common.⁵⁷

This development was unwelcome to Butt, who could, however, do nothing positive to discountenance it without

56 Irishman, 25 Sept., 9 Oct. 1869.

57 See Nation, 6, 13, 20 Nov. 1869.

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alienating the most important section of his supporters. But there was one small element in the amnesty movement that was positively hostile to the tenant campaign and prepared to display its hostility. That element consisted of fenians, acting with what support from their leaders or a section of the Amnesty Association it would be difficult to tell. Their most celebrated intervention occurred in Limerick city on 1 November when a local group dismantled the platform and prevented a number of eminent clergy and laymen from addressing what was intended to be an important tenant-right meeting.⁵⁸ This and similar, if less spectacular, instances of interference were defended on the grounds that the tenant campaign violated a pledge made by 'the country' not to seek or accept any favours in advance of amnesty.⁵⁹ But the destructive enthusiasm displayed can best be explained as a manifestation of that anti-farmer feeling which had long existed among sections of Irish society and that had found expression and some encouragement in fenianism.

If the tenant-right meetings were undesirable from Butt's point of view, physical opposition to them in the name of amnesty threatened to bring disaster on

58 Irishman, 6 Nov. 1869; Irish Freedom, Oct. 1912.

59 Ibid.

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all his schemes. Delicate balancing was needed. A meeting of the committee of the Amnesty Association held on 12 November had before it a letter from the absent president, ^{which was} subsequently sent to the newspapers, ^{and} in which amnesty enthusiasts were admonished against undervaluing the truly national content of the tenants' campaign.⁶⁰

The Irishman, despite its gleeful recounting of the forcible prevention of tenant-right meetings, displayed in its editorial columns some sensitivity towards the feelings of the farmers and their friends, perhaps most disarmingly of all in its explanation of why 'the people' had broken up the Limerick meeting: 'It is not that they love the cause of the tenant farmers less, but they love that of the prisoners more.'⁶¹ The public tenant-right meeting held in the Rotundo on the evening of 14 December was essentially an attempt by Butt to defuse a threatened crisis. The main thrust of his address on that occasion was to persuade amnesty enthusiasts that no appeal to nationalism could be used to justify hostile action against tenant farmers.⁶² And the main achievement of the evening was not any declaration for tenant-right, but

60 Irishman, 13 Nov. 1869.

61 Ibid., 6 Nov. 1869.

62 Ibid.; Nation, 18 Dec. 1869.

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the fact that the anti-tenant activists present in large numbers were prevailed upon, by Butt's eloquence and authority, not to disrupt proceedings. That was the truth behind the Nation's anxious assertion that 'the proceedings were orderly and characterized by great unanimity'.⁶³

This apparent clash between amnesty and tenant-right forms the background to the celebrated Tipperary by-elections of November 1869 and February 1870. Butt was pressed from many quarters to stand for the seat made vacant by the death of a sitting member. He rejected the suggestion, ostensibly because he had doubts about the usefulness of serving in 'an alien parliament'.⁶⁴ It seems reasonable, however, to conjecture that an important consideration was the difficulty that he would have experienced in the autumn of 1869 in conducting an election campaign, or even drafting an address, without exposing the ambiguity that enabled him to retain the allegiance of the farmers, and of the potentially disruptive anti-tenant wing of the amnesty movement, while at the same time appearing to the Irish tories to be a bulwark

63 Ibid.

64 Thornley, Isaac Butt, p. 72.

against the flood of liberalism then threatening to sweep away all that they held dear.

With Butt out of the running, the tenant interests which were dominant among the Tipperary electorate turned to an eminent Liberal lawyer and advocate of tenant demands, Denis Caulfield Heron. When his return seemed a foregone conclusion, a group of amnesty activists, led apparently by J. F. X. O'Brien,⁶⁵ put forward the name of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. (Typical of the period, the idea of nominating a political prisoner was inspired by contemporary developments in France, where exiled and imprisoned opponents of the Napoleonic system, including Victor Hugo, were being nominated for parliamentary seats.)⁶⁶ If Rossa had been seen by the electorate as the standard-bearer of an amnesty movement inimical to tenant-right (which is how his nominators viewed him), he would have been overwhelmingly defeated at the polls. But fenianism had ceased to be a bogey to the farmers when, in 1867, it lost its credibility as an agent of violent revolution. In fact, the fenian prisoners had long since come to symbolize the frustrated ambitions of the entire

65 R. Pigott, Personal recollections of an Irish national journalist (2nd ed., Dublin and London, 1883), p. 321.

66 Irishman, 30 Oct., 27 Nov. 1869.

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Irish catholic community, including the tenant farmers. Accordingly, the choice between Rossa and Heron was a mesmerising and meaningless one for many voters, and on polling day, 25 November, almost seventy per cent of them remained at home.⁶⁷

The election is described by Thornley as, 'an unmistakable struggle for predominance between the fenian-amnesty and Liberal-land reform parties'.⁶⁸ However, it was seen as such only by a few activists on either side and by outsiders; for most people in Tipperary, and throughout the country, there simply was no conflict between amnesty and tenant-right. Under the circumstances the fact that Rossa obtained a small majority (103) of the 2,171 votes cast was of no outstanding significance.⁶⁹ Or at least it did not signify the upsurge of support for fenian revolutionism that English politicians and leader writers discerned at the time. The complexity of the situation escaped the comprehension of many contemporaries and indeed of many

67 The number of registered electors stood at 9388 in 1862 and 9507 in 1871 (B. M. Walker, 'The Irish electorate, 1868-1915', in I.H.S., xviii, no. 71 (Mar. 1973), pp 376, 380.

68 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 72-3.

69 Thom's Irish almanac, and official directory of the United Kingdom, 1871 (Dublin, 1871), p. 997.

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subsequent commentators.⁷⁰ Ironically, although Butt had not encouraged Rossa's candidature, the election did much to advance his objectives by hardening British opinion against a far-reaching land bill.⁷¹ Another important result of the episode may have been to give certain fenians among the amnesty activists a taste for parliamentary electioneering. After Rossa had been declared incapable, as an unpardoned felon, of membership of parliament,⁷² another by-election was necessary. On this occasion Heron was opposed by C. J. Kickham, who was nominated without his consent. In a somewhat larger poll, Heron was victorious by a margin of four votes.⁷³

While Butt dragged his feet - with a purpose - on tenant-right agitation, Gray was pressing ahead with a positive campaign. Its climax was the land conference held in Dublin on 2 and 3 February 1870. Virtually every prominent personage in the country who had evinced any interest in land reform was invited to attend. About fifteen M.P.s were present including The O'Donoghue and

70 Steele, Land and politics, pp 271-4 summarises various reactions.

71 Ibid.

72 Hansard 3, cxcix,^{coll} 122-52 (10 Feb. 1870).

73 1668 to 1664: Thom's Irish almanac and official directory of the United Kingdom, 1871 (Dublin, 1871), p. 997.

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J. F. Maguire.⁷⁴ G. H. Moore absented himself on the pretext that the conference was in some way offensive to his patriotic sensibilities;⁷⁵ however he could have been confidently expected to find an excuse of some kind to avoid having to support an initiative launched by Gray. Butt could not afford to be that prickly unless he was willing to forfeit his place in the hearts of the tenant farmers. And as he did decide to attend, the esteem and authority which he possessed obliged Gray to give him an eminent position. Butt appears to have played a prominent part in the framing of the resolutions adopted by the conference, which demanded most extensive measures of tenant-right.⁷⁶ Thornley's opinion that Butt manoeuvred Gray by means of these resolutions into a more advanced position than Gray wished to occupy is debatable, although he supports it by the recorded view of an unsympathetic contemporary;⁷⁷ in fact Gray had two years previously committed himself to an extreme stance.⁷⁸

In the early days of February Butt was still in an awkward situation, awaiting events rather than dictating

74 Nation, 5 Feb. 1870; Steele, Land and Politics, p. 295.

75 Thornley, Isaac Butt, p. 76.

76 Ibid., p. 75.

77 Ibid., pp 76-7.

78 Steele, Land and politics, p. 71.

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them. His strategy began to yield results once Gladstone's long-promised land bill appeared on 15 February 1870. The cabinet might feel that momentous concessions had been made but the tenants' demands were well-nigh insatiable, and their hopes had been high. The disappointing contents of the bill, and the failure to obtain significant improvements, alienated the farmers and their friends from Gladstone and the Liberals. That alienation was what Butt had been hoping for. Even if they had obtained a near-perfect measure of land reform, the farmers and the catholic middle classes would inevitably have formulated demands on some other front, but they would still have relied on the Liberal party. Instead they felt obliged, by summer 1870, to look elsewhere for land reform and for anything else they might want. Butt was ready to re-direct their gaze. Agitation on specific grievances, he told them, was futile.⁷⁹ At the end of March the County Tipperary branch of the Irish Tenant League dissolved itself, with the declaration that 'nothing was left for the people but to agitate for repeal of the union'.⁸⁰ Later in the year the Cork Farmers' Club pledged its

79 Irishman, 2 Apr. 1870.

80 Nation, 2 Apr. 1870.

support for the programme of the Home Government Association.⁸¹

From 1870^{onwards} the farmers placed their hopes for tenant-right in the government of an Ireland enjoying home rule. And with the farmers no longer agitating explicitly for tenant-right, the anti-tenant section of Irish nationalists was not thereby inhibited from joining with them in political effort. One's admiration for the brilliance of Butt's home rule formula increases on inspection, from this as from many other angles.

Under the heading of land and politics, reference must be made to ribbonism, and especially to its relationship with fenianism. From contact with the sources for the history of the 1860s one gets the impression that ribbonism existed in south Ulster, north Connacht and north Leinster, extending south to Westmeath and perhaps King's County. This pattern of distribution would be difficult to establish conclusively: in 1871 the inspector-general of the Royal Irish Constabulary expressed the opinion that ribbonism existed in, at most, six counties - Meath, Westmeath, Queen's County, Roscommon, Monaghan and Mayo⁸² -,

81 Irishman, 10 Dec. 1870.

82 Report from the select committee on Westmeath &c. (unlawful combinations) together with proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence and appendix, p. 141, H.C. 1871 (147), xiii, 697 (hereafter cited as Select committee on Westmeath, 1871, xiii).

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while Dublin Castle actually had on file quite recent reports on ribbon activity from his subordinates in other counties, notably Armagh and Cavan.⁸³ Such contradictions and obscurity bedevil the study of ribbonism. Part of this elusiveness is due to the basically uncentralized structure of ribbonism and to its variation according to the different conditions of each area. Even the parliamentary select committee which in 1871 examined ribbonism in one county - Westmeath - produced little except vague generalizations in its report.⁸⁴

Ribbonism was essentially self-effacing. It can be denied the description of nationalist because it did not have explicitly nationalist objectives, but that is a shallow reason; it was non-nationalist in a deeper sense in that it did not offer its members many of the features that characterize modern nationalism and nationalist societies, such as public display, a sense of identification with something greater than the sum of its parts, belief in some kind of earthly paradise to come, and centralizing leadership. There are some indications that by the 1860s ribbonism was beginning to have imposed

83 E.g., constabulary report, Shercock, Co. Cavan, 14 Oct. 1869; constabulary report, Co. Armagh, 5 Jan. 1870 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, 'F'papers, 5056 R, 6020 R).

84 Select committee on Westmeath, pp iii-iv, 1871, xiii, p. 549.

on it a more modern style of organization, expression and leadership. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, with its ramifications among the exiles in Britain and America, provides an instance of this, although it embraced only a portion of the old ribbon societies. The examination and trial of a number of men arrested in Belfast for secret conspiracy, shortly after the Phoenix Society arrests in the south, suggest that some ribbonmen attempted to adapt their society to meet the developments of 1858.⁸⁵ Various local splits reported among the ribbonmen in subsequent years almost certainly relate to the introduction of new modes of organization, and resistance to these.⁸⁶ It is in this context of an outmoded movement ripe for expropriation by modern organizations, but often slow to accept new ways, that we must view the reaction of ribbonism to fenianism.

Michael Davitt has stated that James Stephens 'travelled through most parts of Ireland organizing his great conspiracy in 1858 and 1859 winning over the younger ribbonmen in large numbers to the national idea of

85 Irishman, 18 Dec. 1858, Nation, 22 Jan. 1859.

86 See, e.g., Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), p. 160; and resident magistrate's report, Killeshandra, 4 May 1869 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, 'F' papers, 4213 R).

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independence'.⁸⁷ That statement is unsatisfactory: Stephens did not set foot in Ireland during 1859; more relevantly, there is no evidence that he ever enjoyed any great success in recruiting ribbonmen to the I.R.B. Indeed, the areas in which fenianism was concentrated up to 1866, and in which Stephens did the great bulk of his organizational work, were mainly in the southern and eastern parts of the country where, it is generally agreed, ribbonism did not exist.⁸⁸ It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was a causal connection, and that the progress of fenianism was inhibited where it had to win the allegiance of people immersed in ribbonism. Stephens was not the man to argue patiently with people long set in their own ways of conspiracy while, in other areas, the materials for an obedient organization were waiting for the merest touch of the master's hand to put them in place.

One of the more definite conclusions of the select committee on ribbonism in Westmeath concerned the social composition of the conspiracy in that county: 'This society has adherents and supporters among the farming classes in the district, and some sympathisers amongst a

87 Davitt, Fall of feudalism, p. 75.

88 See above, p. .

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certain class of small traders in the towns, but recruits its ranks chiefly from farm servants and daily labourers.⁸⁹ This suggests more reliance on the labouring classes and less on the artisans, than was the case with fenianism. Nevertheless there would obviously be serious overlapping if the two movements were to exist independently in the one locality, so that, where ribbonism was entrenched, fenianism had to take cognizance of it.

The basically agrarian preoccupation of ribbonism has sometimes been cited as a factor which gave rise to incompatibility with fenianism, but the point needs to be clarified. In western counties where landless farm labourers were comparatively scarce the ribbon lodges may have been dominated by small landholders imbued with the typical tenant's fear of radical measures. However, the 'farm servants and daily labourers' who were apparently the major force in ribbonism in Westmeath (and no doubt in other counties) would have been quite pleased with the re-distribution of land that fenianism implicitly offered.⁹⁰ By comparison with fenians, such ribbonmen were conservative, not in what they would accept as desirable, but in what they visualized as being possible. One well-placed

⁸⁹ Select committee on Westmeath, p. iii, 1871, xiii, p. 549.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85 (printed), p. 641 (MS).

commentator noted that, in one district at least, ribbonmen 'thinking the fenians did not mean fight' would not join fenianism on any account'.⁹¹ It would be a mistake to see in this an implication that the ribbonmen were waiting eagerly for some group that did 'mean fight'. What it refers to is their inability to comprehend the idea of popular resistance ceasing to be defensive and conservative, and becoming instead aggressive and revolutionary. And it was that type of barrier rather than differences on specific points of policy - agrarian or otherwise - that interposed itself between the two movements.

Perhaps it was this barrier that John O'Leary had in mind when, in his recollections, he remarked that it was easier to make a rebel, or a fenian, of an orangeman than of a ribbonman.⁹² However, O'Leary was really tilting at the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which by the 1890s some fenians were representing as ribbonism under a change of name. At the same time, and later, they were accustomed to imply that ribbonmen and A.O.H. members suffered from some kind of doctrinal leprosy that marked them off from

⁹¹ Edward Duffy's sister in Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 160-61.

⁹² John O'Leary, Recollections of fenians and fenianism (2 vols, London, 1896), i, 111, and ii, 27.

the intellectually enlightened republicans. The truth of the matter is that the A.O.H., like fenianism, differed fundamentally from ribbonism which, again like fenianism, it merely used as raw material; and it seems likely that quite as much of primitive ribbonism was channelled into fenianism as into hibernianism. And antagonism between the I.R.B. and the A.O.H. was perhaps due as much to straightforward rivalry for membership as to ideological differences. These are put in perspective by a reading of Denieffe's recollection that, early in 1858, while collecting money in New York to launch the I.R.B., John O'Mahony, Michael Corcoran and himself were initiated into the A.O.H.⁹³

The gradual process of the absorption of ribbonism by the I.R.B. was effectively launched by Edward Duffy, a native of Ballaghaderin, County Mayo. He was one of that group of enthusiastic commercial apprentices introduced to the I.R.B. by Luby in Dublin in 1860, with incalculable consequences for fenianism (and indeed for Irish political history in general).⁹⁴ Returning to his native area in 1861, he set about swearing in fenians. Because so many of the likely candidates were ribbonmen,

93 Denieffe, I.R.B., p. 22.

94 See above, ch. 4.

progress was slow and had to be made in the face of physical threats. Yet, progress there was, in Counties Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon and Leitrim, and eventually James Stephens felt obliged to grant it recognition. He gave Duffy responsibility for organizing the I.R.B. throughout Connacht and also in Counties Cavan, Longford and Westmeath. This amounted to an admission that Duffy was the master of fenian proselytism among the ribbonmen. In the autumn of 1863 Stephens induced Duffy to give up his employment and devote himself in a wholetime capacity to his I.R.B. work.⁹⁵ One of the consequences was that Duffy was rendered dependent on central funds for his support, and so was bound to Stephens; that in itself was an indication of his importance. Stephens did accompany Duffy on an organizing tour in the west in 1864, but he never assumed there the role that he had in the I.R.B. in Munster and Leinster.⁹⁶ Stephens never dealt directly with the centres in Duffy's territory, but made all contact through Duffy himself. O'Donovan Rossa, who toured with Duffy in 1865, and perhaps also in 1864, seems to have found dialogue with the ribbonmen-turned-fenians

95 Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), pp 160-61.

96 Ibid. . . .

more congenial than Stephens did.⁹⁷

In the closing years of our period the dissolution of ribbonism and the re-channelling of its vital forces continued apace. The signs of this included the emergence of 'fenian ribbonmen', clashes in some places between pro- and anti-fenian ribbonmen, trouble elsewhere between fenians and ribbonmen.⁹⁸ The significant results of this process are suggested by John Devoy's revelation that in 1879 Cavan and Mayo were two of the leading fenian counties, having between them almost twenty per cent of the membership of the I.R.B.⁹⁹ Only the historian of the land war can tease out the ultimate consequences of the work begun by Edward Duffy in 1861.

97 Irish Republic (Chicago), 22 Feb. 1868 quoted in Breifne, iii, no. 10 (1967), p. 161; Seán Ó Lúing, Ó Donnabháin Rosa I (Dublin, 1969), pp 180, 206-10.

98 See Select committee on Westmeath, p. 9, 1871, xiii, p. 565; constabulary report, Co. Armagh, 6 Oct. 1869 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, 'F' papers, 4690 R); police report, 18 Sept. 1869 (S.P.O., Police and crime records, 'F' papers, 4593 R; Breandan Mac Giolla Choille, 'Fenians, Rice and ribbonmen in Co. Monaghan, 1864-7' in Clogher Record, vi, no. 2 (1967), pp 226-7.

99 Devoy, Recollections, pp 33, 234.

CHAPTER THIRTEENSURVEY OF A DEVELOPING NATIONALISM, ITS STRENGTHS
AND WEAKNESSES, 1858-70

Nationalism was a well-established feature of Irish political and social life by 1858. To decide when this state of affairs had first come about would involve us in an elucidation of data that are obviously outside the limits of the present work, and it could also entangle us in that most contentious of questions, the definition of nationalism. It will suffice here to say that Irish nationalism (on any ^{reasonable} interpretation of the term) was self-evidently on the move in the early 1840s, and found impressive expression in the repeal agitation of those years.

Not surprisingly, the upheaval of the great famine served ultimately to promote national consciousness, not simply because it constituted a grievance that could be exploited by nationalist propagandists, but also because it hastened many of the social and economic changes that are conducive to the spread and intensification of national feeling. The consciousness of Irish catholics that they constituted a national community with grievances that could best be satisfied by self-government did not evaporate

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in the 1850s. If it appeared to diminish by comparison with the years immediately preceding the famine, that was merely because circumstances were unfavourable for its display.

The international political and diplomatic situation in 1858 and the years immediately following encouraged a re-assertion of nationalist attitudes and the resumption of an unequivocally nationalist posture. This could not be expressed through parliamentary politics, partly because parliamentary representation was still an inadequate reflection of popular feeling, but even more so because these were years of immobility in party politics, in which popular pressures, English or Irish, produced few parliamentary results. In the early 1840s O'Connell had supplemented the deficiency of parliamentary politics by a campaign of extra-parliamentary, popular agitation. Divisions within the popular party, or rather the lack of leadership capable of overcoming division, negated the strenuous efforts that were made in the early 'sixties to establish a successor to the Repeal Association. Nobody did more to frustrate that development than James Stephens. And when the fenian movement reached its zenith in the middle 'sixties it effectively stifled all political activity on the part of that great majority of Irish nationalists for

whom the I.R.B. had nothing to offer.

From the middle of 1867 onwards, popular nationalism re-emerged, with a hitherto unprecedented vigour and enthusiasm, to be channelled in time into the pro-Gladstone electoral effort of 1868, the amnesty campaign of 1869, and the home rule movement of 1870 and subsequent years. Because it emerged in the wake of fenianism, and because it interested itself spontaneously in the fortunes of fenian prisoners, this new wave of nationalism might seem to owe its origin and strength to fenianism, indeed to be a continuation thereof.

To take that view is to risk committing the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc, and to overlook the wider context of these events. Fenianism had in fact delayed the new upsurge of nationalist expression, which can be properly understood only as part of that wave of demand for popular reforms that was sweeping through the United Kingdom. There is about British politics of the period 1866-8 a sense of the people coming into their own, of a fundamental acknowledgment by the institutions of government of the popular will, and a consequent movement of popular feeling towards closer identification with these institutions. The Irish equivalent of all this was an intensification of the hopes and loyalties that constitute

nationalism.

The new intensity of Irish nationalism in the last years of the decade must be adverted to, even though it is something very difficult to quantify. It is the type of development that is best explained by an illustration. We take one provided by an aspect of the mock funeral procession held in Dublin on 8 December 1867 in honour of the Manchester martyrs. The reporter of the Freeman's Journal on the occasion was fully in sympathy with the demonstration, but he was taken aback by the participation of children. The 30,000 marchers included a couple of thousand 'of tender age and innocent of opinions on any subject'. The city had seen many demonstrations during the decade, but there had not been anything quite like this in any 'previous displays of popular strenght'.¹ Earnestness, he reflected, must have been strong in the minds of parents who directed a son or daughter to walk in saturating rain and painful cold through 'five or six miles of mud and water'. It was, he remarked sardonically, and perceptively, 'national education with a vengeance'.² What he had witnessed was evidence of a new and more

1 Freeman's Journal, 9 Dec. 1867.

2 Ibid.

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virulent stage of nationalism.

Nothing encourages nationalism more than some initial successes in changing the state or society to meet the requirements of the popular will. The disestablishment of the Irish state church is a case in point. The purely economic, social and material changes involved made comparatively little difference to the catholic population at large; the really important achievement was the implicit recognition by the government that Irish institutions should be determined upon by majority Irish wishes. That principle having been admitted in one major instance, the Irish knew that ultimately they could, and would, have their own way. The apparent disdain of doctrinaire nationalists for disestablishment should not be allowed to obscure the immense importance of the Irish church act of 1869 for Irish nationality.

If democratic Irish opinion was going to prevail, then there would be a decisive change in the laws governing ownership and tenure of land. The certainty that this would come to pass, and specifically that the tenant farmers would obtain a secure and untrammelled hold on their lands, entered Irish political life in the second half of the 1860s, and had the most profound implications. Popular mythology and propaganda easily linked this with

the question of nationhood by depicting a past in which the same alien agency had suppressed Irish nationality, and at one and the same time dispossessed 'the Irish', that is, the supposed lineal ancestors of the nineteenth-century tenantry. Even Gladstone came to subscribe to a modified version of this myth when he decided that the tenants' demands were explicable - and justified - as the historical residue of a communal interest in the tribal lands under the celtic system.³ In reality the farmers were making their demands precisely because they were abandoning traditional attitudes and following the rest of Western Europe into the modern world of economic individualism.

The tenants' fight against landlordism was part not of a centuries-old struggle against invaders but of the revolt against established privilege and ascendancy (especially when they pinched economically) that was characteristic of the emerging modern society, and of modern nationalism. Because they were different in so many respects, British and Irish society were affected differently by this revolt. English tenant farmers might have their grievances, but their complaints counted for

3 Steele, Land and politics, pp 252-3.

little in the most industrialised country in the world, whereas in post-famine Ireland the farmers could not be ignored. Tenant-right was in Ireland what free trade was in England - the catch-cry of the emerging leading class in society, and the apparent guarantee of its economic security. Fenianism, too, was a manifestation of nationalism associated with modernising trends in society. Its greatest appeal was the sense of fellowship that it offered to young men of certain classes who were rejecting traditional social controls.

Despite the evidence of their growing attachment to nationalism during the period, there is no reason to believe that Irishmen in the 1860s were in general very concerned with the principles of nationality or with any of the large questions of theory arising from their allegiance. Such matters were left to a small number of enthusiasts. Not surprisingly, most of these were products of the Young Ireland movement, and they had little to say that had not been said more eloquently in the period 1842-8. They were mostly to be found involved in, or closely associated with, the nationalist weeklies: the Sullivans at the Nation; Denis Holland, P. J. Smyth, J. E. Pigot and others in the pages of the Irishman; and John O'Leary, T. C. Luby and C. J. Kickham of the Irish People. Not

directly involved in the press, but making noteworthy contributions by letters and other communications to the newspapers, were individuals such as Smith O'Brien, John Martin, John Mitchel, Dean O'Brien and Fr John Kenyon. Statements of doctrine and policy can also be recovered from their extant correspondence.

Virtually the only point on which all of these ideologists were agreed was that Ireland should have self-government. 'The less you harp on repeal the better - stick to self-government in general and let it shape itself.' So Kenyon advised John Martin in 1864, acknowledging the absence of consensus.⁴ Like Martin, A. M. Sullivan and Smith O'Brien were still attracted to the repeal idea, although both were reconciled to the fact that its chances of meeting the needs of the situation were limited.⁵ Many who were willing to accept the main point of the repeal formula - a link with Britain through the crown - were anxious to point out that a revival of all the features of the 1782 constitution would not be desirable. It would not be enough to have an Irish

4 Kenyon to Martin, 16 Feb. 1864 (N.L.I., Hickey papers, MS 3226).

5 Sullivan to O'Brien, 14 Aug. 1860 (N.L.I., W. S. O'Brien papers, MS 447); O'Brien to Edmund Hayes, 22 Oct. 1863 (N.L.I., Hickey papers, MS 3226).

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legislature, J. E. Pigot insisted, writing in 1860: there would also have to be an Irish executive, so ridding the country of English officials. But this would not preclude a continuing connection with England.⁶ An article in the same paper two years earlier on 'the destiny of Ireland' visualised the maintenance by a self-governing Ireland of an amicable arrangement with England, if an English minister should have sense enough to make one before 'an inevitable finale'. That, the writer suggested, would seem to most of his readers to be the most likely culmination, and to some of them it would also seem the most desirable.⁷

Of course there were those who insisted on total separation.⁸ In 1861 another contributor to the Irishman decreed that true nationality meant believing that Ireland was entitled to be - 'as God intended' - a free, sovereign and independent nation. Repeal of the union, he declared, was not nationality.⁹ The Irish People held consistently to the separatist line. Most comment-

6 Irishman, 22 Sept. 1860.

7 Irishman, 25 Sept. 1858.

8 See Irishman, 22 Aug. 1863.

9 Irishman, 28 Dec. 1861.

ators, including those in the Irish People, presumed that the relationship of a self-governing Ireland with Britain would be determined by the means used to obtain freedom, and that the more violent these means, the more severe would be the rupture.¹⁰ On this principle many people who would be quite happy to retain constitutional links with the larger island were nevertheless prepared to accept that in fact such links would not remain.

Those who desired or expected separation did not unanimously assume that this would mean the establishment of a republic. Republics were rather out of fashion in Europe for much of the nineteenth century: the Belgians and the Greeks on coming to independence had found for themselves foreign princes to rule over them as constitutional monarchs. Not surprisingly, a few of the handful of Irishmen who were interested in constitutions and such things, saw the possibilities of this for Ireland. A leader-writer in the Irishman in April 1860 speculated on the likely outcome of an Irish plebiscite along the lines of those that had taken place in northern and central Italy. He predicted an overwhelming vote for a native parliament; following that, some would vote for the English connection

10 See, e.g., Irishman, 13 Aug. 1864.

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to continue, but a great many would opt for 'entire independence under an Irish monarch with a French tongue, descendant of him who fought at Clontarf'.¹¹ The man in question, of course, was Marshal MacMahon. The contemporary MacMahon sword movement had implications of this in the minds of some of the organizers, though it is fair to assume that most of those who subscribed to it were thinking in traditional terms of seeking succour from the French and the 'wild geese', without making any sophisticated constitutional commitments or insinuations.

If doctrinaire constitutional monarchists were not numerous, neither were doctrinaire republicans. Of course the fenians were sworn to serve an Irish republic. Even among the fenians, however, only a small number appear to have felt any allegiance to the European republican tradition, with its strong anti-religious bias; they included Stephens, Luby and probably some of the young men who were prominent supporters of the supreme council in its early years. (This does not take from the undoubted fact of the debt owed by the I.R.B. to some aspects of continental republicanism) American republicanism was another matter. The differences were occasionally pointed out, as for example, in an Irishman leader

11 Irishman, 28 Apr. 1860.

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on 'The Roman Republic of 1849', which denounced the 'anti-property', 'anti-liberty' and 'anti-clerical' policies of Mazzinianism.¹² By and large, the republicanism that attracted rank and file fenians was of the un-doctrinaire, American variety, which, among its other advantages, did not do any violence to their religious beliefs, and was seen primarily as a system under which a man, whatever his origins, need not kotow to superiors.

It would, however, be a travesty of the truth to pretend that the generality of fenians had clear and firmly-held views on forms of government and were intellectually convinced republicans, in either the continental or American moulds. And, accordingly, it would be a mistake to think that candidates for I.R.B. membership were required to appreciate political theory before being allowed to swear allegiance to the republic. Nor did the Irish People do very much to elucidate the principles and meaning of republicanism. From its infrequent references to the subject there emerges the impression that republicanism is equated with government by law, as opposed to despotism (and so is not distinguished from constitutional monarchy). One contribution, at least,

12 Irishman, 23 Aug. 1862.

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has the logical implication that Ireland in 1865 could not be described as a republic, but only for the reason that its laws were undemocratic; it does not make any reference to the constitutional situation which to us makes the very question seem ludicrous.¹³

Perhaps the last word on forms of government should be left to John Mitchel, who is commonly regarded as one of the patriarchs of the Irish republican tradition, and who entered into regular discussion of Irish national affairs during his stay in Paris, 1859-62, usually through the pages of the Irishman. Commenting on one of the many long-winded discussion documents penned by his friend, John Martin, he had this to say:-

He enters into the question of the best form of government - monarchical or republican, British sovereign, or some other sovereign, or no sovereign. In all of this I take small interest, and cannot well see its relevancy. I care nothing for forms of government. Any national, and no alien government is what Ireland needs; and for the present and for many years to come, what I desiderate is a strong military rule - no 'freedom of the press', no free trade, but an inexorable conscription and universal drill, no habeas corpus and much drum-head.¹⁴

In an earlier chapter we looked at the attitudes of various individuals and groups to the use of physical

13 Irish People, 28 Jan. 1865; see also Irish People, 18 Mar., 10 June 1865.

14 Irishman, 1 Dec. 1860.

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force, and we will now consider some manifestations of that glorification of violence (over and above advocacy of its use) which is a typical feature of nationalist rhetoric. James Stephens is on record citing the beneficial results of struggle: 'The very best thing for a people, after liberty, is the struggle for it. Nay, the struggle, when an earnest one, purifies and ennobles a people more than liberty till a people knows how to use it.'¹⁵ Parliamentary agitation, the Irish People argued, should be shunned not only because it was incapable of producing results but also because it was demoralising. 'Even if it could win independence, independence so won would do no good; for freedom, to do good, must be gained with difficulty and by heroic sacrifice, in the face of perils and death.'¹⁶ On another occasion the same organ found fault with the political advances achieved by Irishmen in 1782 and 1829, on the grounds that war was averted on both occasions and that consequently 'the people were not ennobled by sacrifices and by heroic deaths'.¹⁷ However, like many

15 Stephens to his wife, 24 June 1864 (N.L.I., Stephens papers, MS 10491).

16 Irish People, 30 Jan. 1864.

17 Irish People, 28 Nov. 1863.

other attitudes and policies which we now associate with the fenians, the cult of violence was not something that they, or their newspaper, had a monopoly of in the 1860s.

The Nation, in one of its frequent meditations on nationalism declared that 'blood beautifies it'.¹⁸ The Irishman eulogised blood as the fertiliser of nationality.¹⁹ An outside contributor to the same paper declared that 'blood is the best rain to make an opinion grow'. That was said in the course of an essay entitled 'The utility of martyrs'; five hundred of those, it was reckoned, would be the quota required to gain Irish independence.²⁰ Less imaginative, but even more ominous, was the message of another contributor some weeks later, giving details of how a guerilla war might be fought in Ireland, and insisting that 'in such a war every act is lawful'.²¹

The use of religious imagery in nationalist rhetoric can also be noticed in this period, but not to any remarkable extent. At least in this area the, Irish People generally lived up to the promise of its first issue which

18 Nation, 14 Dec. 1861.

19 Irishman, 7 July 1860.

20 Irishman, 4 Aug. 1860.

21 Irishman, 18 Aug. 1860.

renounced exaggerated and bombastic terminology.²² The Irishman, which was not guided by any comparable canons of good taste, spoke, in the last issue of its second volume, of its 'holy faith' concerning 'the resurrection of Ireland and the salvation of its millions'.²³ It was a form of rhetoric not resorted to frequently even by the Irishman, but which recurred from time to time in that journal, notably at eastertime 1870, in a leading article under the title of 'The easter of the Irish nation'. This, having made reference to the penitential period of lent, and having quoted St Paul, concluded as follows:

Nor will fears or hesitation beset the onward path of the Irish people; they, who have passed through so many trials, who have been victors over so many miseries, shall not doubt, but shall behold the stone rolled back from the sepulchre and the white-robed messenger of heaven announcing the easter of the Irish nation.²⁴

The concept of abstentionism was frequently aired during the 1860s. It was strongly advocated by John Mitchel, who represented it on some occasions as a serious and practical line of policy and at other times as an

22 Irish People, 28 Nov. 1863.

23 Irishman, 7 July 1860.

24 Irishman, 16 Apr. 1870.

act of defiant iconoclasm.²⁵ It was in the latter mood that he himself was to stand as candidate in County Tipperary in the mid-1870s, and at least as early as 1861 he was suggesting the idea of having himself (who could not and would not take a seat) nominated for parliament. If you want to use your franchise to effect, he told Irish voters in April of that year, you should return me and T. F. Meagher for a dozen constituencies at once; that 'would be legal, peaceful, anti-parliamentary and unconstitutional, so that I cannot see how any reasonable objection is to be raised against it'.²⁶ Others who publicly supported an abstentionist policy included John Martin,²⁷ P. J. Smyth²⁸ and various contributors to the Irishman.²⁹

A number of other ideas which, like that of abstentionism, had occurred earlier and were to recur later with stronger reverberations, can be found in the *day-to-day*

25 See Irishman, 15 Dec. 1860, 6 Apr. 1861, 15 Feb. 1862, and ch.5 above.

26 Irishman, 6 Apr. 1861.

27 Nation, 26 Dec. 1863.

28 Irishman, 13 Apr. 1861.

29 See, e.g., Irishman, 18 Feb. 1865, 29 Feb. 1868.

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political literature of the 1860s. Among them was the notion that Hungary's relationship with Austria in some way provided a headline for Ireland's relationship with Britain. Just what this headline was supposed to be at any particular time depended on the prejudices of the commentator of the moment, and on his knowledge (or ignorance) of Austro-Hungarian affairs.³⁰ Again, the idea that a nation should and could be liberated while relying exclusively on its own moral resources was occasionally argued, at least once in a leading article that included in its title the phrase 'sinn fein'.³¹

During the 1860s almost the only Irish nationalist to publish comprehensive and detailed plans for the self-government of Ireland was J. E. Pigot. Not least because of its uniqueness, his pamphlet On the future of Ireland and on its capacity to exist as an independent state; by a silent politician, published in Dublin in 1862,³² deserves some recognition. Its main feature is a 'plan

30 See, e.g., Irish People, 10 Sept. 1864, 11 Dec. 1865, Nation, 28 Apr., 27 Oct. 1860, 30 Dec. 1865, Irishman, 28 Apr. 1860, 31 Aug. 1861, 1 Dec. 1866, 13 July 1867, 4 Apr. 1868.

31 Irishman, 29 Oct. 1859; see also Irish People, 24 Sept. 1864.

32 Serialised in Irishman, 11 Apr. - 16 May 1863.

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of a constitution for the state of Ireland'.³³ This envisages a head of state (who might be either a life-president or a king) presiding over a system of administration owing much to the American constitution and even more to the Napoleonic system, and very little to British precedents. The country would be divided into nine provinces, and further into departments, cantons, and communes; Dublin city would be merely a provincial capital, while the new metropolis and seat of executive power would be Limerick city. While Pigot's work might be dismissed as the scribbling of an under-employed faddist, it is only just to point out that he considered in some detail the practical working of his proposals,³⁴ and that he was even specific on financial matters, providing summary estimates for the government as a whole and even for some individual departments.³⁵

An important extraneous reason for referring to Pigot's pamphlet is the fact that it has been represented as the work of James Stephens, notably in Rutherford's

33 Op. cit., pp 1-16.

34 Op. cit., pp 17-44.

35 Op. cit., pp x, 28, 36.

history of fenianism.³⁶ The true authorship was established in an item in the Irishman, written as part of the flood of comment that followed the appearance of Rutherford's volumes.³⁷

A less detailed though vastly more important plan for Ireland's constitutional future appeared in 1870 with the publication of Isaac Butt's pamphlet on home rule and federalism.³⁸ The term 'home rule' had been used occasionally during the 1860s but only as a synonym for 'self-government'.³⁹ Butt's ideas on federalism derived not from the Irish political debates of the 'sixties, but from those of the 'forties. His formula was aimed at achieving a compromise not between the disputing theoreticians of traditional nationalism but between traditional nationalists and those traditionally unionist

36 John Rutherford, The secret history of the fenian conspiracy, its origin, objects and ramifications (London, 2 vols, 1877), p. 290; Hereward Senior is among those misled (see H. Senior, 'The place of fenianism in the Irish republican tradition' in Maurice Harmon (ed.), Fenians and fenianism: centenary essays (Dublin, 1968), p. 64).

37 Irishman, 17 Nov. 1877.

38 Isaac Butt, Irish federalism: its meaning, its object and its hopes (Dublin and London, 1870).

39 See, e.g., Nation, 1 Sept. 1860, Irishman, 8 Dec. 1860.

and conservative in outlook. The fact that his formula was accepted quickly and uncritically by the nationalist community (notwithstanding reservations on the part of a few ideologists such as P. J. Smyth and John Martin)⁴⁰ prompts the making of two observations. Firstly, Irish public opinion in 1870 had very little concern with abstract questions about forms of government. Secondly, despite the new level of intensity reached by Irish nationalist feeling, there was no indication that it inevitably demanded independent Irish statehood.

If the seething masses of Irish nationality were uninterested in the question of what constitutional options might accommodate their ambitions, they were almost totally indifferent to what is usually referred to as cultural nationalism. That was the preserve of a few enthusiasts. Insofar as popular nationalism needs a 'cultural' cement that was probably supplied in the Irish case by the catholic religion rather than by any manifestation of what is normally referred to as culture, in the narrow sense. The most common form of cultural nationalism - the cultivation of a distinctive national language - could have little appeal in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, for the reason that the social and economic changes making

40 Thornley, Isaac Butt, pp 103-6.

possible the growth of nationalism were in turn made possible only by the widespread abandonment of Gaelic in favour of English.

Nevertheless, doctrinaire nationalists felt the need for a national language. The Society for the Promotion and Cultivation of the Irish Language was formed in Dublin in the summer of 1858;⁴¹ there is no definite evidence to link it with the contemporary heightening of political interest, though it is tempting to postulate a connection. The achievements of the society were modest indeed, but some aspects of its story are significant. It provided a course of lessons in Irish in its rooms in Middle Abbey Street, beginning on 10 August 1858. A few months later twenty-seven students were reported to be attending regularly.⁴² Its early admissions included John Devoy and a number of other young men who were to become prominent I.R.B. members in Dublin. Devoy recalled that the society was unable to keep up the payments for the rent of its premises and was enabled to continue its work due to the help of A. M. Sullivan, who made a room available at the offices of the

41 Irishman, 13 July 1858, Nation, 21 Aug. 1858.

42 Irishman, 31 July, 13 Nov. 1858.

Nation.⁴³ Because of being on Sullivan's premises the Gaelic class became involved in the launching of the national petition; and despite the location, a number of the students were inducted into the I.R.B. in their classroom early in 1861.

A. M. Sullivan's interest is especially interesting in view of the fact that, according to Devoy, he knew not a word of Irish.⁴⁵ Yet he affirmed the duty of a nation not to lose its language, called for efforts to stem the decline of Irish and deplored the record of national and convent schools in this regard.⁴⁶ Early in 1858 he secured for the Nation a fount of Irish type - something it had not possessed for ten years - and began a regular weekly 'Gaelic department'.⁴⁷ Sullivan appears to have been regarded as a patron by the Belfast branch of the Society for the Cultivation and Promotion of the Irish Language.⁴⁸ The sources, scanty as they are, suggest

43 Irish Freedom, Mar. 1913.

44 Ibid.

45 Devoy, Recollections, p. 264.

46 Nation, 20 Mar. 1858, 1 Sept. 1860.

47 Nation, 20 Mar., 3 Apr. 1858.

48 Nation, 1 Sept. 1860.

that the Belfast branch assumed a much more vigorous life than the Dublin original.⁴⁹ In December 1858 it published an address to the young men of Ulster, that, in its denunciations of 'West Britons', matches anything produced in later decades.⁵⁰

Smith O'Brien, in his rigorous application of the principles of romantic nationalism to the Irish situation, became in his turn, and rather late in life, an Irish language enthusiast. Some months before his death he was engaged in diligent study with the objective of attaining 'the honoured title of Gaelic scholar'.⁵¹ At the same time he was encouraging the use of Irish in a number of primary schools. Meanwhile, Dean O'Brien, founder of the C.Y.M.S., was following the same logic. At the annual conference of the society's branch officers held in Drogheda on 26 May 1861 he advocated in the strongest fashion that they should establish Irish classes wherever possible and promote the study of the language by C.Y.M.S. members.⁵²

49 Ibid.; Irishman, 18 Dec. 1858, 19 Jan. 1861.

50 Irishman, 18 Dec. 1858.

51 Irishman, 2 Jan. 1864.

52 Irishman, 1 June 1861.

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The mid-nineteenth century witnessed much literary and intellectual activity in English which was specifically and self-consciously Irish, but which was divorced from political nationalism and accordingly did not take on the character of cultural nationalism. One element in the explanation of this is the fact that the opportunities, and the inclination, for learned and artistic activity were still confined largely to classes which did not share the political views of the majority. (Parnassus was perhaps the stronghold that the catholic middle classes were least interested in storming). However, even many of the literary-minded exponents of nationalism did not, at least in the 1860s, see any vital connection between literature and nationalism. Knocknagow, the writing of which began in 1869, is concrete evidence of this, and very striking evidence in view of its authorship. It is in many ways a self-consciously Irish work, but it is totally lacking in the spirit of 'national literature' as that was understood by, for example, the Irish literary movement at the end of the century.

Despite the fact that he was lionized by that later movement, O'Leary's ideas on cultural nationalism in the 'sixties seem to have been much like Kickham's. An article in the Irish People, written perhaps by Luby,

but which in any case had to have O'Leary's editorial seal, dismissed as fools those young men who dreamt of an Irish national literature and schools of Irish art, though it acknowledged, patronisingly, that they were generally well-intentioned and amiable. What was perhaps the most active group of such people in the Ireland of the time was singled out for a particular jibe: 'A branch of these specially cultivate archaeology as an infallible means of national rejuvenescence.'⁵³ The writer's precise point was that such intellectual activities while unobjectionable in themselves should not be allowed to distract attention from the far more important business of winning independence, after which, like all good things, they would flourish. But no devotee of cultural nationalism would adopt that attitude.

Whatever its deficiencies on the theoretic and cultural front, Irish nationalism in 1870 was a formidable political and social phenomenon. It summed up the demands of a self-conscious community of people, constituting a clear national majority (and capable of political action on the most up-to-date lines) that their country should be governed in their interests and in accordance with their wishes. Those were demands that

53 Irish People, 19 Dec. 1863.

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a liberal democratic regime could not resist indefinitely. In the meantime the adherents of Irish nationalism were supported in their self-confident beliefs by as beguiling an array of mythology as any modern nation had created to justify its existence. And the sense of belonging to an Irish nation actually in existence, and which was believed to have existed in a glorious past, gave the individual self-respect and the feeling of having a meaningful place in the world, which in turn re-inforced his loyalty to the nation.

There was, of course, one vital flaw in this imposing edifice. This self-confident national community was almost exclusively composed of catholics, and included no more than a handful of the country's one-and-a-quarter to one-and-a-half million protestants. This is scarcely the place to attempt a comprehensive assessment of Ireland's politico-sectarian divisions, which antedate 1858 by many decades and are still the centre of world attention and subject to unending analysis over a century after the end of the period we are covering. Nevertheless, a number of facets of the problem are illustrated by the events of 1858-70, and perhaps even one or two significant developments in the long story can be discerned within these years.

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From fairly extensive contact with the sources for the period one comes away with the strongest impression that the mass of Irish nationalists saw themselves as catholics recovering rights - and dignities - that had been taken from them precisely because they were catholics, and that had to be *recaptured* at the expense not just of the English, but of Irish protestants. At the same time, there was an unwritten convention that the position should not be stated baldly in so many words. Instead, those who articulated public opinion on the catholic side paid lip-service to a nationalism that was non-sectarian and that was confined to catholics only because protestants were suffering from a temporary collective blindness. Of course the convention was sometimes forgotten, especially in the heat of the moment. One of many examples that might be cited is found in the excited reaction of the Irishman to the disestablishment bill. It joyfully painted a picture of 'the majority', 'the people', setting out on a victorious struggle against 'the ascendancy', by which it clearly meant the protestants of Ireland.⁵⁴ In any case, yet another convention of political rhetoric allowed the most unrestrained denunciation and castigation of protestants simply by referring to

54 Irishman, 6 Mar. 1869.

'orangemen'.⁵⁵

However, it remained true throughout the 1860s that Irish nationalism was represented by its apologists as moving towards a political framework in which people of all religions would have a place. Even those who might express indignant frustration at the obduracy of protestants did not deviate from that principle. This concept owed its acceptance (however notional) by the catholic populace to the fact that it had been cultivated by Daniel O'Connell. It had been part of his attempt to impose a political framework on the ugly reality of his time, that of the aroused catholics of Ireland heading for violent conflict with the protestant inhabitants of the island. In the 1860s the reality was as it had been twenty years earlier, and O'Connell's utilitarian rhetoric was still struggling vainly to undo it. While the intention and content of the rhetoric was admirable in itself, it may have had the effect of leading its users to underestimate the reality.

The assertion of a non-sectarian nationalism is, of course, more usually associated with the thinking of Thomas Davis, although he can have had far less responsibility than O'Connell for whatever tolerance there was

55 See e.g., Irishman, 2 Apr., 12 Sept. 1864.

in popular attitudes. O'Connell's policies were pragmatic, Davis's were based on a theoretical ideal of the nation, similar to that promulgated by Mazzini, and which was basically secularist in the continental revolutionary tradition. Adherents of this type of nationalism made significant appearances in Irish politics in the years 1858-70, and invariably proclaimed the doctrine that nationality was independent of creed. They provided an important element in the leadership of the National Brotherhood of St. Patrick, and were one of the major causes of clerical opposition to that body. An even smaller group of them attracted much attention through the I.R.B., or, to be more accurate, the Irish People.

James Stephens, T.C. Luby and John O'Leary were all, at least in the 1860s, anti-clericals in the French sense. Their disdain for traditional religion and its prejudices comes across in the pages of the Irish People as ringing denunciation of sectarianism. There is about their denunciation a strong suggestion of the idealist ranting against the reality that refuses to conform to his platonic idea. It is tempting to hail these fenian propagandists as apostles of toleration, but before succumbing to that temptation one should bear in mind

that they were grossly intolerant and offensive in their relations with every other section of nationalists, and in their comments on any opinion not in accordance with their own.

The writings of Davis had won over a spectacular band of protestant intellectuals to the idea of Irish nationhood, but the fenians had no comparable success. They did however win the allegiance of a small number of protestants, the leading light among them probably being David Bell, a former presbyterian minister from Ballybay.⁵⁶ The indications are that the total number of protestants in the I.R.B. was a matter of dozens.⁵⁷ A few of these appear to have been former orangemen.⁵⁸

On the other hand it seems reasonable to assume that, by and large, the fenian rank and file saw themselves as a catholic body, even if the occasional protestant had had the good sense to join them. Two County Down fenians were overheard in 1865 saying that success would have been achieved in '98 only for there were 'so many damned protestants' in the rebel ranks; they did not

⁵⁶ See Thomas Bell, 'The Reverend David Bell', in Clogher Record, vi, no. 2 (1967), pp 253-76.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Irish Freedom, Feb. 1911; see also Frank Roney, Frank Roney, Irish rebel and California labour leader (Berkeley, 1931), pp 59-63.

⁵⁸ MS 331; Irishman, 10 Mar. 1866; Devoy, Recollections, pp 28, 33.

expect the same problem again.⁵⁹ Indeed there are hints from a few sources that among fenians in the south and east there were rumours current in the summer of 1865 about a 'black night', to be devoted to the massacre of protestants, and about protestants being given the choice of taking the fenian oath or facing death. The evidence for the existence of these rumours is not conclusive but neither can it be dismissed out of hand.⁶⁰

Moving away from fenianism to take a broader view, it would appear that the palpable strengthening of nationalism in the 1860s had the effect of arousing an enhanced sense of solidarity among protestants. Indeed a detailed study of the politics of Irish protestantism in this period would be of immense interest. Looked at from the outside it certainly bears the aspect of the politics of reaction. Manifestations of catholic power provoked counter-demonstrations in the protestant strongholds, especially Belfast. This occurred after the catholic university procession of 1862, and again after the O'Connell monument procession of 1864. Both of these

59 Constabulary report, Ballinahinch, Co. Down, 26 June 1865 (S.P.O., Fenian police reports 1864-5, no. 184).

60 Constabulary reports, Carrick-on-Suir, 3 Apr. 1865, Bagenalstown, 21 June 1865, Cork, 11 Sept. 1865 and Kilkenny, 16 Sept. 1865 (S.P.O., Fenian police reports 1864-5, nos 142, 183, 248 and 260).

events in Dublin gave rise to sectarian riots in Belfast, those in 1864 being particularly serious. Reaction to the commemoration ceremonies for the Manchester martyrs was particularly severe and widespread, and brought into the limelight the man who, from the outside, would appear to have been the only truly popular protestant leader of the period - William Johnston, J.P., of Ballykilbeg, who was sentenced to imprisonment on 28 February 1868 for defiance of the Party Processions Act, and elected to parliament later in the year.⁶¹

There was a widespread belief among Irish nationalist commentators that disestablishment would drive, or lead, the Irish protestants into the nationalist fold. Some initial reactions in 1869 and 1870 seemed to be bearing out that optimism. The attempt of Isaac Butt to capitalise on the development incorporated what was perhaps the most seriously-intended and realistic scheme devised in the nineteenth-century for reconciling Irish protestants to Irish nationalism. It seems fair, however, to suggest that Butt equated Irish protestantism with the Irish ascendancy. (His overtures, after all, were directed mainly towards landowners and the proprietors of conservative newspapers.) If Butt made this fundamental mistake, it is no surprise that Irish catholics did like-

⁶¹ Thom's Irish Directory, 1869, p. 166.

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wise.

If those who dissented from the popular consensus constituted the ascendancy there was nothing to be concerned about. By 1870 Irish catholics felt that they had the measure of the ascendancy, and events were to prove them right. But they made the grave error of assuming that Irish protestantism was co-terminous with the Irish ascendancy. Again, that was true over perhaps three-quarters of the country, blinding Irish catholics to the fact that in Ulster there was a protestant community of quite a different character, not of the past but anchored firmly in the modern world, consisting not just of landlords and their dependants, but including all the elements of an integral society, tenant farmers, tradesmen, professional men, businessmen, industrialists and - something virtually unknown in the south - an industrial working class. They were not on the way to oblivion.

CONTENTS

Introduction to Bibliography 437

PRIMARY SOURCES

I	All materials	<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	438
II	Published letters and papers		440
III	Contemporary newspapers and periodicals		450
IV	Tracts, sermons and other published works of contemporaries		452
V	Official publications		475
VI	Works of reference		484

SECONDARY SOURCES

VII	General histories		486
VIII	Biographical works		497
IX	Special studies		507

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction to bibliography	443
------------------------------	-----

PRIMARY SOURCES

I	MS materials	446
II	Published letters and papers	449
III	Contemporary newspapers and periodicals	450
IV	Pamphlets, memoirs and other published works of contemporaries	452
V	Official publications	455
VI	Works of reference	456

SECONDARY SOURCES

VII	General histories	456
VIII	Biographical works	457
IX	Special studies	459

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The central source of material for this thesis has been the nationalist press. In particular, the Nation and the Irishman have both been examined week by week, the former for the full thirteen year period, the latter for twelve and a half years, from its inception in July 1858 to the end of 1870. Similarly, each issue of the Irish People (November 1863 - September 1865) has been inspected. The Freeman's Journal, other Dublin papers, and various provincial journals, have been consulted on numerous points. (See section III below.)

The Nation and the Irishman both provide regular information, interpretation, and comment, on political affairs. In addition to dealing with events they also pay great attention to opinion, frequently carrying comment (as well as news) from London journals and the Irish provincial press. Similarly, they summarise, review, and frequently serialise, relevant pamphlet literature. The use of two papers with somewhat different outlooks (and which, indeed, were frequently at war with one another) adds perspective to the picture of the period. These and other newspapers are not merely witnesses to the details of the developments being explored in this

thesis, they are themselves an integral part of the story.
(See chapter six above)

Most of the period is extensively covered in the Larcom papers. (See section I below.) As recourse was being had in methodical fashion to the files of contemporary journals, dependence on Larcom's newscuttings was somewhat reduced. It was of considerable benefit to get free from the patterns imposed by the under-secretary's principles of selection. But nothing can now replace the range of the newspaper material from which he was able to draw. And, of course, much of the manuscript material is original, irreplaceable, and invaluable.

Also of considerable use, and extending over the years 1858-70, are the papers of Cardinal Cullen preserved in Dublin. (See section I below.) These are supplemented by summaries of his extensive, and often very interesting, correspondence with Tobias Kirby, rector of the Irish College, Rome, appearing in recent issues of Archivium Hibernicum. (See section II below.)

In carrying out this study there has been a deliberate concentration on Irish primary sources. However, the papers of two prime ministers - Palmerston and Gladstone - have also been utilised.

Fenianism is the aspect of the period which has generated the most obvious blocks of source material. Most (though by no means all) of the collections of manuscripts and papers in the National Library that cover this period refer to fenians or fenianism. (See section I below.) The balance is even more distorted in the records of Dublin Castle, where documentary activity was generated by external political activity in proportion to its treasonableness. Hence we have the comparative riches of the various State Paper Office collections of fenian material. (See section I below.)

Again, fenians and fenianism dominate the published memoirs of the period. (See section IV.) The various volumes of recollections have been used widely above, but with full respect being paid to the growing awareness of their unreliability on points of detail. And a deliberate effort has also been made not to let them dictate the pattern of the work.

The bibliography below is a list of those items which have been found useful in the writing of this thesis, with the addition of a few others that have been mentioned in the text or footnotes for other reasons. When more than one item from a co-operative work has been used the title of the full work, rather than the titles of individual contributions, appears in the bibliography.

I MS MATERIALS (CONTINUED)

BELFAST Part of Mayo papers

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Diary of James Stephens, 1859

DUBLIN STATE PAPER OFFICE, DUBLIN CASTLE

DUBLIN DIOCESAN ARCHIVES papers, 1853-71, 1877

Cullen papers to recorder: Fermanagh papers

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

- MSS 331-3 Recollections of Thomas Clarke Luby
- MSS 446-7 William Smith O'Brien papers
- MS 915 Report by the inspector-general of constabulary, 1863
- MSS 3041-2 Journals of William Joseph O'Neill Daunt
- MS 3226 William Hickey papers 1866-80
- MS 5018 John O'Mahony correspondence
- MSS 5964-5 Samuel Lee Anderson papers 1866-71
- MSS 7517, 7586, 7593, 7629, 7676, 7687, 7697, 7725 Sir Thomas Larcom papers
- MS 8657 William Smith O'Brien correspondence
- MS 10415 Isaac Butt papers 1844-51
- MS 10489 Alexander Martin Sullivan letters
- MS 10505 J. P. Leonard correspondence

I MS MATERIALS (CONTD.)

MSS 11187-8 Earl of Mayo papers
 MS 15714 Alexander Martin Sullivan correspondence
 MS 18026 John Devoy papers

STATE PAPER OFFICE, DUBLIN CASTLE

Chief secretary's office: Registered papers, 1863-71, 1877.

Police and crime records: Fenian papers:-

- (1) Habeas corpus suspension act: abstracts of cases, 1866-8;
- (2) Habeas corpus suspension act: index of warrants, 1866-8;
- (3) Fenianism: index of names, 1864-5;
- (4) Fenianism: index of names, 1866-80;
- (5) 'F' papers, 1866-74;
- (6) Lists of arrests and discharges, 1866-71;
- (7) Fenian crown briefs and accompanying documents, 1865-7;
- (8) Reports on secret societies, 1858-9;
- (9) Reports on fenianism, 1864-5;
- (10) 'A' files, 1864-8.

I

MS MATERIALS (CONTD.)

LONDON

BRITISH MUSEUM

Additional MSS 44411-638: Gladstone papers

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Colonial Office records: Irish Office records, 1864-6

QUALITY HOUSE (NATIONAL REGISTER OF ARCHIVES)

Broadlands MSS: Palmerston papers, 1860-5

NEW YORK

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Margaret McKim Maloney collection: O'Donovan Rossa papers
(on microfilm in National Library of Ireland)

OTTAWA

PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA

Correspondence between Timothy Daniel Sullivan and Thomas
D'Arcy McGee, 1862 (on microfilm in National
Library of Ireland)

I MS MATERIALS (CONTD.)

WASHINGTON

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(4 vols, Naas, 1961-74).

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Celt (Kilkenny)

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Evening News (Dublin)

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III

CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPERS AND

PERIODICALS (CONTD.)

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- Irishman (Belfast, later Dublin)
- Irish People (Dublin)
- Irish Times (Dublin)
- People of Ireland (Dublin)
- Kilkenny Journal
- Morning News (Dublin)
- Nation (Dublin)
- Tablet (Dublin and London)
- Times (London)
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- Tipperary Examiner (Clonmel)
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