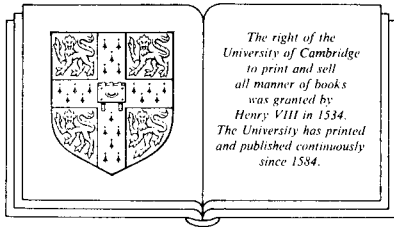


Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1987

First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland.

(Past and present publications)

Includes index.

1. Nationalism – Ireland – History. 2. Ireland –
Politics and government. 3. Ireland – History –
Autonomy and independence movements. 4. Ireland – Social
conditions. 5. National characteristics, Irish.
6. Peasant uprisings – Ireland – History. 7. Insurgency –
Ireland – History. I. Philpin, C. H. E.
DA910.N36 1987 941.508 86-18399

ISBN 0 521 26816 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 52501 2 paperback

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>page</i> vii |
| Introduction R. F. FOSTER | 1 |
| 1 The Emergence of a Nation V. G. KIERNAN | 16 |
| 2 The Formation of the Irish Mind: Religion, Politics and Gaelic Irish Literature, 1580–1750 NICHOLAS CANNY | 50 |
| 3 Presbyterianism and “Modernization” in Ulster DAVID W. MILLER | 80 |
| 4 The Potato in Ireland K. H. CONNELL | 110 |
| 5 Irish History without the Potato L. M. CULLEN | 126 |
| 6 The Houghers: Agrarian Protest in Early Eighteenth-Century Connacht S. J. CONNOLLY | 139 |
| 7 Priests, Parsons and Politics: The Rightboy Protest in County Cork, 1785–1788 MAURICE J. BRIC | 163 |

vi *Contents*

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 8 | An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793 THOMAS BARTLETT | 191 |
| 9 | Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland TOM GARVIN | 219 |
| 10 | The Ribbon Societies: Lower-Class Nationalism in Pre-Famine Ireland M. R. BEAMES | 245 |
| 11 | Rural Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: Peasant Assassinations in Tipperary, 1837–1847 M. R. BEAMES | 264 |
| 12 | Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Ireland K. THEODORE HOPPEN | 284 |
| 13 | Merchants, “Strong Farmers” and Fenians: The Post-Famine Political Élite and the Irish Land War DONALD JORDAN | 320 |
| 14 | Stopping the Hunt, 1881–1882: An Aspect of the Irish Land War L. P. CURTIS JR | 349 |
| 15 | The Geography of Irish Nationalism, 1910–1921 DAVID FITZPATRICK | 403 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 441 |

Introduction

R. F. FOSTER

The historical relationship between nationalism and popular protest in Ireland raises a number of vexed questions, not least because both involve the overarching issue of land and its ownership. Karl Marx was merely the most acute of the many nineteenth-century observers who initially inferred a clear-cut connection between these factors: “The destruction of the English landed aristocracy in Ireland is an infinitely easier operation than in England herself, because in Ireland *the land question* has hitherto been the *exclusive form* of the social question, because it is a question of existence, of *life and death*, for the immense majority of the Irish people, and because it is at the same time inseparable from the *national question*”.¹ By 1881, however, his view was more equivocal: “The real intricacies of the Irish land problem – which indeed are not especially Irish – are so great that the only true way to solve it would be to give the Irish Home Rule and thus force them to solve it themselves. But John Bull is too stupid to understand this”.² Both Marx and Engels, in fact, were increasingly driven to laying heavy emphasis on “Irish character” as an explanation for the peculiarities of Irish history;³ in this they followed those contemporary commentators upon popular disturbances like George Cornwall Lewis, whose sophisticated attempts to provide an overall analysis tend invariably to break down in the face of local variety and paradox.⁴

¹ Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, 9 Apr. 1870, in Marx and Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question* (Moscow and London, 1971), p. 293. The contemporary Irish analysis which is most striking is, of course, that of James Fintan Lalor.

² Marx to Jenny Longuet, 29 Apr. 1881, *ibid.*, p. 331.

³ See I. Cummins, *Marx, Engels and National Movements* (London, 1980), p. 109.

⁴ See, again, Engels to Eduard Bernstein, 26 June 1882, in Marx and Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, p. 334: “The names Ribbonmen, Whiteboys, Captain Rock, Captain Moonlight, etc., have changed, but the form of resistance – the shooting not only of hated landlords and agents (rent collectors of the landlords)

Moreover the answers which were not provided by the simple version of nineteenth-century historical materialism were not supplied by the determinism of twentieth-century nationalism either. A rehearsal of the rights and wrongs of eight hundred years of struggle did little to explain the formation of reactionary local mentalities, the paradoxical nature of the targets chosen by agrarian secret societies, the striking discontinuities between varieties of "nationalism" from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the divisions and antagonisms within the farming classes, the particularism of Ulster's development, and the erratic performance of the Irish economy as a whole and the landlord sector in particular. Such a list catalogues many of the questions which recent Irish historiography has addressed;⁵ and this collection brings together an important selection of pieces which do much to chart the process.

In so doing, the authors have contributed to an exercise in self-examination which has engaged Irish historians for the last thirty-odd years.⁶ While this is a phenomenon with considerable political implications, much of the impetus behind it lay in the perceived inadequacy of Irish social and economic historiography written in a nationalist mould. Work like that of Alice Murray and George O'Brien,⁷ admirably pioneering in its day, was confined in

but also of peasants who take over a farm from which another has been forcibly evicted, boycotting, threatening letters, night raids and intimidation, etc. – all this is as old as the present English landownership in Ireland, that is, dates back to the end of the 17th century at the latest. This form of resistance cannot be suppressed, force is useless against it, and it will disappear only with the causes responsible for it. But, as regards its nature, it is *local, isolated*, and can never become a general form of *political struggle*". George Cornewall Lewis's classic *On Local Disturbances in Ireland* (London, 1836) remains the indispensable starting-point. See M. R. Beames, "Rural Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: Peasant Assasions in Tipperary, 1837–1847", *Past and Present*, no. 81 (Nov. 1978), repr. below, pp. 264–83, for a discussion of Lewis's arguments (p. 266).

⁵ See, for instance, S. Clark and J. S. Donnelly Jr (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780–1914* (Manchester and Madison, 1983); P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: Land, Politics and People* (Cambridge, 1982); C. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 1983). Scholarly discussion of organized rural unrest was previously restricted to a collection of essays edited by T. D. Williams, *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), and scattered articles.

⁶ A process commented upon in R. F. Foster, "History and the Irish Question", *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., xxxiii (1983). For a consideration of recent work, a useful guide is J. Lee (ed.), *Irish Historiography, 1970–1979* (Cork, 1981); see also L. A. Clarkson, "The Writing of Irish Economic and Social History since 1968", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xxxiii (1980).

⁷ See A. Murray, *A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between*

a framework dictated by the concept of liberation from English dominion; and this structure proved incapable of explaining the dynamics of the Irish economy before and after the Union, as well as during it – let alone Irish demography and the shifts within Irish society. An interest in economic history, no less than any other kind, often carries some dimension of political inspiration; and if the politics of economic historiography in Britain tended to revolve round socialist pessimism versus capitalist optimism,⁸ the politics of Irish economic history were uncompromisingly nationalist. The conclusion to Tom Garvin's essay on "Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others" states that "the habit of deriving political behaviour directly from economic life has encouraged a misreading of an important phase in the development of Irish political culture".⁹ It is no less true that the habit of deriving economic generalizations from political preoccupations confused and cramped both social and economic history in Ireland until the work of the last generation of historians.

There is, of course, a case for saying that it was political events in the island since 1969 which provoked many of the most fruitful reassessments in scholarship, much as the Irish crisis of the 1880s focused the minds of Lecky, Bagwell and Froude. But reconsiderations of the nature of Irish social, economic, demographic and political history began well before Ulster reaped the whirlwind. Much of the work in this volume, in fact, indicates a responsiveness on the part of Irish historians to intellectual currents outside Ireland. The work of Louis Cullen on the comparative history of Ireland, Scotland and France comes to mind, as well as David Miller's application of modernization theory to the Ulster Presbyterian mentality; or, indeed, Theo Hoppen's meticulous "Hanhamization" of Irish provincial electorates.¹⁰ The fact that so much of the new

England and Ireland from the Period of the Restoration (London, 1903); G. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1918); G. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin, 1919); G. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (London, 1921).

⁸ See D. Cannadine, "The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution, 1880–1980", *Past and Present*, no. 103 (May 1984).

⁹ Below, p. 244.

¹⁰ See L. M. Cullen and T. C. Smout (eds.), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1977); L. M. Cullen and F. Furet (eds.), *Irlande et France, XVII^e–XX^e siècles: pour une histoire rurale comparée. Actes du premier colloque franco-irlandais d'histoire économique et*

Irish social and economic history found a forum in *Past and Present*, from the early 1960s onwards, is in itself indicative – as was the foundation and success of a new journal, *Irish Economic and Social History*, in 1974. For the connections made in much of this work, and the intellectual issues raised, are important in altering and broadening conceptual perspectives as well as uncovering evidence and supplying new interpretations.

The question of rural unrest in the early nineteenth century has been the *locus classicus* for much of this activity, and inspires a large proportion of the present collection. However, if contemporary governments often exaggerated the extent of, for instance, the Ribbon movement, subsequent commentators tended to err in the opposite direction; and it is only in comparatively recent times that historians have come to grips with the sheer extent, as well as organizational sophistication, of rural unrest before the Famine. This relative neglect may well have been due to the fact that the “nationalist” content of such movements is apparently exiguous, at least by comparison with (for instance) the far less representative uprising of 1867. Even where a nationalist analysis is evidenced among the leadership of rural protest movements at this time, the extent to which it spread to the rank and file remains dubious. The vital question of when and how popular protest developed from a local, “reactive” basis, into the directly nationalist “associational” organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lies behind many of the investigations collected here. They also provide some strong arguments for a high degree of autonomous organizational ability among rural classes in Ireland before and after the Famine – notwithstanding the histrionic dimension of millenarian rhetoric that often accompanied such activity.¹¹ (That dimension may, indeed, have helped conceal objective differences of interest between those temporarily allied for agrarian protest, as well as sharpening the sectarian edge of the conflict.)

Even more basic, perhaps, is the question of the Irish agricultural economy, the population it supported, and the food they ate. This

sociale, Dublin, 1977 (Paris, 1980); L. M. Cullen and P. Butel (eds.), *Négoce et industrie en France et en Irlande aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Actes de colloque franco-irlandais d'histoire*, Bordeaux, mai 1978 (Paris, 1980).

¹¹ See J. S. Donnelly Jr, “Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821–4”, in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*; P. O’Farrell, “Millennialism, Messianism and Utopianism in Irish History”, *Anglo-Irish Studies*, ii (1976).

was territory staked out by the late K. H. Connell; his published work on the Irish population and Irish peasant society had a resonance out of all proportion to its volume, and his influence was pervasive both in teaching and research.¹² It is apposite that this collection should contain not only Connell's thoughtful essay on "The Potato in Ireland", but also a wide-ranging and questioning commentary on the issue by Louis Cullen, whose work elsewhere links diet, commercialization and demography; new ground concerning these issues continues to be opened up by the tools of quantitative methodology, allied to the literary and oral sources exploited by Connell with such flair.¹³ The question of diet alone raises issues which affect the new social history in many ways, and may spread further still. (A recent article sets a mischievous hare by pointing out that the inhabitants of Knock, County Mayo, were existing primarily on Indian meal, which induces the pellagra syndrome of group hallucinations, in the very year when they were vouchsafed their celebrated apparition of the Virgin Mary.¹⁴)

Connell's and Cullen's work explores the complex and contradictory patterns of a society and an economy which did not lend itself to easy generalizations. Other historians have presented the picture

¹² K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* (Oxford, 1950); K. H. Connell, *Irish Peasant Society* (Oxford, 1968). A full bibliography and a number of important articles in Connell's honour may be found in J. A. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson (eds.), *Irish Population, Economy and Society* (Oxford, 1981).

¹³ See also L. M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland* (London, 1981), chs. 7-8. On these issues in general, R. D. Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production: Its Volume and Structure* (Cork, 1966) contains basic material of great importance. Section I, "Demography and Diet", of Goldstrom and Clarkson (eds.), *Irish Population, Economy and Society*, includes *inter alia* an important synthesis by L. M. Cullen, "Population Growth and Diet, 1600-1800"; also see J. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (London, 1983). Important articles by P. M. Austin Bourke and Cormac Ó Gráda are listed in Lee (ed.), *Irish Historiography*, and await collection. Connell's work on Irish population history has been criticized in M. Drake, "Marriage and Population Growth in Ireland, 1750-1845", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvi (1963-4) and J. Lee, "Marriage and Population in Pre-Famine Ireland", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xxi (1968). A general critique was delivered by Ó Gráda and Mokyr to the conference on British population history in Asilomar, California, 10-13 March 1982, entitled "New Developments in Irish Population History, 1800-1850". Among much else, this cast doubt on the extent to which the potato was a necessary condition for population growth, especially in the decades before the Famine.

¹⁴ E. M. Crawford, "Indian Meal and Pellagra in Nineteenth-Century Ireland", in Goldstrom and Clarkson (eds.), *Irish Population, Economy and Society*, p. 131 n. 38.

of an Ireland whose economy divided into at least two major regions, with respect both to geography and to "modernization".¹⁵ While this has not received universal assent, it indicates the way in which Irish historians are approaching basic questions of definition. The process extends to breaking down and reassembling the components of (among much else) the very concepts of "nationalism" and "popular protest". The essays by Victor Kiernan and Nicholas Canny at the beginning of this collection, and David Fitzpatrick's at the end, take on the thorny question of what "nationalism" meant, and to whom: as well as the way that definitions of national identity were altered by their brokers, poets no less than politicians. In the course of his challenging and astringent analysis, Fitzpatrick remarks that "Although few nationalists believed that violence was at all times an appropriate means of political expression, still fewer believed that it was never so".¹⁶ This raises a question which preoccupies several other contributors: the relationship between agrarian violence and politicization. *Levels* of Irish violence, it should be constantly stressed, were low; it was the obvious anarchic intent behind such manifestations that so distressed observers. The temptation to identify rural rebellion with "primitive nationalism" is firmly eschewed by Michael Beames's work; an appreciation of fundamental changes in the agricultural economy lies behind his analysis of rural conflict in pre-Famine Ireland. In his study, questions of definition are facilitated by a densely referenced local context; a clear picture emerges where "the occupation and control of land...is the chief source of conflict",¹⁷ and victims of rural assassins may be colluding tenants as easily as enterprising landlords. (This is connected with the simple but enormously important fact that the phenomenal spurt in Ireland's population before about 1840 was concentrated at the bottom of the rural class structure; and with the fact that, given the potato economy, a forcible claim to land might be seen as essentially analogous to a "food riot".¹⁸)

¹⁵ See P. Lynch and J. Vaizey, *Guinness's Brewery in the Irish Economy, 1759-1876* (Cambridge, 1960); J. H. Johnson, "The Two 'Irelands' at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century", in N. Stephen and R. E. Glasscock (eds.), *Irish Geographical Studies in Honour of E. Estyn Evans* (Belfast, 1970); J. Lee, "The Dual Economy in Ireland, 1800-1850", in T. D. Williams (ed.), *Historical Studies*, viii (London, 1971).

¹⁶ Below, p. 405.

¹⁷ Below, p. 280.

¹⁸ Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*, introduction to Section I, "The Tradition of Violence", p. 27.

The question that recurs concerns defence of the status quo. Here as elsewhere, the simplifying perspective of nationalist historiography is being displaced, and we return, curiously, to the contemporary perception of Cornewall Lewis, who identified Whiteboy objectives as “the regulation of dealing with land, and of the employment of individuals”; or even of W. E. H. Lecky who, as Bartlett reminds us, postulated something very like a “moral economy” for eighteenth-century Ireland.¹⁹ That much-used phrase, indeed, can almost too readily be applied to the network of perceptions and assumptions which made up Irish rural society. This is as evident in L. P. Curtis’s essay on “Stopping the Hunt” in the Land War, as in the pieces by Beames, Garvin and Connolly – whose work elsewhere too has thrown new light on religion and social attitudes in pre-Famine Ireland.²⁰ In his essay on “the Houghers” in early eighteenth-century Connacht, Connolly shows agrarian rebels appealing once again to the moral assumptions of the status quo – with the arguments being presented on their behalf by their “betters” among a sector of the local gentry. A similar surprising conjunction appears in Bric’s study of the Rightboy protests seventy years later.

Many of the assumptions behind these protests were to show a tenacious continuity over the next century and a half, though the ensuing period saw a transformed agrarian class structure, and the commercialization of agriculture, leading to conflict between strong farmers and the rural poor. Until recently the historiography of the eighteenth century took little enough account of themes like these; but the work of scholars like Cullen, Connolly and David Dickson²¹ is shifting the perspective of eighteenth-century studies away from the framework of constitutional high politics and the culture of the country house, much as the researches of Marianne Elliott have altered our perceptions of the United Irish movement.²² A considera-

¹⁹ Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*, p. 238; and below, pp. 266, 216.

²⁰ S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780–1845* (Dublin, 1982).

²¹ See D. Dickson, “Taxation and Disaffection in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland”, in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*. Like much else in recent Irish historiography, Dickson’s work stems from an important doctoral thesis, as yet unpublished: D. Dickson, “An Economic History of the Cork Region in the Eighteenth Century” (University of Dublin Ph.D. thesis, 1977).

²² See M. Elliott, “The ‘Despard Conspiracy’ Reconsidered”, *Past and Present*, no. 75 (May 1977); M. Elliott, “The Origins and Transformation of Early Irish Republicanism”, *Internat. Rev. Social Hist.*, xxiii (1978); M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (London, 1982).

tion of the legitimization of violence in Irish society, the contemporary preoccupation of politicians, magistrates, travellers and social novelists alike, has formed a recurring theme in recent work on Irish social history. When this legitimizing process produces a mandate for an "alternative government", the continuing relevance of the subject can most clearly be seen; and it is this kind of continuity which links the preoccupations of Fitzpatrick's Sinn Féin back to the rural protests of Connolly's and Garvin's pre-Famine agitation.

What historians have to decide, however, is the extent to which such alternative structures of authority are defined in terms of nationalist struggle; and to what extent they simply reflect local resentments on the perennial question of the land. "Damn Home Rule!", George Birmingham was told by a local nationalist before independence, "What we're out for is the land. The land matters. All the rest is tall talk". Though this may have been what Birmingham (a Church of Ireland canon as well as a novelist) wanted to hear, it is a refrain repeated throughout Irish history. Travelling round Ireland before the Famine, Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall decided the same analysis was true of Ribbonism; General Lord Strathnairn concurred ("the possession of Irish land, on a sort of social principle, by the lower classes, is the aim of all Irish confederacies"). A hundred years later similar accusations were levelled in Dáil Éireann at the motivation of some freedom fighters in the Anglo-Irish war.²³

On the other side of the demesne wall, Irish landlords are now (historiographically speaking) basking in the glow of self-righteousness. Researches into the nineteenth-century Irish economy at large, and the administration of Irish estates in particular, have produced a picture in which the flowing tide of prosperity is with the larger tenants; while the landlords, so far from raising rents to blood-sucking excesses, were charging at such an uneconomic level that they were bound for the dust-heap of history long before the

²³ "An attempt was made by many selfish people in many areas to cash in on the work of the IRA, and in Mayo and in many parts of the West attempts were made to cover up, under the idea that it was IRA activity, the work of people who wanted something for themselves and did not give a damn about the nation". Dáil Éireann, vol. 100, col. 1883, 11 Aug. 1946; quoted in P. Bew, "The Land League Ideal: Achievements and Contradictions", in Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: Land, Politics and People*, p. 91. Also G. Birmingham, *An Irishman Looks at his World* (London, 1919), p. 208; Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character, & c.*, 3 vols. (London, 1841-3), ii, p. 122; Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, p. 15.

combined efforts of Parnell, Davitt, Captain Moonlight and W. E. Gladstone finally precipitated them there.²⁴ In fact the chief authorities on the late nineteenth-century Irish agrarian economy are positively critical of the Land Acts which pushed the landlords over the edge: one example of the way in which recent Irish scholarship carefully distinguishes economic history from the history of economic policy.

Here again, however, one can be led astray by easy generalization; and subdivisions among the gentry, as well as variations in types of landlord, are rightly stressed by historians working in the field. Even before the Famine acted (in Hoppen's words) as a "Darwinian selector of the fittest",²⁵ and the passing of the Encumbered Estates Act struck the terror described by Engels into the hearts of the Ascendancy,²⁶ Beames demonstrates that the landlords who invited attack were very often Catholics and liberals, with names like Byrne and O'Keefe. They were, in fact, singled out by their commercial and entrepreneurial spirit rather than any mark of a conquering race.

Hoppen shows the complex, paradoxical, intuitive relations sus-

²⁴ Notable published commentaries on the process are B. L. Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish Economy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); J. S. Donnelly Jr, *Landlord and Tenant in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1973); J. S. Donnelly Jr, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork* (London, 1975). Important theses are C. Ó Gráda, "Post-Famine Adjustment: Essays in Nineteenth-Century Irish Economic History" (Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, 1973); W. E. Vaughan, "A Study of Landlord and Tenant Relations in Ireland between the Famine and the Land War, 1850-1878" (University of Dublin Ph.D. thesis, 1974). For some of their conclusions, see C. Ó Gráda, "Agricultural Head-Rents, Pre-Famine and Post-Famine", *Econ. and Social Rev.*, v (1974); W. E. Vaughan, "An Assessment of the Economic Performance of Irish Landlords, 1851-1881", in F. S. L. Lyons and R. A. J. Hawkins (eds.), *Ireland under the Union: Varieties of Tension. Essays in Honour of T. W. Moody* (Oxford, 1980); W. E. Vaughan, "Landlord and Tenant Relations in Ireland between the Famine and the Land War, 1850-1878", in Cullen and Smout (eds.), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History*; W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904* (Dundalk, 1984).

²⁵ Below, p. 289.

²⁶ Engels to Marx, 23 May 1856, in Marx and Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, p. 85, a famous passage, which perhaps still deserves quotation: "The landowners, who everywhere else have become bourgeoisified, are here reduced to complete poverty. Their country-seats are surrounded by enormous, amazingly beautiful parks, but all around is waste land, and where the money is to come from it is impossible to see. These fellows are droll enough to make your sides burst with laughing. Of mixed blood, mostly tall, strong, handsome chaps, they all wear enormous moustaches under colossal Roman noses, give themselves the false military airs of retired colonels, travel around the country after all sorts of pleasures, and if one makes an inquiry, they haven't a penny, are laden with debts, and live in dread of the Encumbered Estates Court".

tained not only between landlord and tenant, but also between landlords on one level and another: an ambivalence that affected the position of land agents too.²⁷ Such peculiarities stretch back through Irish history; it may not be fanciful to link them to the curiously symbiotic, if still resentful, relationship between indigenous and planter communities in the seventeenth century, intriguingly indicated here by Canny. Bartlett similarly reminds us that conservatism and an odd harmony are just as characteristic of rural social relationships in Ireland, for most of the eighteenth century, as the publicized violence and brutality.²⁸ There may be connections forward, not only to Hoppen's electioneering landlords, but also to Curtis's depiction of irruptions into the Somerville-and-Ross complicities of fox-hunting culture.

If heterogeneity among the landlords is one conclusion that comes clearly through the essays in this collection, another must be the even more bewildering degree of differentiation among their tenants. Maurice Bric's study shows how the tithe grievance in late eighteenth-century Cork reflected a desire that levies be commensurate with different tenants' abilities to pay; it was apparently associated with resentment of exactions by the Catholic church as well. In the process Bric profiles the politics of *le menu peuple* at local level: those small cottier and wage-earning classes whose assets were declining in value, while their smallholdings were being undermined by inflated taxation as well as the more businesslike collection procedures associated with tithes, hearth-money, dues, cess and rents. This bears out studies of eighteenth-century unrest elsewhere;²⁹ and the pattern of rural unrest a hundred years later can be cast in a not dissimilar mould. In the 1880s once again, a variety of economic interests were represented by the Land League, the larger farmers being aligned with those whose subsistence was genuinely at risk; unity was precariously preserved through rhetoric and the obligingly extreme reactions of the government, but the objective interests of the

²⁷ For ways in which the position of the agent of a great estate could approximate to that of a lesser landlord, see R. F. Foster, *Charles Stewart Parnell: The Man and his Family* (Hassocks, 1976), p. xiv.

²⁸ For a similar warning against too easily identifying "violence" as the essential characteristic of nineteenth-century Irish rural life, see Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, pp. 5-7.

²⁹ Dickson, "Taxation and Disaffection in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland"; J. S. Donnelly Jr, "The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5", *Irish Hist. Studies*, xxi (1978-9).

alliance were dangerously at variance, a fact of which some leaders at least were uneasily aware.³⁰

Recent analysis of the League has concentrated upon the implicit contradictions in the variety of interests it represented; and on the fact that coalition was facilitated by the structural changes in Irish agrarian society following the Famine, notably the virtual disappearance of the agricultural labourer.³¹ Moreover in the Land War itself, and in subsequent agrarian agitation in the west, the position of the graziers has come more and more sharply into focus. There was sustained hostility towards them, both as a species not "farmers" in the proper sense of the word, and as contributors to the process of depopulation in Connacht; but such feelings were defused by a political leadership in which grazing interests were strongly represented. (This would be as true for the 1920s as the 1880s.) The heroic interpretation of the Land War blurred the graziers' position into that of "the tenants" (or even "the peasantry") as a whole; but they have recently been analysed as constituting a class in themselves.³²

³⁰ Such a realization may have lain behind Parnell's celebrated letter to Mrs O'Shea from Kilmainham gaol, 14 February 1882: "At least, I am very glad that the days of platform speeches have gone by and are not likely to return. I cannot describe to you the disgust I always felt with those meetings, knowing as I did how hollow and wanting in solidity everything connected with the movement was. When I was arrested I did not think the movement would have survived a month, but this wretched Government have such a fashion for doing things by halves that it has managed to keep things going in several of the counties up till now. However, next month, when the seeding time comes, will probably see the end of all things and our speedy release". Katharine O'Shea, *Charles Stewart Parnell: His Love Story and Political Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1914), i, pp. 235-6.

³¹ See D. Fitzpatrick, "The Disappearance of the Irish Agricultural Labourer, 1841-1912", *Irish Econ. and Social Hist.*, vii (1980); J. W. Boyle, "A Marginal Figure: The Irish Rural Laborer", in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*. On divisions within the League, see P. Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), p. 223: "The Land League was above all a class alliance of the rural bourgeoisie, the middle and poor peasantry, and the agricultural proletariat: one of the most remarkable things about the League is the way in which its different sections pushed in different directions. The large and middle farmers were looking for rent reductions, the smallholders of the West were looking for a land redistribution, while the labourers of the South were contemplating at least a general strike for better wages. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to deny that despite these differences there was an overall anti-landlord unity". For an analysis that plays down class divisions within the movement, see S. Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979). Also see A. W. Orridge, "Who Supported the Land War? An Aggregate-Data Analysis of Irish Agrarian Discontent, 1879-1882", *Econ. and Social Rev.*, xii (1980-1), pp. 214-15.

³² See D. S. Jones, "The Cleavage between Graziers and Peasants in the Land Struggle, 1890-1910", in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*.

Donald Jordan's essay considers their position in Mayo, cockpit of the Land War, and thus makes an important contribution to the localist perspective firmly established by the work of Fitzpatrick and Donnelly.³³ Jordan's essay also raises the issue of class identity in rural unrest, and the development of a rural bourgeoisie, based on commerce as much as "strong farming", who were able by the 1870s to challenge the political position of the landed élite.³⁴ Following this analysis, land agitation in Mayo was directed by that same rural bourgeoisie, allied with their client class of small farmers, and working on the political mobilization provided by local Fenianism. "These relationships shaped the nature of rural protest in Mayo, providing the foundations for its early strength during the spring and summer of 1879, but also accounting for the rapid disintegration of the agitation".³⁵ A similar pattern may well hold good overall.

These paradoxes, these ambivalences, these uneasy coalitions led to twentieth-century Irish nationalism. It should then be no surprise to find in it the curious compound of radicalism, conservatism and reaction expressed by Sinn Féin's ideology in the years before independence, and by Irish party politics ever since. The development is possibly best understood in terms of a series of disjunctions, rather than the kind of continuity imposed by the "apostolic succession" theory of Irish nationalism. The course of Irish economic and social history should not be marked by the traditional political milestones like Grattan's parliament, the Act of Union, the fall of Parnell and the treaty of 1921. Even the Famine has recently been reassessed as an accelerator, rather than instigator, of economic and social change. The key processes are now seen as the economic effects of the French wars, the shift from pasturage to tillage and back to pasturage again, the regionalization of economic development, the local variations in emigration practices, and the effects of demographic change on family structure;³⁶ one might add the sharpening of class differences

³³ Below, pp. 403–39, for Fitzpatrick's consideration of Munster's special nature; also D. Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913–1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin, 1977); Donnelly, *Land and People of Nineteenth-Century Cork*.

³⁴ See William Feingold's work on poor law elections for a similar process in another context, notably his "Land League Power: The Tralee Poor-Law Election of 1881", in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*.

³⁵ Below, pp. 346–7.

³⁶ On this process, see D. Fitzpatrick, "Class, Family and Rural Unrest in Nineteenth-Century Ireland", in Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: Land, Politics and People*.

within the peasantry, shifting patterns in popular religious culture, the social economics of shopkeeping, the politicizing effect of local government reform, and the vexed issue of “modernization”.

If there are continuities along the way, they may occur where we expect them least. The processes of class formation, agrarian alliances, and legitimization of rural violence provide one area for prospecting; so do the local power-patterns reflected in Sinn Féin no less than the Irish Parliamentary Party. Over all, there are the intractable verities of the Ulster situation – patterns which recent scholarship has tried to relate to economic developments as much as to sectarian folk-memory.³⁷ The complexity of the Ulster *mentalité* is discussed in this collection by David Miller (who has elsewhere related the peculiar forms of Irish Catholicism to the context of modernization³⁸). Here “conversionist evangelicalism” is related to the particular functions of religion in Ulster’s uneasy maintenance of “quasi-national” status. The simple assumption that the northern identity merely represents the “unfinished business” of southern nationalism, and that popular Protestantism indicates the manipulation of workers by bosses, is hard to sustain in the face of this and other recent work.

What these essays convey is a jolting of perceptions, representing an effort to see Irish history in a wider scheme, and as part of a less solipsist process, than has usually been the case. (In a rather similar way medieval historians have represented Ireland as part of an archipelago grouped round the Irish Sea, and early modernists have linked colonization in Ireland to enterprises in Virginia, and placed Munster in the same social and economic unit as south-west England.³⁹) Thus Garvin fits Irish unrest into the wide-ranging scheme of Eric Hobsbawm’s *Bandits*, Canny and Miller bring cosmopolitan historical concepts to bear on the analysis of mentalities, and Kiernan uses Indian parallels to illuminate the Irish case (as others have invoked the Algerian *colon* experience, or set the

³⁷ P. Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism: The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 1975).

³⁸ D. W. Miller, “Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine”, *Jl Social Hist.*, ix (1975); D. W. Miller, “The Armagh Troubles, 1784–95”, in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*.

³⁹ K. R. Andrews, P. Hair and N. P. Canny (eds.), *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480–1650* (Liverpool, 1979); M. MacCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland, 1583–1641* (Oxford, 1986).

experience of Irish nationalism against that of Scandinavia⁴⁰). Just as exciting, however, is the work of those like Hoppen and Fitzpatrick, who reinterpret the every-day. Notwithstanding the ground swell of great associationist movements like Amnesty and Home Rule, the non-ideological local issues which Hoppen shows landlords manipulating in order to make a political come-back in the 1850s remained the bedrock of Irish politics up to Fitzpatrick's period – and beyond. Similarly the over-representation on political bodies of rural trader interests, and the under-representation of the small farmer class, was a syndrome which characterized Irish life before and after independence.⁴¹

The contribution of scholars working in these fields has been to counter the view of Ireland enshrined in the too accessible *Realities of Irish Life* recorded by the nineteenth-century land agent, W. Steuart Trench: “a kind of poetic turbulence and almost romantic violence, which...could scarcely belong to real life in any other country in the world”.⁴² The violence is there; but the true “realities” of Irish life are more interesting, and less romantic, than that. To understand them we need a profile of rural social structures and political attitudes of the kind indicated here by Beames, Bric, Connolly and Garvin, and expanded upon by Fitzpatrick and Curtis. This requires an analysis of mentality, an appreciation of local variations, and an understanding that the landowning class was no more a homogeneous social entity than the peasantry. Overall, we need to reconstitute the contemporary dimensions of phenomena which, like Bric's Rightboy protest, “no one was clear in, but which every one understood”.⁴³

This collection makes an effort to recapture the implications and complexity of such attitudes, and – though this is not the place to catalogue an agenda – it also indicates the fields waiting to be tilled. If such a process stringently analyses the “nationalist” content of popular protest in Irish history, it will help towards a definition of the nationalist impulse itself. Canny points out that the energy expended upon the compilation of historical annals in the early

⁴⁰ O. MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780–1980* (London, 1983); R. Mitchison (ed.), *The Roots of Nationalism: Studies in Northern Europe* (Edinburgh, 1980).

⁴¹ See L. Kennedy, “Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics in Pre-Independence Ireland”, in Clark and Donnelly (eds.), *Irish Peasants*.

⁴² W. Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (London, 1868), pp. v–vi.

⁴³ Below, p. 190.

seventeenth century may have been a kind of desperate compensatory device – “a memorial to a lost civilization”.⁴⁴ The nationalist historians of a later age were similarly guided by the need to testify. At the very least this volume represents the kind of work which has shifted the emphasis of enquiry away from that long-lived propensity for elegy and exhortation.

⁴⁴ Below, p. 62.