For J.C.

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IRELAND
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War, Peace and Beyond

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The Ascendancy of the Land Question, 1845–91

4.1 Guilty Men and the Great Famine

It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and undo the plainest wrong without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gun-powder plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence on the part of the Circumlocution Office.

Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*[1]

An Gorta Mór, the Great Famine (1845–51), weighs heavily on the contemporary conscience.[2] Originating in an ecological disaster, the Famine brought starvation and disease which claimed one million lives and stimulated a mass emigration which, in the ten years after 1845, totalled one and a half millions. The death toll, taken as a proportion of the Irish population, gives the Great Famine the grim distinction of being perhaps the most costly natural disaster of modern times. Out of this apocalypse springs much political and intellectual controversy. The horrendous loss of life helps to invest discussion of the Famine with a passion which, even by the standards of Irish political and historical debate, is unusual. Conflicting interpretations of the Famine have fuelled the 'revisionist' debate within modern Irish historical scholarship, and have caused some soul-searching within the history profession: the 150th anniversary of the disaster renewed political rancour and stimulated calls for an official British apology (an expression of regret was in fact proffered by Tony Blair, newly elected as Prime Minister, in May 1997); the anniversary created an opportunity to remember just how completely the public memory of the Famine had been suppressed in Ireland. The Famine victims have become pawns

in political and academic debates which, at root, have little to do with the Ireland of the mid-1840s. In truth, the Great Famine remains a source of pain and guilt and confusion and anger for the contemporary Irish, just as other natural or human-made disasters have created similar responses elsewhere in Europe. The Famine dead pose questions which Irish liberalism and conservative nationalism are as yet unable to answer. The Famine dead bequeath a guilt which both the British and the Irish have difficulty in facing.

At the root of this tragedy, and the ensuing political controversies, was a virulent fungus, *phythopthora infestans*, which was noted in the United States in 1843 and which began to attack the Irish potato crop in the late summer of 1845. Irish dependence on the potato had been growing since the early eighteenth century, and by the mid-1840s it constituted the staple foodstuff of the labouring poor: any prolonged interruption of the supply, therefore, threatened the welfare of the cottiers who formed the bulk of Ireland's population of 8.2 million (in 1845). But in 1845 this threat did not seem to be immediate, for the fungus had attacked late in the growing season and over one half of the potato crop was saved. There was still distress, but comparatively few casualties: the as yet limited nature of the crop failure combined with the prompt and effective measures of the Peel government to stave off high levels of excess mortality. The controversy over the extent of the problem was resolved in 1846, when there was a virtually complete failure of the potato crop, and the poor were reduced to eating the seed potatoes – where they were available – which were vital for the following season. The result of this desperation and collapse in morale was a sharp fall in the acreage of potatoes planted (there may well have been a reduction from around two million acres in 1845 to under 300,000 acres in 1847): and thus, while there was a limited recovery in the crop of 1847, the harvest was small, and the level of distress very great. Moreover, despite the (admittedly tenuous) grounds for hope in 1847, the harvest of 1848, like that of 1846, was a near-complete failure, and mortality levels soared. Thereafter there was a slight improvement in the yield, but this was completely overshadowed by the devastating impact of the failure of 1846–8: disease was rife, and the number of famine-related deaths remained high until 1850–1. The completeness of the failure in two years, 1846 and 1848, combined with the false hopes of 1845 and 1847 to break both the health and the will of the Irish poor.

Beyond this narrative, however, lies a series of interpretative problems or controversies. Even the level of mortality during the Famine years has been a matter of some dispute, since a great deal of politically nuanced argument rests upon rival calculations of the death toll. Modern econometric analysis favours the traditional estimate of one million deaths, as opposed to lower figures in some 'revisionist' accounts, or exaggerated totals in some polemical literature: some texts have placed the total number of Famine dead (both the victims of starvation as well as of hunger-related disease) as low as 500,000 to 800,000, while James Connolly (for example) claimed in 1910 that 'at the lowest computation 1,225,000 persons died of absolute hunger; all of these were sacrificed upon the altar of capitalist thought'.[3]

The mortality figures are generally related to the performance of the government relief measures, and this issue – essentially the issue of culpability – has attracted considerable notice in the recent historiography of the Famine.

As with the narrative of crop failure, so it is much easier to describe government attitudes and activity in the years of the Famine than to assess their effectiveness. On 1 November 1845 the Prime Minister, Robert Peel (who had considerable experience of Ireland, having served as Chief Secretary) proposed the creation of a special relief commission: this in turn was charged with the management of a supply of £100,000 worth of maize and meal, which the government had ordered from the United States. This grain arrived in Ireland only at the end of January 1846, and had therefore little impact upon the distress arising from the partial crop failure of 1845: the comparatively few famine-related deaths in 1845 had more to do with the limited capacity of the agrarian economy to surmount a temporary and partial dearth than with the efficacy of the government's measures. The purpose of these grain purchases was to permit the government some influence over the food market – the intention 'was not to replace private traders but rather to control them': the sales of this grain, which began in March 1846, were designed to counter rising prices and were closed to commercial speculators.[4]

The second element of the Peelite strategy involved the encouragement of local relief committees (staffed by junior officials, poor law guardians and the clergy), which were designed to augment the official commissariat. These committees were enjoined to seek subscriptions, and they received official support in proportion to the amount that they raised from private sources: the government subvention occasionally matched the private funding, but was often limited to two-thirds of the locally raised sum. In addition these committees were charged with the distribution of food, ostensibly within strict guidelines but in practice (fortunately) more liberally than the official dictates permitted. Food was sold at cost price, or where appropriate (and against the official ruling) it was given freely. A type of outdoor relief was thus in existence long before the Poor Law Extension Act (1847), which formally sanctioned the first aid outside the workhouse.

The third and more traditional remedy applied by Peel to ameliorate conditions in Ireland was the provision of work. The work schemes, initiated by three measures early in 1846, were intended to complement the food distribution system that was being inaugurated simultaneously. The government was (at least in theory) endeavouring to augment the food supply while providing a source of earnings for labourers, but in practice its acute concern for the freedom of the market created problems: wages, for example, on the public schemes had to be less than those prevailing in the locality so that (again in theory) workers would not be drained from other forms of employment. The limited nature of the cash economy in many parts of Ireland combined with delays in the movement of currency and with the limitations of the official commissariat meant that some labourers were forced to buy on credit and at high prices from private food dealers.

However, dysfunctions such as these (which would become prevalent) were still comparatively rare by mid-1846, when Peel's administration fell. On the whole Peel's

initiatives coped well with the still embryonic disaster. Peel had of course discovered free trade principles (he used the Irish crisis as a political tool to repeal the Corn Laws), but he was a highly pragmatic economic liberal: as T.P. O'Neill remarked, 'he showed an initiative unusual in that era of laissez faire and undertook tasks at variance with current economic theory'.[5] He mitigated the dogmatism of his Treasury officials while simultaneously defeating what Dickens called 'the great study and object of all public departments' – inertia or, in Dickensian terms, 'how not to do it'.[6]

The normal functioning of the market had been an abiding concern, but Peel was clearly prepared to intervene in order to ensure that the market worked in the interests of the public good. His fall from power in June 1846 opened the way to a much more doctrinaire administration, and to a number of disastrous modifications in the administration of relief. The government of Lord John Russell was highly susceptible to the *laissez-faire* dogma of Treasury officials, especially the arrogant and priggish Assistant Secretary, Charles Trevelyan: indeed, it is hard to escape the impression that Russell and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Wood, were – at least in the matter of Irish relief – mere ciphers for their civil service underlings. This new dogmatism found expression in a number of forms. Peel's importation of Indian corn (which had been inaugurated against Treasury advice) was not continued, for – as Trevelyan opined – 'the supply of the home market may safely be left to the foresight of private merchants': in fact it was not until mid-1847 that the impact of imports on food prices began to be felt.[7] The food depots that had been established under the Peel regime were controlled in a manner which betrayed a greater sensitivity for the rights of traders and the equilibrium of the market than for the starving poor: meal which had been sold at cost in early 1846 was sold at, or above, the average market price. Peel's relief commission was wound up and its functions transferred to central government.

Centralization was in fact a hallmark of the new dispensation. The Board of Works was reorganized, and the schemes of public employment relaunched under a closer management and with an at times brutal rigour. While central government took a controlling influence in the reconstitution of the public works, its desire for tight control did not stretch to payment. Where the Peelite schemes had been financed either by central government or through loans, the revised public works were to be funded exclusively by 'persons possessed of property in the distressed districts': half of the cost was to be borne directly by local taxpayers, while the other half was borne indirectly (in the form of government loans).[8] Moreover, though it seems that Peel intended to stimulate works of a high 'reproductive' value (that is, socially and economically profitable works), it is clear that the Whig government was much more agitated by the dangers of individual profiteering than by the desire to maximize the benefits arising from the investment (this pathological caution and negativism were more general characteristics of the administration): local cesspayers were therefore expected to pay for work which brought them little benefit.

Aside from the burden of ideology, the Whigs were also hampered by the extent of the crisis that they confronted. Peel's public works had recruited at most some

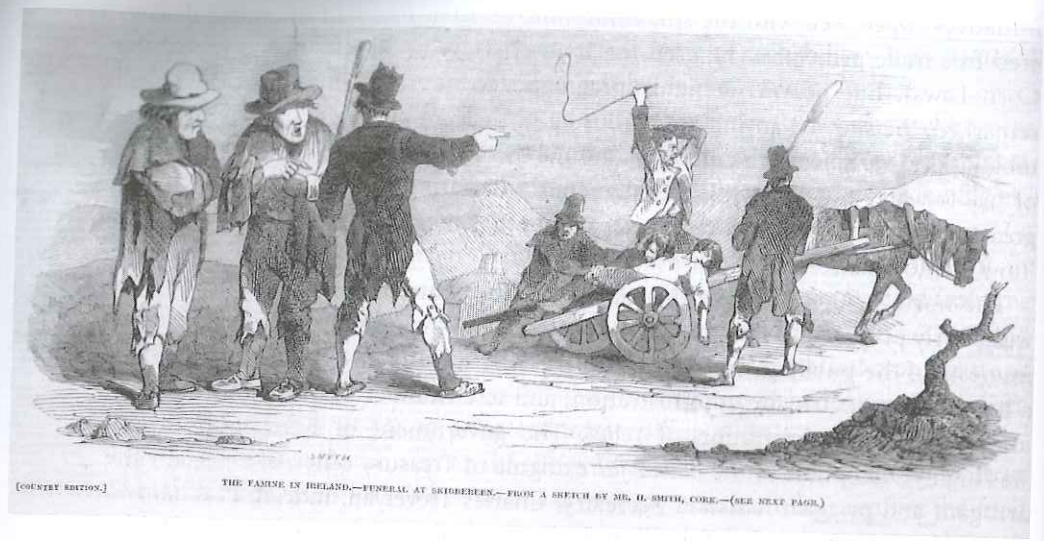


Plate 3 A funeral at Skibbereen of a famine victim, January 1847.
Source: Mary Evans Picture Library.

100,000 labourers, where the Whig scheme was employing around 750,000 by the spring of 1847: the government had in fact surpassed the farmers as the biggest source of employment. The task of mobilizing perhaps 10 per cent of the Irish population was enormous, and T.P. O'Neill is surely right to distinguish the practical achievement of the local Board of Works from the strategic ineptitude of Whitehall; Christine Kinealy also distinguishes the energy of Irish administrators from the detached, even cynical, ideologues in London.[9] However, this scale compounded the weaknesses of central policy. Wage payments were often delayed, sometimes for five weeks or more. The labourers could not therefore acquire food, except by taking on extortionate loans, and in any case they were often so weak through fatigue and malnourishment that they could not work. Labour was paid at a piece rate, and the wage was assessed so that a worker might earn between 10d(4p) and 1s 6d(7.5p) a day, depending on his exertions: this, while an unexceptional stimulus in normal commercial conditions, was of course an appalling requirement in a time of distress for it penalized precisely those who were most in need of a wage. In addition, given the context of high food prices, these miserly wages offered little hope except to the desperate.

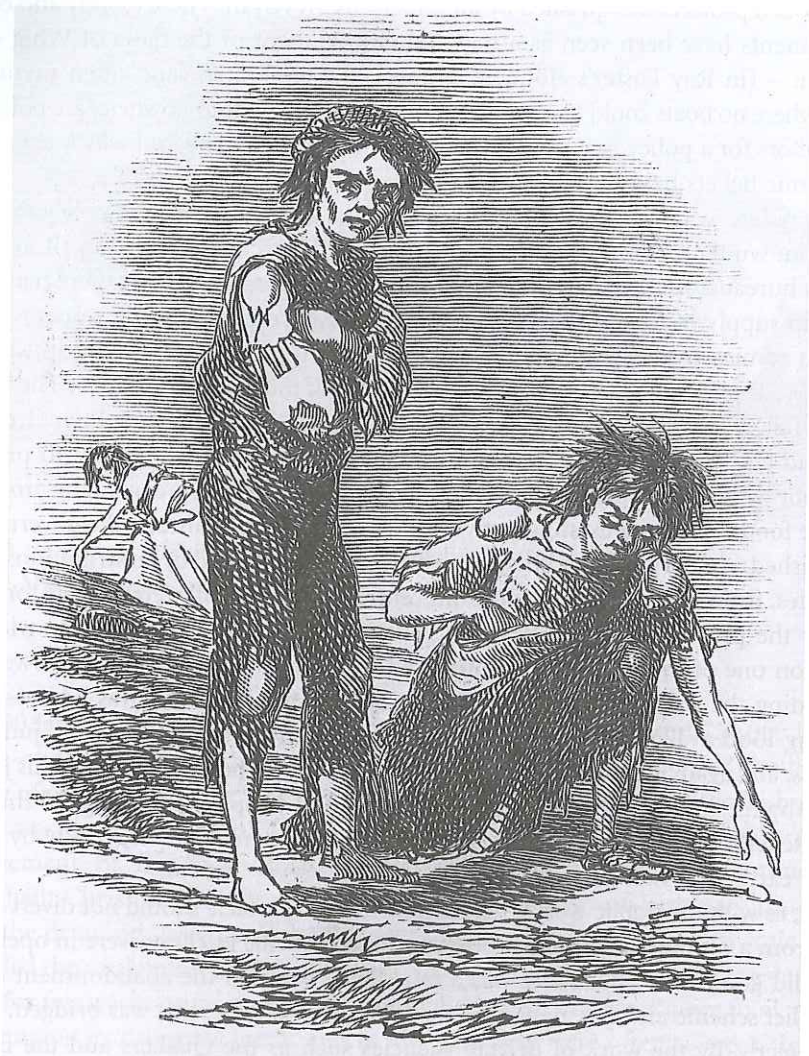
Nor were the works completed of widespread value. Although the government eventually relented and permitted more reproductive employment, this decision was delayed and was so swathed in bureaucratic technicality that it had little effect. Most of the £4.8 million outlay on public works went on roads and quays, which were often left incomplete when the works scheme was axed in May 1847. A proposal to reactivate the schemes in 1848 with a view to relieving distress and finishing the

abandoned projects was quashed by an imperious Trevelyan. These bloody and costly monuments have been seen as a material embodiment of the flaws of Whig dogmatism – (in Roy Foster's eloquent phrase) 'the celebrated (and often mythical) piers where no boats could land, walls around nothing, roads to nowhere, are poignant metaphors for a policy that was neither consistent nor effective, but which expressed economic beliefs held by the governing classes in both countries'.[10]

The public works had been the chief prop of the government's relief policy through the grim winter of 1846–7, and they had failed. The scheme had been (if nothing else) a bureaucratic wonder, and might well have proved effective if there had been a cheap supply of food to complement the wage payments. But the works were in fact an administrative Tower of Babel: a magnificent edifice, founded and sustained on dubious principles, and the source, ultimately, of much human misery. The extent of the failure was recognized in February 1847 through the Destitute Poor (Ireland) Act and a U-turn in policy: the Act brought a shift away from efforts to provide the poor with work and money towards a much more direct approach – the provision of free food. Using the existing network of local relief committees, the government established a battery of soup kitchens, which were maintained by contributions from the rates, from private charity and from central funds. Not all were eligible for relief under the provisions of the new Act, but in practice the coverage was wide: in addition one of the problems encountered in the operation of the public works – sustaining the able-bodied in the context of high food prices – was addressed by making food available at cost price. The soup kitchen scheme has been judged a success, and again, in purely administrative terms, it is difficult to question this judgement: by the middle of August 1847 over 3 million people were being fed through the kitchens, a remarkable achievement by any standards, and especially by those of the early Victorian period.[11]

But, as with the public works, the administrative spectacle should not divert attention from a number of serious problems. First, once the kitchens were in operation they did good work, but there was a fatal delay between the abandonment of the old relief scheme and the inauguration of the new scheme: this was bridged, albeit imperfectly, by the work of private agencies such as the Quakers and the British Relief Association. Second, the soup kitchens provided the cheapest form of gruel which, in all probability, had only a slight nutritional value. It is difficult to gauge the precise impact of the kitchens on the mortality rate since they were in operation only during the summer of 1847, and it has been suggested that the fall in mortality at this time was merely 'a seasonal phenomenon'.[12] Third, the organization of the kitchens, though impressive, still meant that the hungry poor often had to trek long distances to be fed. And fourth, there is some suggestion that the queues for food, though probably inevitable, brought both further degradation and demoralization to the poor, as well as – more seriously – the increased risk of succumbing to infectious disease. The soup kitchens prevented starvation, but they may well have heightened the threat of typhus.

Even with these manifold problems, the soup kitchens were probably the most effective of the relief measures inaugurated by government. They were, however,



BOY AND GIRL AT CAHERA.

Plate 4 Cahera 1847.
Source: Hulton Getty.

designed merely as a temporary expedient, to buy time for a more permanent relief initiative. For this reason the scheme, though hampered by red tape, ran counter to a number of Whig shibboleths: the provision of food at cost price, for example, overthrew the Whig commitment to market forces and represented a turnaround from the earlier administration of the food depots. The more considered Whig response to the Great Famine came with the Poor Law Amendment (Ireland) Act of June 1847. This amounted to a modification of the existing poor law to cope with the demands of a near-permanent crisis, and it was launched against

deceptively auspicious circumstances (falling food prices, an anticipated rise in the demand for labour). A separate Irish poor law commission was created, and the number of Irish poor law unions increased to ensure a more effective supervision of relief. The most controversial aspect of this initiative, however, came with the funding arrangements, for the full cost of relief in any union was to be borne by its ratepayers. In practice this outrageously parsimonious decision was inoperative, and the government had to support numerous unions from 1847 through to 1849: private charity, transmitted through the British Relief Association, also helped to support impoverished areas. In May 1849 a measure was passed to permit the Poor Law Commission to transfer levies from the more prosperous east of the country to the devastated areas of the south and west; and in 1850 the Treasury advanced a loan of £300,000 to bail out the indebted unions. But, while these measures were welcome, they encapsulated the grudging and wrong-headed approach of the Whig government to relief: the Treasury, ever concerned with cost and with market freedom, held firm to its disastrous principles until the evidence of appalling mortality forced those actions which should have been taken in the first place.

Perhaps the most important and potentially beneficial aspect of the Poor Law Amendment Act was the institution of widespread outdoor relief. The categories of people eligible for this aid were tightly defined, but could be relaxed under certain conditions; and, indeed, during the winter of 1847–8 the Poor Law Commission extended the operation of outdoor relief in 70 out of the 130 unions. However, an amendment to the measure – the infamous 'Gregory clause' – excluded from relief those who held more than one-quarter of an acre of land. Moreover, the structures and provisions of the Act, though apparently adequate, once again foundered on the rock of official parsimony. Because the local ratepayers were in the first instance responsible for the cost of relief, their representatives on the local poor law committees were often afraid to incur large-scale expenditure. The financial state of many unions remained parlous until at least 1849. The rations issued to those on outdoor relief, or those sheltering within the workhouses, were therefore often minimal, and in addition many were denied relief on the slightest pretext. The workhouses were not built to cope with a natural disaster, and though many were extended through the erection of temporary accommodation, this building was done speedily and poorly, and conditions remained dreadful. Overcrowding was rife, and the opportunities for the spread of disease were appallingly great. Many more were given outdoor relief than were contained within the workhouses, though this balance shifted slightly as more workhouse accommodation was provided. The numbers involved indicate the extent to which the population had been impoverished: in 1849 some 930,000 people were housed at one time or another in the workhouse (this was the peak figure), while around 1.21 million were given outdoor relief (outdoor relief had peaked in 1848 with 1.43 million beneficiaries). The overriding impression is of a stupendous administrative performance which might easily, with a more liberal expenditure, have been converted into a stupendous humanitarian achievement.

Complementing these gargantuan, if plodding, official efforts were individual philanthropists and private relief agencies. No clear picture of landlord effort during

the Famine has emerged, although the evidence suggests that, as minor casualties in the holocaust, they were not always in a position to supply aid. Irish landlords were longstanding hate-figures for zealous Whigs and utilitarians, and the Poor Law Amendment Act, in forcing the burden of Irish poverty into the uncertain grasp of Irish property, was merely the legislative expression of deep-seated anger and impatience (one thinks of Drummond's famous remarks about the responsibilities of Irish property). Indeed, the parentage of Whig policy is not hard to trace, for it rests unquestionably with the utilitarian initiatives of the 1830s: the creation of the Irish poor law system along English utilitarian lines, the thrusting of responsibility onto Irish landlords over the tithe question, the disruption of the old patronage networks of the gentry – all clearly prefigured the expedients adopted, and the prejudices exposed, during the Famine. Denuded of rental income and threatened with the burden of relief, few landlords could be great philanthropists, and indeed many, following the logic of the Whig relief measures, or stimulated by economic desperation, initiated large-scale evictions from their estates. The burden of debt among the landed classes grew to the extent that the government saw the need for the Encumbered Estates Act (1849), which was designed to facilitate the sale of the many estates 'encumbered' with debt – designed, in the words of George Boyce, 'to encourage free trade in land'.[13] It was also hoped that the measure would attract capital from outside Ireland (again the Whigs placed great faith in the smooth operations of the market place); but in fact Irish property proved to be an unappetizing prospect for any other than Irish investors, and the influx of new funds never materialized. Between 1849 and 1857 there were 3,000 sales under the terms of the Act and of the £20 million paid out only £3 million came from outside Ireland: only one in every 24 of the new purchasers came from Britain. The overall effect of the Act was therefore to divert investment capital away from other Irish enterprise and into the land, where – for proprietors – speedy and secure returns were not to be had.

If Irish property as a whole was not sufficiently prosperous to bear the burden of relief which the government was anxious to impose, then individual landlords offered good-hearted but minor acts of philanthropy. This was true of other classes. The clergy of all denominations were active in relief work, though some priests of the Church of Ireland were guilty of the sin of 'souperism' – of proselytizing among the hungry poor.[14] All the churches, however, paid a heavy toll for their relief efforts, with mortality rates among the Catholic clergy doubling during 1847 (in the same year 40 Protestant ministers died from typhus or relapsing fever). But the religious denomination which was most conspicuously associated with famine relief was also one of the smallest – the Society of Friends, or Quakers. In November 1846 a group of Dublin Quakers formed a Central Relief Committee to coordinate efforts in Ireland and to communicate with interested Quakers in England. As Mary Daly has pointed out, the strength of the Quaker contribution rested in a combination of disinterested compassion (the Society was unconcerned with evangelism) and disproportionate wealth and business skill (the denomination, though small, included leading business families such as the Pims and Bewleys).[15] The scale of Quaker relief was, by private standards, enormous – around £200,000 – but of course

it could only be a small fraction of government expenditure (around £10.5 million) and it was therefore only a partial solution to the widespread misery in the Ireland of the late 1840s. Moreover, Irish Quakers tended to be more constrained than their English counterparts. Like the government, they were initially reluctant to distribute free food and equally unwilling to undermine private commercial effort: though compassionate, they believed in the doctrines of political economy almost as fervently as the officials of the Treasury. In this sense their business acumen cut two ways. Still, the overall importance of the Quaker contribution was not seriously impaired by these ideological qualms, or by the necessarily modest scale of relief, because the timing of their effort offset these limitations: in particular their soup kitchens, which were operating in the spring and summer of 1847, helped to alleviate distress in a hiatus between official relief enterprises. Well-timed private charity could have a disproportionate impact, but as the hard-pressed and exhausted Quaker philanthropists readily acknowledged, it was government alone which in the long term could 'carry out the measures necessary in many districts to save the lives of the people'.[16] A massive and prolonged crisis such as the Great Famine ultimately sapped the energy of private relief agencies and numbed the compassion of private donors. Only government had (in theory) the financial and human capacity necessary to tackle famine relief: it was therefore a tragedy for the starving millions that the Great Famine should have coincided both with a financial trough in Britain and with the ideological ascendancy of utilitarianism.

Accounts of relief strategy dominate the literature on the Famine, and they are related to the issue of accountability. One million died in the Famine years, and both the Irish public and (to a lesser extent) Irish historians, in coming to terms with the disaster, have mulled over the ways in which it might have been avoided: a concomitant of this task has been the apportioning of blame. One distinguished commentator, Cormac Ó Gráda, has suggested that there has been a tendency in modern Irish historiography to 'normalize' the Great Famine and to evade the issue of culpability; and he has seen this apparent timidity as part of the academic reaction to the violence in Northern Ireland.[17] Some (though not all) recent historians of the Famine have returned in tone and judgement, if not in methodology, to older narratives, illustrating the pain and brutality of the period as well as emphasizing the great burden of responsibility borne by dogmatic government ministers and civil servants. On the whole recent work, mainly that of the 'new' economic historians, has convicted the government of heartlessness and miserliness and a near contempt for Irish lives: Trevelyan is restored as the flawed protagonist of a bloody gothic tragedy ('Trevelyan perhaps more than any other individual represented a system of response which increasingly was a mixture of minimal relief, punitive qualifying criteria, and social reform').[18] A now famous illustration of the cheapness of Irish misery was made in 1983 by Joel Mokyr, who pointedly compared British expenditure on the Famine (£10.5 million) with the outlay 'on an utterly futile adventure in the Crimea' (£69.3 million).[19]

Only time and further detailed scholarship will tell whether these judgements stand, or whether they merely represent a temporary swing of the historiographical

pendulum away from an apparent 'revisionist' orthodoxy. Some preliminary summation might, however, be ventured at this stage. Criticisms of British government policy date back to the Famine, and a tradition of impassioned denunciation began with the young radicals of the *United Irishman* newspaper: John Mitchel remarked famously that 'the Almighty indeed sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine' by permitting food exports from Ireland while people starved. Mitchel's disciple, Thomas Devin Reilly, elaborated upon this view by describing the government's relief efforts as being an ill-concealed attempt at mass murder: for Reilly the poor law system was designed so that the Irish population 'which once numbered nine millions may be checked in its growth and coolly, gradually murdered'.[20] Unfavourable comparisons between the expenditure on famine relief and on warfare are much older than the work of Mokyr, dating back (again) to the Famine era and contemporary criticism. This form of analysis was of immense importance, partly because of the general influence of the Young Ireland historical perspective throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it was also the case that such a critique chimed with popular anger, incomprehension and suspicion in the wake of an unprecedented natural disaster; and, furthermore, it was readily comprehensible to people who had become attuned in the O'Connell years to bitter denunciations of Saxon oppression. Accusations of genocide made sense to many Irish people on the basis of their own painful experiences; but do they make sense in the light of government attitudes and actions?

The government was undoubtedly characterized by a cussed faith in a self-regulating market and by an exaggerated view of the economic strength of the Irish landed class: no other interpretation can adequately explain the emphasis on public works in 1846–7 at the expense of cheap food, or the burden imposed on Irish property by the Poor Law Amendment Act (1847). Influential civil servants such as Trevelyan had an at times brutally legalistic conception both of religion and of the economy: Trevelyan's reluctance to tamper with what he saw as the fixed laws of the market place was as firm as his faith in a vengeful God. Equally his confidence in his own judgement was as secure as his condescension towards the 'Celtic peoples' (an ironic prejudice, given the Cornish origins of his own family).[21] The Whig government (in contrast to Peel) tended to react to events, and even then to react very tentatively: even though the total sum spent on relief by the Whigs was large and might have been yet larger, it could unquestionably have been employed in more timely and productive ways. The painfully slow manner in which relief schemes were inaugurated in 1846–7 reflected the government's abiding fear of perverting market forces and undermining the economy (sustaining the natural laws of the market seems at times to have been much more of a priority than preventing deaths): this tardiness cost lives, in particular because the great killers of the Famine – typhus, relapsing fever – were able to take root at this time and to spread. In addition, Christine Kinealy and others have argued that some in the government came eventually to see the Famine as a crude mechanism for social reform ('these included population control and the consolidation of property through a variety of means'), and to tailor relief strategies accordingly: 'this was a pervasive and powerful "hidden agenda" '.[22]

In all this there was arrogance and officiousness and (at the very least) the appearance of coldness; but there is no evidence of a genocidal impulse or a murderous conspiracy. Even the most unsympathetic officials worked exhaustively to set up the painfully elaborate official relief schemes, and they achieved bureaucratic – but not humanitarian – marvels. More money might well have been spent on relief, and this in fact was the plea of many contemporaries (Ó Gráda has suggested that a great protest meeting of Irish peers, MPs and landlords held at the Rotunda, Dublin, in January 1847 'was unique in Irish history'): it is clear that many compassionate observers deemed the various initiatives to be inadequate; it is clear, too, that condemnation of the British effort was not confined to later, and politically embittered, critics.[23] On the other hand, comparisons between the cost of the relief schemes and expenditure on the Crimean War, though superficially shocking, are less impressive on reflection. Such comparisons demonstrate merely that many nineteenth-century European governments spent more on military endeavour than directly on social welfare, and to expect otherwise is to apply humane but anachronistic values: as Ó Gráda has remarked, 'even today the welfare of the underclass and the famine-prone often plays second-fiddle to military adventures'.[24] Moreover, as has been noted, the Famine coincided with a profound economic downturn in Britain and a broader European food shortage, so that there were apparently some grounds for cautious expenditure. The historiographical emphasis has traditionally (and naturally) been on the immense level of mortality and on the missed opportunities ('if', Kinealy has argued, 'the measure of success is judged by the crudest yet most telling of all measures – that of mortality – the British government failed a large portion of the population'); but, as the eminent Irish physician William Stokes remarked, 'if many were lost, perhaps ignorantly, let us think on the number saved. We cannot be suddenly wise'.[25]

The Famine has bequeathed a variety of painful legacies. It creates awkwardness for both Unionists and nationalists: there is no clear reason to suppose that an Irish repeal administration would have performed any better than the British, and there is some reason for imagining that, bereft of resources, it would have performed a good deal worse. It is true that in the subsistence crisis of 1782–4, which struck after the winning of legislative independence, an embargo had been placed on food exports: but the initiative here was taken by the British-appointed lord lieutenant, and came in defiance of some Irish commercial protests. In addition the O'Connellite tradition was heavily tinctured with the utilitarian convictions that were at the cancerous root of British policy: the great O'Connell pursued his life-long antagonism towards Peel and Toryism to the point of supporting the Whig dogmatists whose relief policies proved so tentative (few of the repeal MPs, for example, opposed the Gregory clause). But equally, however, the Famine demonstrates the narrow constraints of Unionism: the Whig conviction was that Irish property should pay for the cost of relief, whether immediately (in the form of rate payments) or in the mid-term (through the repayment of loans advanced by the Treasury). There was some effort to direct funds from wealthy areas of Ireland to impoverished areas, but no attempt was made to raise funds through a levy in Britain. And, although the Treasury loans were written off in 1853, this was only as part of a deal whereby

income tax was extended to Ireland (so that, in effect, the loans were repaid by a different medium).

But the Famine created a much wider pain. As after any great tragedy, the burden of self-imposed guilt carried by the survivors was heavy. The Famine revealed some of the most prosaically heartless aspects of Victorian government; but equally it exposed some of the grimmer aspects of Irish social relations in the nineteenth century. In the struggle for survival or for marginal advantage, there was much ruthlessness. Landlords and farmers evicted impoverished cottiers; private traders insisted on the free export of grain in the Famine years, and were angered by the official importation and distribution of food; gombeenmen exploited the inadequacy of the official relief system by lending money at exorbitant rates, or by supplying food at an immense profit. The wealthier parts of Ireland showed great reluctance when called upon, in 1849–50, to aid the more impoverished areas of the country. At a more local and intimate level, the burden of hunger and disease reduced many of the poor to actions which they would otherwise have thought shameful. Little wonder, then, that the decimated and broken Irish looked to find guilty men in the corridors of Whitehall.

4.2 Pivot or Accelerator?

No less politically charged than the question of culpability is the debate over the impact of the Great Famine: indeed, no issue illustrates more clearly the sensitivities that still enshroud the historiography of the Famine years. For the 'debate', as with so many other aspects of the 'revisionist' controversy, is not so much about absolute difference as about questions of emphasis and political nuance. Thus, few would claim that the Great Famine had any other than a profound impact upon Irish politics or Irish society; but perceptible differences open up in deciding precisely how profound this impact might have been. Though the metaphors vary slightly, the debate is now (and indeed has for long been) about whether the Famine was, on the one hand, a 'watershed' or 'a turning point', or, on the other hand, 'a catalyst' or 'an accelerator'. Traditional historiography has on the whole favoured the stronger metaphors, while much recent scholarship prefers to place an emphasis on continuity. Some irritation has been expressed, however, at a perceived 'trend to de-sensationalise the Famine' and at 'the tendency to remove the Famine from the centre stage of nineteenth century history', and (as with the issue of accountability) there is some evidence of a mild reversion to older perspectives.[26]

Whatever the emphasis, it is clear that the Famine touched almost every aspect of Irish life in the mid- and late nineteenth century. The death of one million people in a population of (at its peak) around 8.25 million, combined with the migration of 1.5 million in only ten years (1845–55), could not fail to have devastating and lasting consequences. Ireland was altered beyond recognition after the Famine, and this is surely of greater importance than counter-factual, and necessarily speculative, argument about the role of the Famine in generating or accelerating change. The

chief casualties of the Famine were the cottiers, who lived at a subsistence level and who were therefore particularly susceptible to starvation and disease: cottiers were also those most given to migration, now, as Oliver MacDonagh has argued, a reflection of profound despair (though the socially 'superior' nature of the emigrants after 1849 has also been noted).[27] The near-disappearance of the cottiers or labourers was linked to the consolidation of holdings in the Famine years and after, for the death, migration or eviction of the poor created opportunities for substantial farmers and landlords: one-quarter of all farms disappeared between 1845 and 1851, while the average size of farms increased in the same period (thereafter a sort of stasis was reached). The disappearance of the poor, combined with the economic vulnerability of the gentry, meant that the Ireland of the post-Famine years was a country of middling farmers: 'Irish society', Mary Daly has observed, 'tended to be dominated by the values, mores and lifestyle of the farmer'.[28]

If the condition of the agriculturalist changed, then so did the nature of agriculture itself. During and after the Famine there was a considerable shift away from tillage, which had been a mainstay of Irish agriculture since the late eighteenth century, towards animal husbandry and pastoral products. The origins of this change have been debated and were at one time located in the aftermath of the French wars, but Ó Gráda's investigation of agricultural output on the eve of the Famine reveals a continuing emphasis on tillage: his comparative analysis of Irish agriculture in the 1850s suggests that the impact of the Famine had induced a rapid shift to pastoral farming.[29] It is now clear that the increasing scarcity of effective labour in the Famine era meant that successful tillage was out of the question. Moreover, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 opened Irish tillage production to a much wider array of competition, and therefore to much greater commercial uncertainty than had been the case in the protected and cushioned past. In addition the persistence of blight continued to damage confidence in the potato, and indeed yields remained miserably low until the discovery by Alexis Millardet of the copper sulphate remedy in the 1880s. The consolidation of greater holdings and the rapid shift to pastoral agriculture gave rise to a new feature of the Irish rural landscape – the great cattle 'ranches' of the east and the midlands.

Other aspects of the social and political life of Ireland were affected by the Famine, though less clearly or less directly. The Famine brought an immediate reduction in the Irish population, and seems to have popularized a range of attitudes and actions which ensured further decline. Late marriage and celibacy were increasingly common options within the socially ambitious farming community, as was emigration for those not in line to inherit the family property. However, there is no simple relationship between these various trends and the Famine. The average age at marriage was already growing in the pre-Famine period, and the proportion of those remaining unmarried was also increasing. Moreover, as Daly has observed, early and frequent marriage in the post-Famine period was associated precisely with those localities which had been hardest hit by the Famine (such as Connacht and west Cork): marriage age and marriage rates would seem therefore not to be solely related to Famine experience but rather to be partly contingent on prosperity, or lack of

it.[30] Indeed, the hard-hit areas of the west and south-west were also those which demonstrated the slightest shift from tillage to pastoral agriculture, and the most tenacious commitment to the potato, indicating again the complicated regional and economic variations in the Irish response to the Great Famine.

Emigration was also, of course, an established feature of Irish life before 1845, indeed from the early eighteenth century on. Throughout the eighteenth century there was a low-level though fluctuating migration from Ulster to North America; but this was interrupted by the French wars (1793–1815) and in any event had produced an Irish-born population in the United States of only 44,000 by 1795. The end of the conflict coincided with an economic downturn and with food shortages (in 1816–17) and this, combined with the wartime suppression of emigration, stimulated a renewed flight: indeed, it has been argued – by W.F. Adams – that the end of the war saw new characteristics in emigration (the development of sustained mass migration, the beginning of a cheap emigration trade, the first widespread signs of poor migrants).[31] Though there were some later troughs in transatlantic and cross-channel emigration (often depending on relative economic conditions), the overall trend was upwards, and in 1842 alone over 100,000 left Ireland for the United States and Canada. However, if emigration during the Famine years and after built upon older traditions and structures, equally there were grimly novel features of this exodus. Though emigration had been rising in the early 1840s, the figures did not approach those of the later 1840s and early 1850s. The scale of the Famine emigration was therefore unprecedented, as was the scale of its casualties: in 1847 220,000 emigrated, while in 1852 368,764 left Ireland. One sixth of those on the passage to Grosse Ile, Quebec, died, with 4,572 deaths in a particularly grim two-month period in 1847.[32] This mass exodus and the permanence of high emigration levels combined with the pattern of infrequent and late marriages to produce a long-term population decline. In the pre-Famine period the same factors, operating at a lower level of intensity, helped to depress the rate of population growth; but, with fewer victims of famine, and with progress towards the eradication of smallpox, the population itself continued to rise.

The massive emigration figures of the Famine and post-Famine eras reflected a more profound shift. A contemporary observer, Lord Monteagle, believed that the despair of 1846 had wholly changed the attitude of the peasant towards emigration: emigration, once the path to exile, was now a welcome and necessary escape route. Oliver MacDonagh has developed this viewpoint, arguing passionately that the Famine brought 'a real change in essence', whereby emigration became an immediate personal option rather than a remote contingency which happened to others.[33] Emigration, thus, which was generally related to wage differences and to perceptions of relative advantage, became less of an economic calculation and more a panic-stricken reflex.

The life of those left behind changed, although – once again – the relationship between this change and the Great Famine is real, though opaque. The long-term decline in population which began with the Famine and which promoted the dominance of the farmer had a wide variety of implications for Irish society. Real wages

rose for the survivors, as did living standards. The housing stock improved: in 1841 the single-roomed homes of the cottiers constituted over one-third of Irish housing, while by 1861 this fraction had fallen to less than one-tenth. The dominance of the potato in the Irish diet was overcome (although ironically, as has been noted, the areas that clung most tenaciously to the potato – in Connacht – had also been those most savaged by the blight). Literacy levels rose in the course of the Famine, 'a reflection', in Daly's observation, 'not of a revolution in schooling, but of the heavy mortality among the poor and consequently among illiterates'.[34] Daly has argued that the long-term rise in literacy may be attributed as convincingly to the retreat of the labouring classes as to the impact of the national school system.

The Famine was at one time blamed for the demise of the Irish language. It is now widely accepted that Irish was under challenge well before the arrival of the potato blight, and that the anglicization of Ireland, though hastened by the Famine, depended upon other circumstances. The spread of the national schools after 1831 encouraged use of the English language – Thomas Davis was angered by the exclusive use of English textbooks in the schools – though it would be wrong to overemphasize this point. The political direction supplied to Catholic Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century was also an influence: O'Connell's emphasis on Catholic opportunity and on upward mobility was at the expense of the Irish language (even though he was a native speaker). There were other more subtle factors at play: the increasing ease of communication with Britain, the continuing development of British government and British economic influence in Ireland. Around half the population were Irish speakers in 1845. The Famine dramatically accelerated this process of decline, removing well over one million Irish speakers either through death or emigration: by 1851 the Irish-speaking survivors of the apocalypse numbered 1.5 million (23 per cent of the population), of whom 319,000 were monoglot (5 per cent).[35]

The Famine had an impact on Irish religious practice, though again, as with so much of this debate, there are differences of emphasis in rival interpretations. A 'devotional revolution' has been discovered, hingeing on the Famine years and involving a shift from traditional lax and heterodox practice towards a more formal and rigorous Catholicism. In this analysis a marked contrast is sketched between the old mixture of pagan and Christian celebration and the new Roman liturgical practice associated with the episcopal rule of Cardinal Cullen; equally a development in Church discipline has been noted, with higher attendances at mass in the post-Famine period and with an enhancement of the social and political authority of the priesthood. These shifts have been explained very largely in terms of the social impact of the Famine: those most devoted to the traditional religion, the cottiers, were decimated by hunger and disease, while the value of the old practices for the survivors was now, given the horrific nature of the disaster, highly questionable. The rising standard of living in the post-Famine period combined with the reverberating shock of the tragedy meant a greater popular acceptance of a more elaborate Church establishment and a more elaborate liturgy.

The neatness of this interpretation has, however, been disputed. In particular Seán Connolly has highlighted the pre-Famine evidence for this 'devotional revolution',

emphasizing the spread of church-building and the retreat of traditional practices in the more prosperous part of the country well before the arrival of the blight.[36] The popular authority of the priest from the 1820s through to the early 1840s was simultaneously demonstrated and bolstered through O'Connellite politics, and the movements for emancipation and repeal. The basis for the priests' later ascendancy was thus apparently laid long before 1845.

This thesis and counter-thesis are reconcilable. The Famine may not indeed have been the original or sole stimulus for the spiritual reorientation of the farmers and wealthier sections of Catholic society: long-term economic and political consolidation within Catholic Ireland may help to explain these changes. On the other hand, the spread of the 'devotional revolution' owed much to the impact of the Famine, for this brought the consolidation of precisely those classes which had for long been susceptible to change. Nor should the profound spiritual trauma inspired by the Famine be written off. It seems a plausible speculation that, just as the Famine – in MacDonagh's judgement – promoted a 'sea change' in popular attitudes towards emigration, so a 'sea change' in attitudes towards religion was also promoted.[37] Change may have been prevalent before 1845, but it assumed a wholly different quality and completeness during and after the Famine.

Just as with religion, so with politics: the Great Famine exercised an immense though not exclusive influence. The popular perception of ministerial ineptitude or malevolence in the administration of relief inflamed anti-English sentiments, both within Ireland and among the many panic-stricken Irish emigrants. Again, however, it cannot be claimed that the Famine was the ultimate origin of hostility in Ireland to the 'Saxon', since (even setting aside the longer tradition of British–Irish bitterness) O'Connell had inflamed Irish national sentiment partly through an appeal to populist notions of England's wrongdoing. Moreover, the Famine emigration did not create an Irish community in North America hostile to the British Empire, since this was already in existence, albeit at a modest size: migration in the eighteenth century had often been linked to a combination of economic downturn and political exclusion, and numerous emigrants had been prominent critics of British tyranny.

Nor did the Famine bring any immediate reinforcement to Irish nationalism: despairing anti-Englishness did not automatically imply a more full-blooded commitment to repeal or to independence. The repeal movement foundered during the Famine, damaged both by the illness and death of O'Connell in 1847 but also by the perceived irrelevance of its core demand at a time of starvation and death. It has been suggested that the Famine undermined the confidence of many repealers in the goal for which they had so strenuously fought.[38] O'Connell himself had reordered his political priorities in the last stage of his career, giving emphasis to Famine-related issues rather than to the constitutional question (he was a supporter both of the Whig administration and of its measures of 1846). The Famine also immobilized the rebels of 1848, simultaneously firing their republican passion and disarming its practical potential. Later generations of Irish nationalist – particularly those indebted to Mitchel – would look back on the Famine as the nadir of British misrule in Ireland, and gain inspiration from their perception of a heartless, indeed murderous, colonial administration; but, for these nationalists of the revolutionary era the Famine was merely the worst of many examples of British tyranny, more potent than other memories because more recent and more widely accessible.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the significance of the Famine, whether in terms of popular Irish politics or Irish political thought. The Famine did not create but it surely transformed the anti-English hostility that underpinned much of the Irish nationalist movement in the mid- and late nineteenth century. Before the Famine anti-English sentiment was deep-seated, but perhaps remote: memories of the suppression of the '98 would have been fresh, but then the rising affected only a comparatively small part of the country and loyalties were more bitterly divided than has often been allowed. The Famine brought much more sweeping casualties and a much more vivid, because painful and immediate, sense of the injustice of British government. In the context of disease and starvation this hostility could find no immediate expression; but, in the aftermath of the Famine, the combination of irreducible anger and relative prosperity among the farming population would provide the foundations for a successful nationalist movement.

The Famine also marked Irish political thought. O'Connell, a landlord, had eschewed any serious attempt to tackle the fundamental problems of the Irish tenurial system (indeed, it is not at all clear that he accepted that there was an issue to tackle). The Famine changed the emphases of the O'Connellite era, for the scale of the disaster and the growing suspicions of British malevolence highlighted the severe limitations of the Liberator's social radicalism and of his constitutionalism. The Famine, with the spectre of starvation and disease and bureaucratic inanity, stimulated the rebirth of the physical force tradition. But perhaps of greater importance than the half-baked rebellion of 1848 was the fact that the Famine helped to highlight the profound problems with the Irish land system and to popularize the radical agrarian agenda of Fintan Lalor. It was the Famine that forged the bond between land and the national question, indeed the bond between land and violent nationalism; it was therefore the Famine that determined the direction of Irish politics for the next 50 years.

4.3 Brigadiers and Fenians

God save Ireland, said they loudly;
God save Ireland, said they all;
Whether on the scaffold high,
Or the battlefield we die,
What matter, if for Erin dear we fall!
T.D. Sullivan[39]

The Famine simultaneously destroyed the immediate possibility of mass agitation and underlined the need for effective Irish political representation: it defeated O'Connell's army of cottiers, while it lent weight to the political clout of the substantial

farmers. The Famine defused the urgency of repeal, while simultaneously arming the land question. It brought the intensification of religious sensitivities, with widespread suspicions of souperism and of anti-Catholic conspiracy. In these ways the Great Famine defined the structures and concerns of Irish politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

One of the issues that was highlighted by the disastrous state of the Irish agrarian economy was tenant right. The failure of the potato crop brought economic pressure on Irish landlords who were confronted both with diminishing rentals and with the immediate burden of the poor law: many were swift to transfer this pressure to the tenantry, either through severe measures to collect the available rent or through eviction. The level of eviction, which in the more prosperous conditions of the mid- and late 1850s was under 10,000 persons in a year, stood at 104,000 in 1850, having risen from 90,000 in 1849. These evictions, in themselves a substantial cause of distress, highlighted a related issue – the absence, outside Ulster, of any compensation for improvement to a holding. This was both a barrier to agricultural development and a very great source of injustice, for there was no incentive to improve a property and those few tenants who ventured their capital in a holding had, in the event of eviction, no right of redress. Nor was this issue hidden from the gaze of Westminster: the Devon Commission, which reported in 1845, accepted the advice of its witnesses and recommended that a landlord should be legally bound to compensate an outgoing tenant for any improvements. But, though several bills were constructed around this principle, none ever made it to the statute book. Moreover, a private effort to legalize the Ulster custom by the radical MP for Rochdale, William Sharman Crawford, failed by a very large margin (112 votes to 25) in June 1847: Sharman Crawford's bill, had it been successful, would have given legal recognition to the payments customarily offered by incoming tenants to their predecessors in a holding. It was evident, therefore, that Irish farmers faced a mounting economic challenge from the landlords and that they could expect no balm from within the existing British and Irish party system. They therefore took refuge in an autonomous organization, the Tenant League.

The farmers' defensive reflex was identifiable as early as 1847, when a series of tenant organizations was founded (including one at Holycross, Tipperary, inaugurated by Fintan Lalor). But these never grew beyond their local origins, and it took a further two years before a national farmers' movement began to emerge: the first body to establish itself on a permanent footing was the Tenant Protection Society of Callan, County Kilkenny, launched by two Catholic curates in October 1849. The Callan initiative coincided with an upsurge in evictions and the continued devastation of the Famine. In addition to this generally bleak (if important) context, there were also particular problems for those prosperous market-led farmers who cultivated wheat and barley: Paul Bew and Joe Lee have remarked that the Callan Society and, indeed, the subsequent tenant organizations were formed after especially poor wheat harvests in 1849 and 1850.[40] In any event, Callan marked the beginning of an organizational campaign which extended throughout all of Ireland and which, in the opinion of J.H. Whyte, had emerged by the summer of 1850 as the dominant

feature of Irish political life.[41] Directed by Charles Gavan Duffy, Frederick Lucas and S.M. Greer, plans were laid to coordinate these formidable but as yet centrifugal forces: a conference of the separate organizations met in August 1850 and declared in favour of the fair evaluation of rent, security of tenure and the free sale of the tenant interest. In order to realize these goals it was agreed to found a permanent governing organization, the Irish Tenant League.

The new Tenant League assumed a larger significance in the extensive writings of Gavan Duffy, one of its most enthusiastic patrons, than in the broader political history of mid-nineteenth century Ireland: it was he who baptized the organization as the 'League of North and South'.[42] In fact the chief significance of the League rests in the fact of its creation rather than in any long-term, or even mid-term, impact. It might be possible to argue that the League popularized the demand for the three 'fs' – fair rent, free sale, fixity of tenure – and thereby laid the foundations for the agitation of the 1880s; but in fact the connection was at best tenuous, for there was no history of sustained farmer pressure or continuous organization, and the League rested on a socially more elevated prop than its populist and inclusivist successors. Yet the architects of the League had apparently succeeded where the movements for emancipation and repeal had failed, creating a national political organization that united farmers of all denominations in a radical programme of reform. This unity was short-lived, for the northerners demonstrated a less intense commitment to agitation than their southern counterparts; but the 'League of North and South' provided an all too rare stimulus to good-hearted ecumenical politicians such as Duffy, and it also provided an (in fact deceptive) exemplar to the Land Leaguers of 1880. And, though the Irish Tenant League swiftly withered, it survived long enough to spur the creation of an independent Irish Parliamentary Party dedicated, in part, to the cause of tenant right.

There were, however, other and much more immediate influences behind the formation of a distinct Irish Parliamentary Party: chief amongst these was the pressure of outraged Catholic opinion. The rise of the farmer movement coincided with a sharp deterioration in sectarian relationships, both in Ireland and in Britain, and an increasingly pronounced division between the Catholic sense of pastoral responsibility and Protestant sensitivities concerning civil authority. It is hard to identify any golden age of sectarian harmony in nineteenth-century Ireland, and certainly the passage of Catholic emancipation in 1829 did not inaugurate anything other than a temporary calm. In fact, with the development of evangelical Protestantism and of Catholic wealth and assertiveness, there was a steady worsening of relations: a number of episodes in the mid- and late 1840s contributed to this decline and highlighted the need for a new and distinctive Irish Catholic response in the House of Commons. The Famine fuelled the widely held suspicion that the British government had engineered an act of genocide against Catholic Ireland; moreover, allegations that the Protestant clergy had demanded the conversion of the hungry as a condition of supplying relief – that they had bartered Indian meal for souls – reflected both an isolated reality as well as mounting sectarian hostility. At the level of high politics, Peel's scheme of Queen's Colleges had provoked an anger among

the Catholic bishops, which festered long after 1845 and which was renewed at the Synod of Thurles in 1850. But the episode that sparked the most concentrated sectarian anger coincided with the Synod, but had otherwise no connection. In August 1850 Pope Pius IX announced the constitution of a new Catholic hierarchy in England, and shortly afterwards the new Archbishop of Westminster, Nicholas Wiseman, proclaimed that 'we govern, and shall continue to govern, the counties of Middlesex, Hertford and Essex': the Liberal government of Lord John Russell immediately sought to channel and exploit Protestant outrage at these apparent pretensions, and in February 1851 a measure was launched which prohibited the use by Catholic bishops of British place names.[43] Russell's Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, and his increasingly trenchant Protestantism, created immediate problems for his Irish Liberal supporters, many of whom were Catholic or who represented Catholic constituencies. These were resolved in March 1851, when a large body of Irish Liberals began to act in opposition to their own government and to assume the appropriately defiant title of the 'Irish Brigade'.

In August 1851 the Brigadiers acquired their own extra-parliamentary organization, the Catholic Defence Association; and in the same month the leaders of the Tenant League (who were losing out in the battle for rural Catholic support) and of the Brigade were brought into an informal alliance. Sharman Crawford was the intermediary, and the basis for agreement was a tenant right bill which was acceptable to the more timid of the Brigadiers without sacrificing all of the Leaguers' demands. This marked the beginnings of a tentative and imperfect, but still vital, coalition between the religious and land movements: it was, in its way, an early prototype for the broad union of forces – religious, economic and constitutional – which drove the Home Rule movement in the 1880s. Certainly the role of the Catholic clergy in promoting this union was very great ('never perhaps did their influence reach greater heights than in 1852'), and prefigured the clerical endorsement of Home Rule 30 years later.[44] This coalition prepared to fight the general election of July 1852, pledged to Sharman Crawford's proposed reform and to the policy of independent opposition; and the local political magnates and fixers (whose importance Theo Hoppen has stressed) showed themselves to be impressed with the mixture of religious fidelity, limited tenurial reform and mildly patriotic opposition which the independents promoted.[45] In fact, before the polling took place another and in some ways more important battle had occurred to decide the nature of Irish Liberal representation: and here the Independents had won out, forcing their more Protestant Whig counterparts into retreat. The election of 1852, fought in the context of heightened sectarian bitterness (in particular rioting at Stockport), marked what John Whyte has called 'the zenith of the independent Irish party': around 48 MPs were returned in the Independent interest, and two conferences, held on 8–9 September and on 28 October to decide on land and religious policy, reinforced the new parliamentary grouping's commitment to the strategy of independent opposition.[46]

To compare the new Independent Irish Party with its later Parnellite and Redmondite successors is to court errors of scale or anachronism, but it does help to highlight a variety of features. Like the Home Rule movement, the Independent

Irish Party rested on a formidable union of clerical and farming support. However, despite the enthusiastic endorsement of many priests, the Independents soon encountered the opposition of Archbishop Paul Cullen, who saw revolutionary passions and Mazzinian godlessness beneath the middle-class piety of Independent leaders like Duffy, and who was therefore opposed to the widespread involvement of his clergy in party propaganda and electioneering: Cullen's tough-minded attitude provoked a succession of Independent appeals to Rome, the strain of which brought the petitioning Frederick Lucas to an early grave.

Like the later Home Rule Party, the Brigadiers and Independents exercised influence by holding the balance between the main parties inside the House of Commons: the Brigadiers had helped to topple the Russell government, and the Independents helped to create the Aberdeen coalition. Like the Parnellites, the Independents were apparently quite content to endorse the Tories in preference to the Whigs, should there appear to be any temporary advantage in so doing. Like the later Home Rule Party, the Independents lost ground in the context of relative agrarian tranquillity or prosperity: just as the Parnellites appear to have suffered from the effective government assaults on the Plan of Campaign in the later 1880s, and just as the Redmondites lost direction after the success of British land legislation, so the Independents were damaged by the rising rural prosperity of the later 1850s.

But there were also sharp distinctions between the two generations of independent Irish parliamentary protest. The Irish Party of the 1850s had no coherent constitutional platform, and was not nationalist in any meaningful sense. It built upon transient religious and economic passions, and was vulnerable to collapse when those passions dissipated. If it differed in purpose to its successors, then it also differed in structure: it was a much more inchoate body than later Irish parties, imposing a loose and ineffective form of discipline. The party was pledged to act in a policy of independent opposition, but this was never fully defined; members of the party were originally bound to accept majority decisions upon the threat of expulsion, but this principle – similar to that imposed by the Parnellites – was soon broken. Even more seriously, the party possessed no strong national organization such as that which supported both the earlier O'Connellite movement and the later Parnellites: neither the Tenant League nor the Catholic Defence Association were effective as local electoral machines, and in any case the latter was very short-lived. The party was therefore highly susceptible to setbacks within its leadership, and indeed a good case has been made out for supposing that the party eventually failed because of failures of personality.[47]

These contrasts broach the separate but related issue of the party's demise. From a highpoint in 1852, when 48 MPs were returned on the Independent platform, the party had sunk to a membership of only 11 in 1859, when it split on the issue of the Tory government's reform bill, and effectively collapsed. In the 1860s a sizeable number of Irish members continued to express their (somewhat hazy) commitment to 'independent opposition' – perhaps as many as 18 in 1865 – but these expressions seem at this stage to have been an aspiration rather than a political reality, and were in any event soon silenced. The former Young Irelander, John Blake

Dillon, staging a genteel political comeback in 1865 as MP for County Tipperary, sought to capitalize on the shifts in British Liberal politics that were occurring after the death of Lord Palmerston; and he succeeded in reuniting the old Independent factions around a policy of support for the new and apparently more 'advanced' Liberal leadership. In 1866 the Independent opposition was confronted once again with a measure of parliamentary reform, the issue which had all but broken the party in 1859; now, however, Dillon's endorsement of the Liberal government carried the day, and the Independents voted solidly for the government on the second reading of the new reform bill (27 April 1866). A form of unity within the Independent tradition had therefore been reconstructed, but at the cost of abandoning the central tenet upon which the tradition rested. As Vincent Comerford has observed, 'it is to 27 April 1866, and not to any date in the late 1850s that we must look for the demise of an independent opposition party in parliament'.[48]

The reform question was thus the proximate cause of death, but there had in fact been symptoms of mortality from at least 1852: in that year the party had lost two of its leaders, John Sadleir and William Keogh, who fell victim to personal ambition, and – in defiance of earlier pledges – accepted junior ministerial office in the Aberdeen coalition. The party had little better luck with its other leaders: Frederick Lucas died, aged only 43, in October 1855, while Charles Gavan Duffy, disillusioned with the attitude of Rome towards clerical support for the Independent cause, left Ireland for Australia in the following month. The most eminent remaining survivor in the leadership, George Henry Moore, was unseated on petition after the election for County Mayo in 1857, and failed to win County Kilkenny in the general election of 1859.

The issues of discipline and organizational support have been outlined, and were undoubted sources of weakness to the party. But perhaps its single greatest flaw was that it was founded on a paradox: it was a small Liberal splinter group which, harnessing Catholic and farming passions, affected independence from British Liberals and was prepared to support the Tories – the traditional party of Irish Protestants and landlords – in order to demonstrate the seriousness of its aspirations. It encountered the problem which Irish Unionist parliamentarians faced in 1885–6 – that of preserving the credible fiction of autonomy while in reality possessing very limited room for political manoeuvre. The Irish Unionists resolved their paradox by effectively and speedily abandoning all but the shadow of parliamentary independence; but the Irish Party of the 1850s sought to preserve their fiction, combining loose political discipline and a flaccid constitution with high principles, and bringing forth as a result confusion and division and acrimony. In the end the Independents shared the fate of the Unionists, trading their autonomy for subservience and a modest influence within one of the British political traditions.

The Independent Irish Party failed, therefore, sinking from a dominant position in Irish electoral politics in 1852 to a marginal significance by the end of the decade, and final destruction in 1866. Moreover, before their effective surrender to Gladstonianism, the Independents appear to have inflicted damage on the wider liberal family and to have created special, if transient, opportunities for Tory electoral

scavenging: certainly in 1859 the Tories emerged – uniquely, in the history of post-reform parliamentary politics – as the largest single Irish party, garnering 54 seats as compared to the Liberals' 51. More specifically, a quirky, limited alliance between the Tories and those sections of the Independents under the influence of G.H. Moore seems to have operated in the later 1850s, with the Whigs as the intended victims: indeed Lord Naas, the astute Tory Chief Secretary, gave some financial assistance to likely Independent candidates.

But the Independents were more than an electoral curiosity. They were significant in their own terms as (however momentarily) an ascendant force in Irish politics: to a very great extent they flagged issues – the three 'fs' of tenant right, the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland – that were taken up by later generations of popular politician. And though the Independents soon foundered, their wreckage provided a marker buoy for future Irish political enterprises. There is certainly a danger, as Roy Foster has identified, of overplaying the benefits of hindsight in assessing the Independent Irish Party; but equally there is little doubt that the party supplied an important reference point, not just for historians but for later political activists.[49] The failure of the Independents and of constitutional pressure may well have assisted the resurrection of the physical force tradition in the later 1850s (certainly the creation of Fenianism only occurred when the disorientation of the Independent Irish Party was beyond question); and the Home Rulers of the 1870s and 1880s were well versed in the errors of their precursors. Political failures can indeed 'be as interesting as successes'.[50]

The Independent Irish Party was in some respects a piece of O'Connellite nostalgia: its fluid structure, its loose external connections, its emphasis on popular Catholic concerns – all recalled the heyday of O'Connell's 'tail'. The party was an old-time reaction to the increasingly inflexible nature of British parliamentary discipline, an Irish response to the formalization of British party politics. Fenianism was also, in part, a reaction to the inflexibility and exclusivity of parliamentary politics; through its strong connections with Young Ireland and the Irish Confederation, Fenianism, too, was partly rooted in the O'Connellite past. But here the connections end. For the Independents developed within an exclusively Irish and parliamentary context, and for most of their political lifetime they satisfied neither constituency. They responded only turgidly to Irish electoral pressures and to British political conventions: their deliberate inaccessibility within the Commons and their enforced remoteness from Ireland doomed them to failure. Fenianism, on the other hand, was highly dependent on a range of international conditions, and its apparently bitter inflexibility, its simplicity and (paradoxically, for a secret society) its openness confirmed its status as one of the most influential of all Irish nationalist organizations. Fenianism tapped several Irish and European political traditions and answered a variety of contemporary needs, both political and social: where the Independents offered only carefully crafted electioneering and the remote prospect of minor reform, the Fenians offered rhetoric (they were 'incurably verbal'), and recreation and status, and the prospect of immediate patriotic glory.[51] In fact neither the Fenians nor the Independents achieved much in isolation; but the

marriage of the two traditions under Parnell – the militant and the constitutional – would prove irresistible.

Fenianism sprang from the wreckage of the 1848 rising and developed in the context of a fissile but active nationalist popular culture in the late 1850s. The exiled veterans of the Irish Confederation in France and in the United States were crucial to the survival of an 'advanced' nationalism, and two in particular – James Stephens and John O'Mahony – carried their enthusiasms and experience into Fenianism. These men, who had been enthusiastic proponents of Young Ireland, were brought into contact with the demi-monde of Blanquist insurrectionary societies in Paris; later, moving to the United States, they encountered other veterans of the '48 and also the as yet untapped financial and sentimental resources of the Irish American community. Stephens returned to Ireland in 1856 and journeyed through different parts of the country in a reconnaissance which he later glorified as his 'Three Thousand Mile Walk': this introduced him to like-minded nationalists, and in particular to the Phoenix literary societies, the most prominent of which was located in Cork and was under the direction of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. By March 1858 Stephens was able to unite his network of Irish sympathizers with his knowledge of European secret organizations and his access to American funding: and the result, fashioned in Peter Langan's timber yard in Lombard Street, Dublin, was a body called initially merely 'the organization', but later dubbed 'the Fenians' or the 'Irish Republican Brotherhood' (IRB).

The timing of this nativity is significant. Speaking in 1881 the prominent Irish American Fenian, John Devoy, defined what he saw as necessary conditions for an insurrection: 'Ireland's opportunity will come when England is engaged in a desperate struggle with some great European power or European combination, or when the flame of insurrection has spread through her Indian Empire, and her strength and resources are strained'.[52] The creators of Fenianism, with their varied experience of exile in France, America and (for some) Australia, were as sensitive to the international scene as the United Irishmen whom they claimed as their forebears. The later 1850s may be seen, with the benefit of hindsight, as a less propitious time for Irish sedition and insurrection than the later 1790s; but there were still several encouraging features. Britain had fought a costly and unglamorous war against the Russians in the Crimea, which – though it delivered a victory of sorts – had cast doubts on aspects of British military efficiency. Moreover, though the French were British allies on this occasion, the campaign highlighted petty national tensions and brought no permanent understanding between the two powers. On the contrary, by the end of the 1850s a variety of episodes – the Orsini bomb plot against Napoleon III, for example, which was planned in London – had damaged the Anglo-French relationship. While the British army was diverted to India and the suppression of the 'Mutiny' or Rising (1857–9), the French were consolidating their navy through the construction of new iron-clad steamships and fighting an apparently efficient campaign against the Austrian Empire in north Italy (in May 1859). By 1858–9, a war between France and Britain was a real possibility; and the British acknowledged the seriousness of this threat through a programme of fortification and – even more

remarkably – through the volunteering craze. For James Stephens it seemed as if the international conditions which had fired the 1798 rising were being recreated; and he and his co-conspirators prepared for the coming Anglo-French war through the creation of the Fenians.

The war with France did not come, but Fenian hopes of a British military humiliation, or at the very least, a military diversion, were kept alive into the mid-1860s by other means. Irish patriots had looked to France, as Britain's traditional continental European rival, for succour; but the rapid growth both of American power and of the Irish community in America suggested alternative possibilities. Indeed, America had for long offered blessings to the Irish patriotic cause. The British preoccupation in North America in the late 1770s had indirectly stimulated Irish national aspirations; and the newly formed United States had provided a haven both for political as well as economic refugees from Ireland throughout the early nineteenth century. The Anglo-American war of 1812–14 coincided with the dispersal and demoralization of the Irish rebels after the twin failures of the '98 and the Emmet rising, and had therefore little impact upon 'advanced' nationalism; but the possibility of a renewed conflict after 1861 – the possibility of British involvement in the American Civil War – developed against, for Fenian conspirators, a much more encouraging context in Ireland. The *Trent* episode (which arose when federal naval officers stopped a British vessel and arrested two confederate envoys) brought Britain close to war with the North at the end of 1861 and stimulated a wave of American sympathy in Ireland: this reached a climax at a mass demonstration in the Rotunda, Dublin, on 5 December 1861, which was suborned by the Fenians. Not only did the Civil War seem likely to draw in the British, it also provided many Irish Americans with military experience and with an eagerness to take on the true, Saxon, enemy. The Civil War therefore seemed to create unique opportunities for the Irish revolutionary cause; and the Irish Fenians, who were well grounded in American and Irish American politics, were keen to respond.

The Fenian leaders were sensitive to the international scene, and to some extent cast their plans in accordance with the state of international relations. But Fenianism flourished not simply because it channelled Irish American passion and money, and continental revolutionary fervour, but also – and indeed, primarily – because it responded efficiently to developments within Irish society. Estimates of the strength of Fenianism vary, and are marred by the hyperbole of Stephens and other leaders, but it seems likely that by 1864 – only six years after the creation of the movement – there were some 54,000 recruits. This figure, though modest enough in the context of O'Connellism, suggests nonetheless a more than superficial appeal. Fenianism was rooted in the social changes of the post-Famine years: the consolidation of the middle classes, especially the lower middle class, the development of towns, especially county towns, and the elaboration of a retail and service sector which hinged on the prosperity of the small farmer. Fenianism appealed to artisans and shop assistants, to travelling salesmen and to farmers' sons: it appealed to the 'class above the masses' which was educated and status-conscious, but debarred through poverty and through the constrictions of mid-Victorian Irish society from

social advancement.[53] Fenianism was therefore a means of sublimating social and political frustration.

But, paradoxically, the growth of Fenianism also reflected a modest degree of social liberation. For Fenianism, more than any earlier popular Irish movement, was eventually controlled by the classes that it represented rather than by wealthy professionals or successful businessmen or déclassé ascendancy figures (some degree of upward social mobility within the movement should, however, be noted). Fenianism therefore marked an important transition in Irish politics, representing a shift away from the politics of deference (whether deference to a landlord, or to a priest, or even to a wealthy and autocratic populist figure such as O'Connell) towards a much more self-sufficient form of political expression: police observers noted that there was a Fenian 'type', embodied in a confident demeanour and gait, and a quiet defiance of everyday authority figures such as the priest or constable.[54] Fenians were not generally bound to a landlord or to a factory master; and they were frequently in employment which offered them not just freedom from unsympathetic domination, but also free time. The Fenian movement channelled popular lower middle-class political tensions, but it did so – at least in part – through providing both recreation and status. The (often nominal) secrecy of Fenianism generated a mystique, which combatted the humdrum in small town life, while its modest degree of social exclusivity offered members some affirmation of status: comparisons might be evoked both with freemasonry and with the artisan organizations of mid- and late Victorian Britain.

But if the Fenian movement addressed social insecurities, it also provided entertainment and recreation: indeed, given the relatively small numbers who turned out in 1867 to fight, it might well be argued that this recreational dimension was the most important aspect of contemporary Fenianism. The movement also satisfied the Victorian infatuation with military skill, and might be compared with the volunteering fad that swept through England in 1859; Fenianism, like the later Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), offered its recruits the opportunity to play wargames – to drill, to train with weapons and, for some, to enjoy military rank. But, more broadly, just as the UVF was related to an intricate Unionist popular culture, so Fenianism fed off the widespread respect accorded to the Irish revolutionary tradition, and indeed generated its own popular revolutionary culture: it had its own paper, the *Irish People*, founded by Stephens in 1863, propagated its own literature (Charles Kickham, the author of *Knocknagow: or the Homes of Tipperary* (1873) was the most renowned Fenian literator), and provided more informal recreation in the shape of rambling, picnics and soirées. In common with continental nationalist organizations, and in common with late nineteenth-century popular Irish nationalism, there was a sporting dimension to Fenianism, with gym-training and boxing on offer besides armed insurrection. While picnics and gymnastics might seem to be unlikely forms of revolutionary expression, such activities helped to consolidate the romantic nationalism and the ties of kinship and friendship which made Fenianism such a potent political movement.

Fenianism also satisfied the widely felt need for spectacle and ceremonial: in some respects it was a curiously public and theatrical conspiracy. In common with other political and religious movements, the Fenians were keen to exploit the ever-expanding rail and road networks; for cheap and easy travel created opportunities both for efficient proselytism as well as mass mobilization. There was thus a popular appetite for mass ceremonial as well as the technology to create such displays. This was perhaps most evident with the campaign of the Amnesty Association in late 1869, when 54 mass meetings were held to demand the release of Fenian prisoners: one of these demonstrations, held at Cabra, attracted an estimated 200,000 protesters and recalled the heyday of O'Connellite agitation. But the most famous and influential example of Fenian street-theatre came earlier, with the funeral of the Young Irelander, Terence Bellew MacManus, who died in exile in San Francisco on 15 January 1861.

The idea to exhume MacManus and convey his body to Dublin came probably from the IRB's sister organization in the United States, the Fenian Brotherhood, whose motivation may well have had more to do with sectional rivalries in Irish America than any higher principle. There was no initial coordination with the Irish Fenians, but while the body was in transit a MacManus Funeral Committee was created to superintend the arrangements in Dublin: this was in effect a Fenian front organization. MacManus's remains arrived in Dublin on 4 November, and there began an elaborate ceremonial which lasted until the final committal, at Glasnevin, on 10 November: the journey to the cemetery was the climax of the week's public mourning, for at least 7,000 or 8,000 accompanied the hearse, forming a procession about a mile in length and flanked by an enormous crowd of respectful onlookers. The numbers in themselves were impressive, but the restraint of the crowd was equally startling; and the visual impact of the occasion was heightened by the presence of funeral marshalls, dressed in mourning and on horseback, and by the widespread use among the processionists of black and white armbands. Although the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Paul Cullen, was hostile to clerical involvement, a Fenian sympathizer, Father Patrick Lavelle, conducted the necessary religious ceremonials and provided a suitably trenchant oration.

The significance of the occasion, though undoubted, is nevertheless hard to define. The MacManus funeral was a formidable display of Fenian organizational skill, and it provided a model for later republican ceremonial: there are parallels between this and the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in August 1915, when Patrick Pearse, echoing Lavelle in November 1861, delivered the graveside eulogy. The funeral also reveals a characteristic Fenian *modus operandi*, for the Brotherhood controlled the occasion, not directly but through its command of a subsidiary, or front organization, the MacManus Funeral Committee (such apparently innocuous patriotic bodies proliferated in the 1860s, often under the influence of Fenianism). Yet, whether the funeral reveals much about the state of contemporary Irish public opinion is open to question. Vincent Comerford has convincingly questioned any automatic connection between attendance on such occasions and endorsement of the political views

of the organizers: certainly the MacManus funeral cannot be used uncritically as evidence for the extent of active popular approval of Fenianism.[55] Archbishop Cullen attracted a crowd estimated by the police (who were rarely sanguine about such matters) at around 100,000 in July 1862, when he opened a new building for the Catholic University at Drumcondra. Even the Prince and Princess of Wales, visiting Ireland in April 1868, attracted great crowds and apparently widespread popular enthusiasm (especially when the Prince visited the Punchestown races). Such occasions reveal little other than transitory popular moods and a lively sense of occasion: they do not demonstrate fundamental political convictions. Fenianism certainly won credibility and gained in confidence through events such as the MacManus funeral; but spectators were not necessarily revolutionaries and sympathetic curiosity was not in itself the basis for a new order.

It would also be misleading to emphasize the social and recreational aspects of the movement to the exclusion of political and ideological themes. Fenianism was formed as a revolutionary conspiracy, and its leaders actively sought to promote the destruction of British rule in Ireland and the establishment of an Irish republic: the formal title of the movement, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was frequently rendered as 'the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood'. T.W. Moody has observed that Fenianism was the only Irish revolutionary organization of the nineteenth century which was committed to insurrection from the very moment of its foundation: where the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders had begun life as purely constitutional bodies and had only gradually, and reluctantly, turned to revolt, the Fenians always professed themselves to be revolutionaries, only occasionally and guiltily toying with constitutional action (as in 1869–70, and in 1873–6).[56] Insurrection, then, was a fundamental tenet of Fenianism, as was the attainment of Irish independence: but the objectives of the movement seem at the start to have been more negotiable than its strategy. For, though the formal goal of Fenian insurrection was a republic, and though a trenchant republicanism was a feature of some Fenian leaders, it is clear that others would have been prepared to accept a more modest constitutional settlement. Both John O'Leary and Charles Kickham were prepared to acknowledge the nominal supremacy of the British crown in a self-governing Ireland. Isaac Butt launched the Home Rule movement in 1870 having sounded out members of the Supreme Council of the IRB; and although relations between the Council and parliamentarianism subsequently became strained, a close if informal connection remained. Even Parnell, the icon of the parliamentary creed, was, it has been cautiously suggested, a recruit to Fenianism.[57]

The social attitudes of the Fenian leadership are even more elusive than their constitutional convictions. On the whole the priority of the movement was national independence, but in so far as certain rural social groupings seemed to be an impediment to this goal, then the Fenians evinced hostility: the landlords were occasional targets, as were the graziers ('those men of bullocks' or 'boors in broadcloth'), and the newly prosperous farming class.[58] Over-weening social ambition and greed were seen as diversions from a necessarily single-minded nationalism, and were therefore constantly denounced (this concern may have reflected the social insecurities

of the Fenians themselves as much as high-minded nationalist principle). The cry of the movement was 'the land for the people', and this combined with the apparently 'advanced' views of leaders like Stephens (who in 1866 became a member of the First International) suggested a highly socialistic organization. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the wealthy and professional classes stayed well clear from early Fenianism; and, equally, the farmers (who had no desire to see their hard-won property lost to 'the people') often remained aloof.

But these generalizations demand some qualification. There were personal and territorial and chronological distinctions in the social critique offered by Fenians. Different Fenian commanders offered different social perspectives: John O'Mahony, though a minor gentleman, described himself as 'an ultra-democrat', and his later writings (in the opinion of Desmond Ryan) 'foreshadowed the social teachings of Pearse and Connolly on the eve of 1916'; Charles Kickham, on the other hand, looked back nostalgically to the patriotic aristocracy of 1782, and at the opening of the Land War, in 1879, he and John O'Leary showed themselves to be highly sensitive to the plight of moderate or reasonable landlords.[59] Kickham, as President of the Supreme Council in the early 1880s, was 'passionately opposed both to the Parnellites themselves and to Fenian dealings with them'.[60] Moreover, despite the spirited rhetoric of the *Irish People* between 1863 and 1865, and despite the lurid condemnation of 'the aristocratic locusts . . . who have eaten the verdure of our fields' in the Fenian Proclamation of February 1867, the movement proved itself in practice to be sensitive towards the rights of property: the rebels of 1867 were, in this respect, peculiarly respectful and undestructive.[61] This feature, combined with the widespread sympathy for Fenian prisoners and the three 'Manchester Martyrs', helped at last to win some farmer support for the movement (especially in the province of Munster). Indeed the austerity of Fenian nationalism could prove to be as much of a burden in the countryside as the allegation of socialism: in 1879–80, at the opening of the Land War, the smallholders of the west effectively abandoned the IRB in preference for the more immediate and worldly temptations held out by the Land League.

Fenianism was thus a revolutionary conspiracy and not a coherent social doctrine; and the most complete (if highly flawed) expression of the Fenian ideal came not in any socialistic treatise but with the intensive revolutionary plans of 1865–7 and the rising of 1867. The Fenian leadership had long promised such a rebellion, and James Stephens had initially and brazenly decreed that 1865 would be the year of action. Large sums of money were sent from America by John O'Mahony, who also directed sympathetic veterans of the Civil War across the Atlantic in order to command the putative Irish rebel army. On 5 August 1865 Stephens directed O'Mahony to issue 'the final call' for American support, an initiative which involved the sale of 'Irish Republic' bonds and which indirectly signalled to Irish American sympathizers that the liberation of their homeland was at hand.[62] Yet the rebellion of 1865 never came: Stephens was gambling on the state of international relations, and, as the likelihood of an Anglo-American war faded and as British security seemed insurmountable, he was forced into bluster and prevarication. In fact delay, rather

than bringing any immediate tactical advantage, played into the hands of the authorities, for while Stephens's mixture of enthusiasm and procrastination sapped Fenian morale, the flow of intelligence into Dublin Castle (from informants such as Pierce Nagle) grew ever greater. The offices of the *Irish People* were raided by the police on 15 September, the paper – one of the chief vehicles of popular Fenianism – was suppressed and its files scrutinized for evidence of illegality: leading Fenians – T.C. Luby, O'Donovan Rossa, O'Leary – were arrested at the same time and bound over for trial. Stephens was apprehended a little later, but was sprung from gaol by John Devoy on 23 November: he remained in hiding in Ireland as his movement collapsed around him.

Uncertain of the effectiveness of normal judicial procedures, the government suspended the Habeas Corpus Act in February 1866, initiating a further and more intensive round of arrests. The cumulative impact of these assaults was disastrous, with the detention of hundreds of suspects, the disappearance of legal boltholes and the disruption of the Fenians' carefully crafted organizational structure. Stephens, however, continued to elude the authorities and managed to slip out of Ireland in March, bound, by a circuitous route, for the United States. In truth the government's actions can have caused him some mixed emotions, for, while his work was overturned, he was temporarily spared the recriminations of those whom he had raised to a fever pitch and abandoned. The respite was only temporary, however: as his promises of revolt were renewed throughout 1866, along with periodic private arguments for delay, the murderous frustration of his lieutenants grew. His teasing, schizoid leadership was finally rejected amidst a welter of personal abuse in New York in December 1866, when he was ousted from the command both of the American and Irish Fenian movements. In the end Stephens was a victim of his own charisma, for his prophetic style had deceived himself as much as the frustrated rebel heroes under his command.

Stephens's difficulty was akin to that of Carson in 1913–14: he was the leader of an armed conspiracy, the vitality of which depended on the lure of action. Promises of military glory were necessary to sustain popular morale; but, equally, such promises created the general expectation that they would be shortly redeemed. Both men grasped that, under existing circumstances, their movements would be annihilated in any conflict; and both sought to prevaricate in the Micawberish hope that 'something would turn up'. Carson's luck held out, for 'something' – in the shape of the Great War – *did* 'turn up', and both his leadership and the morale of his movement survived unimpaired, where Stephens was swept away by a tide of distrust and frustrated aggression. They were two vain and charismatic men with a shared instinct for political survival; but Carson had a lawyer's sense of the limits of persuasiveness and a firmer grasp on political realities.

When the Fenian rising came, in February and March 1867, it came without any direct intervention from Stephens. Indeed, partly because of the damage sustained by Irish Fenianism during the government offensive, and partly because of the wealth of Irish American military experience, the leadership of the impending revolt fell into the hands of several ex-officers of the Federal army, the most prominent of

whom was Colonel T.J. Kelly. Kelly, like Stephens (whose place he nominally filled), saw little hope of success for the revolutionary enterprise, but he had a stronger sense that the personal honour of the Fenians and the broader credibility of the movement were at stake: he was an energetic, indeed a calculating and ruthless soldier, but no desperado. Arriving in London at the end of January 1867, he found that a group of Irish Fenian refugees had – Stephens's procrastination notwithstanding – plans for a revolt well in hand, and though his own immediate preference was for caution, these schemes were put into action in mid-February. Over 1,000 Fenians gathered on 11 February in preparation for a raid on the well-stocked and (so it was thought) lightly guarded arsenal at Chester: but in fact the authorities had been informed of the rebel plans and had strengthened the garrison to the point where the Fenians lost heart and dispersed. A more minor uprising took place near Cahirciveen, County Kerry, where on 12 February around 100 Fenians under the command of a Colonel John O'Connor seized a coastguard station and its weapons before discovering – through the capture of a police dispatch rider – that their plans were also known to the authorities. They, too, like their English counterparts, dispersed. They, too, like their English counterparts, appear to have been the victims of an informer, John Joseph Corydon, who was well connected with the Fenian community in Liverpool.

The failure of the February insurrection discredited its architects and created an opening for a new executive committee, comprising representatives from each of the four provinces of Ireland. This met in London on 10 February and appears to have immediately transformed itself into a self-styled Provisional Government of Ireland: two further members, one representing the British Fenians, and Colonel Kelly (who surrendered his authority to the new body), were co-opted. At about the same time the new Provisional Government declared in favour of a further uprising, which was provisionally scheduled for the end of February but subsequently postponed to early March. This furious impulse to fight, in the teeth of failure and regardless of the damage done by the government and by informers, reflects both the desperation of the Civil War veterans and a general disgust at Stephens's dithering and apparent cowardice in 1865–6.

The manifesto of the rebels was published on 19 February and declared war on the 'aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish': the document, which was republican and internationalist in tone, reflected the political sensitivities not just of the Provisional Government but also of its English sympathizers, and especially Charles Bradlaugh. As Vincent Comerford has remarked, the cooperation between the Provisional Government and English republicans highlights a context for Fenian development beyond that which might normally be supplied: the Fenians certainly operated within a tradition of militant Irish republicanism, but in the later 1860s they were also part of, and sought to exploit, a broader republican connection in the United Kingdom.[63] However, neither these new English allies nor, indeed, the older American support networks delivered much by way of military aid. The Fenian rising of 1867 was launched with the support of English rhetoric and the questionable support supplied by Irish American officers; but no allied expeditionary force was

sent to Ireland and there was no diversionary uprising in Britain or in British North America.

The uprising had two main focuses, Dublin and Cork, with lesser out-breaks in Tipperary and Limerick: there were skirmishes in Clare, Louth, Queen's County and Waterford. The broad strategy (there was no detailed plan of campaign) was to hold out until the appearance of Irish American reinforcements; and this meant that set-piece battles with the crown forces (such as had broken the '98 rising) were unwelcome, and that raids on well-guarded barracks (such as the fiasco at Chester) were equally unwelcome. A number of rallying points were selected (Tallagh Hill, Dublin, and Limerick Junction): the choice of Limerick Junction reflected a general recognition of the importance of railways, and indeed a characteristic rebel action was the uprooting of track. Beyond these highly preliminary and defensive plans, there seems to have been little except a faith in improvisation. Perhaps this reflected despair, or a conviction that the purposes of Fenianism were sufficiently served by the fact of the revolt – the 'propaganda of the deed' – rather than its outcome.[64] But it may also be the case that, in the light of the betrayals of February, the leaders were suspicious of devising premature and over-elaborate plans which might easily have fallen into the hands of their enemies. If the impulse towards vagueness was the fear of treachery, then it was not entirely misplaced: for, as before, the authorities were well informed of the insurgents' schemes. Any gaps in their knowledge were helpfully plugged by a General Massey, who was arrested on 4 March and who graduated from being the most senior conspirator in Ireland to the role of chief witness for the crown in the prosecution of his former associates.

The Cork Fenians numbered perhaps 4,000 men, but though they carried out some minor operations – the capture of a coastguard station, the destruction of a police barracks – they never reached their designated muster-point and soon lost heart and dispersed. In Limerick the Fenians attacked a small police station at Kilmallock on 6 March (a premonition, it has been remarked, of the strategies of 1919–21); and there were similar minor confrontations between the rebels and the Irish Constabulary in Tipperary.[65] As in the aftermath of the '98 (though on a much smaller scale), these skirmishes were often conducted by small, broken bands and were devoid of any overall strategic purpose: as in the aftermath of the main battles of the '98, these skirmishes continued for several weeks after 5–6 March.

Though estimates vary, the most substantial manifestation of the 1867 rising came in Dublin. Here there were three intended points of mobilization on the night of 5–6 March – Tallaght Hill, Palmerston and Killakee at Rathfarnham: it appears that Killakee was to be the main centre of activity, for it was here that the military leader of the Dublin Fenians, General Halpin, had stationed himself. The other rallying points were probably chosen for diversionary purposes. If this was (as seems likely) the strategic purpose of the Dublin insurgents, then their plans went utterly awry: the lines of communication collapsed and Halpin waited at Killakee for a force that never arrived, while at Tallaght Hill a substantial gathering of Fenians waited for leadership that was never supplied. There were some, albeit very minor, successes:

the group of Fenians who gathered initially at Palmerston were led by two army veterans (Lennon, a deserter from the 9th Lancers, and Kirwan, a sergeant in the Irish Papal Brigade) and captured the police stations at Stepaside and Glencullen before dispersing. At Tallaght Hill a large body of Fenians assembled – the Irish Constabulary suggested (probably erring towards generosity) as many as 7,000–8,000 – but, aside from the lack of organization and direction among this body, they were demoralized by the results of a minor affray at Tallaght police station, where the Constabulary routed a small body of Fenians and inflicted two casualties. The insurgents on the Hill either slunk away in despair or were dispersed and driven off by British troops. The overall result of the Dublin rising was, for the rebels, utterly disastrous. Recent scholarship has laid emphasis on the relatively large numbers that the Fenians were able to mobilize (despite the failures of February and the impact of arrests), but the complete failure of the Fenian leadership to exploit this support has also been stressed. As the latest scholar of the episode has remarked: 'the conduct of the rising amply confirmed the dangers of a headquarters staff of American officers totally divorced from the centres, the effective leaders of the individual circles'.[66] Given the plight of Halpin, a disoriented leader separated from his dispirited troops, this judgement seems hard to fault.

If the 1867 rising was a diminutive version of the '98, then Bompard's expedition was echoed in the arrival, in May 1867, of *Erin's Hope*, a solitary vessel carrying a handful of Irish American sympathizers, who were rounded up by the authorities with the same efficiency that had been applied to Tone and his allies. The scale of the two risings at first glance scarcely bears comparison: it is doubtful whether the rebels of 1867 mustered 10,000 men in total, where perhaps 50,000 turned out in 1798; estimates of the casualties of the '98 vary between 30,000 and 100,000, where the total fatalities of the 1867 rising amounted to 12. However, both rebellions had an apparently decisive impact on British policy, and both supplied the revolutionary cause with martyrs. Tone, sentenced to hang long after the rebels had been crushed, was the most celebrated victim of the '98 rising (even though he took his own life); and equally the most celebrated casualties of the 1867 rising fell after the battles had been lost, and met death on a British scaffold.

Just as the bloody aftermath of the '98 contributed greatly to the folk-memory of the rising as a whole, so the aftermath of the 1867 rising had in some ways a much more fundamental political impact than the military episodes of February and March: the immediate fall-out from the '67 certainly stimulated a much more intense and sympathetic popular interest than the botched manoeuvres of the rebels. On 11 September Colonel T.J. Kelly and a fellow Fenian officer, Timothy Deasy, were arrested in Manchester; a week later they were escorted in a Black Maria from their gaol in order to make a brief court appearance. These legal formalities gave would-be rescuers a chance, while the spectacular (and politically profitable) rescue of James Stephens in 1865 provided an exemplar: returning from court, the Black Maria was attacked by 30 armed Fenians, who liberated both Kelly and Deasy but in so doing also shot and killed one of the (unarmed) police guards, Sergeant Brett. Twelve suspects were later charged with involvement, and of these five men

were sentenced to hang: two of the five were reprieved, but Allen, Larkin and O'Brien went to the gallows at Salford Gaol on 23 November.

The three men had saved their leaders (Allen said that he would die for Colonel Kelly), but – more remarkably – they had also saved their movement: they succeeded in rescuing the 1867 rising from the ridicule which had been applied to the '48, and which might easily have been transferred to the confused and futile skirmishes that constituted the Fenian uprising. For Allen, Larkin and O'Brien were executed despite what Catholic Ireland viewed as their innocence of calculated murder, and as a result of what was seen as British injustice. (For their part the British authorities had little doubt about the guilt of the accused: the two presiding justices and Cranbrook, the not unkindly Home Secretary, were convinced that Allen had fired the fatal shot and that he and the other two Fenians had led the ambush.) There may also, paradoxically, have been an element of surprise and shock in the Irish reaction: the public was accustomed to a relatively lenient judicial response to insurgency (there were no executions after the 1848 rising, or indeed as a result of the main unrest in 1867), and this complacency was confirmed by the general assumption that the suspects were innocent, by the youth of the accused (Allen was only 19), and by the two reprieves that preceded the hangings.

The political repercussions of this confusion of anger and shock and sympathy were profound. As with the 1916 rising, so in 1867 the execution of Irish rebels created a consensus of support for Fenianism which had hitherto been conspicuously lacking. As in 1916, so in 1867, Irish parliamentarianism and Irish militancy achieved a shaky sort of rapprochement; after each rising the Catholic hierarchy and Irish militancy were able to establish a cautious understanding. The full force of sentimental nationalism was mobilized in the interests of the militant leaders: propertied Irish people could now, through the patriotic sacrifice of the Manchester Martyrs, appreciate those whom they had once suspected of propagating socialism and anarchy.

This political reorientation deserves some further attention. The title of 'martyr' that was bestowed upon Allen, Larkin and O'Brien hinted at a shift in the relationship between popular Catholicism and the Fenian movement. The Church had hitherto been divided on the issue of the Fenian threat: MacHale of Tuam had refused to condemn the movement and had offered some protection to the most outspoken of the Fenian priests, Patrick Lavelle; Moriarty of Kerry, a Gallican like MacHale, was a vehement critic of Fenianism, who cooperated with the crown authorities and (much to Archbishop Cullen's disgust) maintained good relations with the local Protestant clergy. On the other hand, Cullen (a cardinal after 1866) differed from Moriarty only in degree, seeing Fenianism less in terms of its nationalism than its (in his skewed perspective) rampant anti-clericalism; he therefore damned the movement as an Irish manifestation of the prevalent continental godlessness. Cullen, predictably, was a more imaginative critic than Moriarty (whose indictment of the IRB did not extend far beyond the conviction that 'eternity was not long enough and hell not hot enough for the Fenians'); indeed, Cullen sponsored an initiative designed to divert electoral attention away from the Fenian movement and

to win popular endorsement for several essentially Catholic political concerns (although tenant right also featured alongside disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and state funding for Catholic education).[67] But the new National Association of Ireland, founded on 29 December 1864, returned only three MPs at the general election of 1865 and soon limped into the political sidelines.

Cullen has been seen (in certain respects, at any rate) as a more innovative political radical than his Fenian opponents, for, while the Fenians stood in a familiar tradition of insurrection, Cullen was attempting to formalize the subjection of Catholic Ireland to clerical political leadership: 'it [the creation of the National Association] will generally be regarded as only a fresh attempt to Ultramontanise the Irish people', opined the (Conservative) *Dublin Evening Mail*.[68] His failure kept alive both the fluid relationship between Catholicism and the IRB, and the broader possibility of a non-sectarian nationalism.

The implications of Cullen's failure became clear after the execution of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien. Free from the discipline of the National Association, or indeed any other secular body directed by the Cardinal, Catholic priests and the Catholic laity united in a widespread public display of mourning. At mass on the day following the executions, Sunday 24 November, priests prayed for the souls of the three Martyrs; in the following weeks requiem mass was widely celebrated in commemoration of the Martyrs' sacrifice and for the peace of their souls. Priests and laity collaborated in solemn mock funerals, one of the largest of which took place on 1 December in Cork: another massive procession, attracting some 30,000 participants, marched in Dublin on 8 December. Some of the burning sense of injustice which fuelled these demonstrations was dissipated by the Fenians' attempt to spring one of their number, Richard Burke, from Clerkenwell gaol: this enterprise depended on a bomb, which, when detonated on 13 December, killed over 20 people living in the neighbourhood but failed to effect Burke's escape. But although the Clerkenwell explosion caused a momentary hesitation, it fired English outrage and indirectly helped to intensify national hostilities; so that the pro-Fenian alliance of priests and people, though shaken, remained substantially intact.

This clerical endorsement of the Martyrs, though it was by no means a blanket approval of Fenian aims or strategy, encouraged many of those who had hitherto kept the Brotherhood at arm's length. The farmers were amongst those who were most susceptible to the influence of the Church, and were therefore amongst those who were most influenced by the very public shift in clerical attitudes. In addition, the rising of 1867 had brought none of the feared despoliation of property, and had instead delivered three heroes: the rising could therefore be interpreted not necessarily in the light of the anti-clericalism or apparent social radicalism of the *Irish People*, but rather in a more traditional and comprehensible way as a conventional demonstration of Irish gallantry and patriotism, and of British repression and duplicity. After the executions at Salford gaol farmers and others who had been sceptical could accept Fenianism as an honourable expression of Irish patriotic aspirations. Fenianism became identified with the cause of tenant right, and indeed served increasingly as a blank screen onto which all manner of social and national grievances

might be projected. By 1871 the ribbon movement – the secret rural combinations of small farmers and labourers – had been won to the cause of the Brotherhood (although Paul Bew has suggested that the high price paid by the Fenians was 'an acceptance of the traditional methods and objectives of agrarian outrage').[69]

The popularization of the Fenians meant, inevitably, a blurring of the distinctions between the constitutional and physical force traditions. This process had a number of aspects: first, as it attracted greater numbers of sympathizers, so the Brotherhood lost some of its militant integrity. Second, if Fenianism was moving closer to constitutionalism, then the constitutionalists were also edging towards the Fenians. Third, Liberalism, freed from the Whiggish preoccupations of Palmerston, was simultaneously evolving as a more inclusivist political force, appealing in particular to the concerns of the Celtic peoples. Thus by 1869–70 a great (if often vulnerable) coalition of Irish constitutionalists and militants, allied with British Liberals, was evolving – an alliance which would later be reconstituted under Parnell and which would dominate Anglo-Irish relations until 1916.

Aside from the Martyrs themselves, the two most influential figures in the early stages of this evolution were Isaac Butt and Gladstone. Butt occupied a political position of great strategic importance, standing at the intersection of several Irish political traditions. He was a great lawyer and constitutionalist who had applied his talents to the defence of, first, the Young Ireland prisoners in 1848, and, later, the Fenian prisoners of 1866–8. Butt was closely involved, therefore, with the creation of Fenian apologetics; and he carried his arguments as defence counsel out of the courtroom to a broader public in 1868–9 through a campaign for the release of the Fenian prisoners. He helped to propagate this initially somewhat fissile campaign, and in June 1869 he emerged as President of a united Amnesty Association: the Association sponsored a series of popular meetings in the summer and autumn of 1869 which, though starting somewhat shakily, peaked on 10 October, when an estimated 200,000 people gathered at Cabra to hear Butt, G.H. Moore and other proponents of an amnesty. Thereafter the Association, fearful of creating the conditions for another Clontarf, suspended these 'monster' meetings. The movement had only a partial success, therefore, and not only because the Association was scarred by the memory of O'Connell: for although the government was prepared to release some Fenian prisoners immediately, it was not prepared to release all, nor was it willing to free the most prominent (save Charles Kickham).

However, as Butt's biographer has remarked, the success of the Amnesty Association rested less with this very qualified outcome than with more intangible and long-term benefits. Militants and constitutionalists were united for the first time in 'constitutional action for a common object'.[70] The meetings at which this Association developed worked not just in the interests of an amnesty but at a more fundamental level: just as with O'Connell's meetings for emancipation and repeal, violent and emotive rhetoric was used, which roused a patriotic fury and which (in the words of John O'Mahony) brought 'the resurrection of a nation from its death-like torpor'.[71] The Amnesty movement helped to create a nationalist coalition and to fire nationalist sentiment, but it also helped to enhance the political

reputation of Butt. Butt was able to exploit his popular standing and his influence with the Fenians to direct this national coalition towards a new body and a new goal: the Home Government Association (founded on 19 May 1870 with the tacit sanction of some of the Fenian Supreme Council); and Home Rule.

While tame constitutionalists such as Butt were luring the Fenians away from their revolutionary purity, Gladstone and the British Liberals were luring Butt and his Fenian allies towards the cage of parliamentary politics. The more anaemic Irish Republican Brotherhood of 1869–70 now confronted not the full-blooded British chauvinism of Palmerstonian Whiggery but rather the much more sympathetic, populist and celticized Liberalism of Gladstone. The general election of 1868 was fought and won by Gladstone on the question of the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland; for he had found in the Church an issue that attracted support from British non-conformists of all hues as well as from Irish Catholics. This revision of British Liberalism, coming in the wake of the Fenians' military failure as well as of John Blake Dillon's conciliatory initiative of 1865–6, reaped immediate electoral dividends in Ireland: the total of 66 seats which the Irish Liberals won was the high-water mark of their success in the nineteenth century. Almost certainly Gladstonian 'justice for Ireland' was immediately rooted in these psephological calculations rather than in panic: as Vincent Comerford has eloquently argued, 'justice for Ireland' was offered by Gladstone 'initially and primarily in order to win seats in Ireland; he did so, not because Fenians had guns and gunpowder, but because other Irish catholics had votes'.[72] A contrary view is apparently supplied by Gladstone himself, who in the House of Commons on 31 May 1869 declared (amidst characteristic layers of qualification) that 'the Fenian conspiracy has been an important influence with respect to Irish policy'.[73] Gladstone's argument was that the Fenian outrages awakened British public opinion to the broader condition of Irish politics; but he was keen to emphasize that, in spite of this electoral awakening, the Fenians had not altered his own convictions 'in the slightest degree'. These apparently divergent glosses are in fact easily reconcilable: Gladstone was indeed moved by electoral considerations, as Comerford has argued; but the electorate, in turn, was moved by the Fenian threat. Indeed, the very fact that Gladstone was able to win the election of 1868 on an Irish issue (referring to the landed ascendancy in terms which would not have been misplaced in the Fenian Proclamation) highlights some of the electoral implications of the uprising in the previous year.

Gladstone's second instalment of 'justice for Ireland' undermined the renewed tenant right campaign of 1869–70, but brought less popular Catholic satisfaction than the Irish Church Act of 1869. The new farmer agitation was launched in 1869 by Sir John Gray, the constitutionalist proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*, who was reviving the old Tenant League agenda of the early 1850s but under apparently more propitious circumstances: as in its earlier manifestation, the movement was founded on farmers' clubs which eventually united under a national Irish Tenant League. Butt, who privately saw the farmers' movement as a diversion from the amnesty and broader constitutional questions, offered a highly insipid support; but he was concerned to hedge his political bets and therefore attended the meeting

(held on 28 September 1869) at which the new Tenant League was launched. He was also present on 2–3 February 1870 at a great Land Conference, which was held in order to thrash out a coherent reform proposal: but he appears to have been disingenuous, persuading the delegates into making lavish demands which he knew would not be satisfied – and which he calculated would stand in the way of any premature reconciliation between the farmers and the apparently benign Liberal administration. Gladstone's Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Bill, which was published on 15 February, compromised the principles of free contract and *laissez-faire* (the Ulster custom was legalized, and some tenants were given greater security of tenure and an enhanced right to compensation for improvements); but the radical precedents created by the measure were concealed by its apparently tentative nature and by the modest defence offered by its author (Gladstone may well have been as concerned to settle his own nerves as to allay proprietorial suspicions). Butt's tactical judgement was therefore once again affirmed; and he was able to quietly direct the disappointed tenant activists towards a higher goal – Home Rule.

Butt had therefore succeeded in diverting many Fenians as well as many farmers towards the cause of Home Rule. Fenianism had flourished in the context of a divided and directionless Irish parliamentary representation; and, equally, it withered when a constitutional movement emerged which supplied a coherent leadership to Irish Catholics and captured their political imagination. The success of Butt's Home Rule agitation – 60 Home Rulers were returned at the general election of 1874, as opposed to only 10 Liberals – reflected the extent to which it had replaced Fenianism as the political vessel into which all Irish political and social aspirations were poured. The Fenians themselves were captivated (in part, at least): at a grand Fenian Convention held in March 1873 the Supreme Council decreed that the day of insurrection might be postponed, pending the approval of the Irish people; and that in the meantime the IRB might 'lend its support to every movement calculated to advance the cause of Irish independence consistently with the preservation of its own integrity'.[74] This reflected partly a hesitant acceptance of the Home Rule initiative as well as a deep-seated passivity within the Fenian movement – a passivity which owed much to Kickham, by 1874 the President of the Supreme Council, and which offended the much more gung-ho approach of American Fenianism (dominated after 1867 by John Devoy and the Clan na Gael movement). It was Clan na Gael that was instrumental in purging the Irish leadership of those who appeared to be falling for Home Rule: a decision of the Supreme Council, taken on 10 August 1876, bound all Fenians to abandon 'active cooperation' with the Home Rule movement, and as a result the Council lost four of its members, including two MPs (Joseph Biggar and John O'Connor Power).[75] Only when a suitably 'advanced' and apparently ruthless parliamentarian emerged on the scene, in the shape of Charles Stewart Parnell, did the possibilities of the constitutional approach dawn on the Clan na Gael: this turnaround was enshrined in Devoy's 'New Departure' telegram of October 1878, in which he offered conditional support to Parnell, and by his protracted courting of the 'Chief' in 1879. Even then, however, Kickham and the Supreme Council of the Irish Fenians remained aloof, attempting to preserve the old militant austerity

while their movement, broken by the attractions of the Land League and of the Parliamentary Party, collapsed around them.

Fenianism was overshadowed but not suppressed: it survived, providing a cabbalistic underpinning to the dominant parliamentary movement until in 1916, as in 1858–9, constitutionalism was judged to have failed and the Fenian moment recurred. However, the highpoint of nineteenth-century Fenianism came unquestionably, and ironically, in the wake of the defeats of 1867. The 'martyrdom' of Allen, O'Brien and Larkin created a massive patriotic movement out of a limited insurrectionary conspiracy. Fenianism was now tolerated, if not blessed, by the Church; an equally reverent popular institution, W.E. Gladstone, supplied some indirect and unwilling encouragement. But the basis for this brief popular expansion had been laid much earlier: by the eloquent propagandizing of Fenian journalists and literators, and through the social Fenianism of the early and mid-1860s.

Fenianism looked to 1798, and to 1848, and indeed in some senses was a direct by-product of Young Ireland and the Irish Confederation. In certain limited respects it also anticipated the later Irish Republican Army (IRA), most clearly in its militant constitution, its organization and its self-reliance: there was a substantial Fenian presence in the higher ranks of the IRA (to be found most obviously with Michael Collins and his lieutenants). The Fenians also greatly enriched the popular culture of late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century republicanism, supplying icons, ballads and a popular literature: the numerous memorials to the Manchester Martyrs are evidence of the material culture supplied by the IRB; T.D. Sullivan's song, 'God save Ireland!', inspired by the courtroom utterances of the Martyrs, supplied an unofficial anthem both to later republicans as well as constitutionalists.

But in other respects the Fenians were a premonition of militant loyalism – and indeed the parallels between Fenianism and the Ulster Volunteer Force of 1912–14 are as compelling as those between Fenianism and later militant republicans. Both the UVF and IRB were very public militant conspiracies; both, however, were serious military institutions. But where the Fenians had been trained in the battlefields of the American Civil War, the UVF leaders had in many cases gained experience in South Africa, fighting the Boers. Both bodies depended on gun-running for their weaponry, the UVF profiting from the cast-offs from the Edwardian arms race, and the Fenians benefiting from the glut of cheap weapons on the market after the Civil War. Both movements were launched against strained international contexts and a heightened popular militancy: both movements to some extent supplied otherwise peaceful civilians with a spurious military glory. Each body had its adventurers: Devoy's rescue of six Fenian prisoners held in Western Australia using the ship *Catalpa* is reminiscent, in its derring-do, of Fred Crawford's Childeresque escapades with the gun-running vessel the *SS Fanny* (or indeed his plan to kidnap Gladstone and transport him by yacht to the Antipodes).

But the UVF, like Fenianism, attracted immense popular support because it was simultaneously a military threat and a means of recreation. Both bodies provided bored, patriotic clerks and shop assistants and salesmen with a purposeful hobby; both bodies helped to cement family ties, and social and commercial connections.

Membership of the UVF was as much a commercial asset to a small businessman in Protestant Belfast in 1914 as membership of the IRB was to a Catholic shopkeeper in (say) Cork in 1865. The success of each body depended, therefore, not simply on its political or military aspirations: each body thrived because it was rooted in the social and commercial insecurities of Irish society.

4.4 Home Rule: A First Definition

While British legislation
Afflicts our Irish nation,
And no amelioration
Of that misrule is near;
Parnell the Pertinacious,
O'Donnell the Audacious,
Will prove how efficacious
Our strategy is here.
Popular doggerel (*c.*1879)[76]

The Independent Irish Party and Fenianism each exercised an influence over the early evolution of the Home Rule movement. The Independent Irish Party supplied a strategy of unencumbered parliamentary opposition, and it also suggested a loose (in fact destructively loose) form of party organization and discipline: in addition there were some veterans of the Independent Party who survived to contribute to the foundation of the Home Rule movement, the most prominent of whom was G.H. Moore. Both parties expressed a mild-mannered and ultimately ineffectual interest in education and in tenant right.

The contribution of Fenianism to the Home Rule movement was (paradoxical though it may seem) much more profound than that of the Independents. Superficially the resemblance between the Independent Irish Party and the early Home Rule Party appears close (both were genteel, inchoate, sometimes directionless parliamentary bodies), but in truth the dependence of the Home Rulers on the achievement of Fenianism was much greater than their debt to any constitutional predecessor (with the arguable exception of O'Connell). For the Fenian movement achieved, through the three Manchester Martyrs and through the Amnesty movement, a degree of popular politicization which had not been reached since the days of repeal. Contemporary commentators and historians interpret this point in slightly different ways, but there is a shared sense of the dependence of Home Rule on the Fenian achievement. Theo Hoppen has emphasized the extent to which the Amnesty movement of the late 1860s overcame what he sees as the 'natural' localism of Irish politics: the Amnesty Association achieved a political 'breakthrough', creating a national movement and popularizing a national issue, especially in rural constituencies where narrow parochial concerns had for long been predominant.[77] These, for Hoppen, were the national foundations upon which the Home Rule

movement built. The egotistical and tendentious F. Hugh O'Donnell introduced his *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party* (1910) with a more crude and flamboyant expression of the same argument: 'it would be quite useless for me to write this history; this history would lack its essential significance, if I were to omit or attenuate the significance of Fenianism in reviving all the forces of Irish protest against the Act of Union'.[78]

Even in its first tentative organizational form, Home Rule embodied very considerable political potential. The Home Government Association was formed in May 1870 by Isaac Butt, who was uniting Protestant Conservative dissidents with Catholic Liberals in a constitutional initiative which was blessed with the 'benevolent neutrality' of an insurrectionist body, the Irish Republican Brotherhood.[79] The demand itself, a call for the re-establishment of an autonomous Irish parliament in Dublin, had a very high level of brand recognition among Irish voters, for it was basically a resurrection of the O'Connellite call for repeal of the Union. In addition the Association benefited from the high level of national political awareness achieved by the Fenians and the Amnesty campaign; and (linked to this) it benefited from growing disillusionment with Gladstone's promises of 'justice for Ireland'. Popular Catholic expectations had been aroused by disestablishment and shattered by the prosaic reality of the Land Act (Irish Protestant disillusionment had come earlier, with the Irish Church Act, which had stimulated some limited Conservative support for the Home Government Association); Catholic liberals were also dissatisfied with Gladstone's Irish University Bill (1873), and thunderstruck by his vigorous and truculent assault on the Vatican council (his pamphlet, *The Vatican Decrees*, first published in November 1874, went through 110 editions and stands as by far the most popular of his writings).

Some aspects of this rich potential were realized; other aspects withered with a depressing swiftness. Voters were interested in the idea of Home Rule, but there was no great passion and – more important – no great willingness to subscribe; the contrast with the repeal movement in both these respects was therefore marked. In addition sectarian tensions in Ireland (and beyond), while rarely offering scope for encouragement, had taken a turn for the worse in the wake of the promulgation of papal infallibility. Butt's hopes of a propertied patriotic coalition seemed initially justified by the nervous union of Protestant and Catholic gentry which launched the Home Government Association. But in practice the suspicion entertained by the hierarchy that the Association was a Tory ruse discouraged widespread Catholic participation; and when – after the failure of Gladstone's university proposals and after his Vatican pronouncements – the bishops evinced a cautious interest in the Association, it was the turn of Protestant Tory nerves to fail. The Protestant Conservatives who had helped to create the Association feared, and particularly after the passage of the Ballot Act (1872), that they would be entrapped and overwhelmed within a popular Catholic movement. These proto-Home Rulers (men such as Edward King-Harman) would eventually find a more comfortable station within organized Unionism, and would indeed bring to Unionism a quirky sense of Irish patriotism which it has often hidden, but never entirely lost.

Some of these burdens on the Association were beyond Butt's ability to remove (though he might affect to ignore them); others (primarily the question of organizational inadequacy) were lightened when, in November 1873, the Home Government Association was superseded by a new Home Rule League and by its British sister organization, the Home Rule Confederation. Organizational defects remained, but the new League benefited from the popularity of the Home Rule concept with the farmers' clubs and – to a more qualified extent – with the Catholic Church; and, drawing upon these ancilliary but crucial resources, it managed to return 59 MPs to the House of Commons in the general election of February 1874. Many of these men were perhaps pragmatic patriots: one putative Home Rule candidate explained to a Liberal minister that his separatist manifesto was his 'only chance. I do not think anyone can make much of my Home Rule'.[80] Many were also anxious, once elected, to retain at least a nominal independence: J.G. Biggar's efforts to impose a more rigorous discipline on the party failed (fortunately for himself, in fact, since his own 'advanced' convictions and defiant obstructionism in the years 1874–7 would otherwise have been smothered). In many cases these Home Rulers owed their seats to farmers: but they were a very gentrified crew, and indeed contained many landed Liberals who had trimmed their sails to accommodate the prevailing farmer gale. There was, however, some premonition of the shape of things to come: even though the new Home Rule Party was largely landed, and even though the House of Commons as a whole was still a landed institution, two tenant farmers had been returned on the Home Rule ticket. Moreover, although Biggar's efforts to create an Irish caucus at Westminster had failed, the Home Rule Party 'demonstrated a remarkable degree of voting cohesion on Irish issues in the Parliament of 1874–80' (in contrast to the more chaotic condition of the Liberal stand on Ireland).[81]

Still, the contrasts between the Buttite party and the Parnellite party are striking. A sharp if acerbic commentator, F. Hugh O'Donnell, highlighted six areas where he felt that there were distinctions between the first Home Rulers and their (in his view) tainted 'Parnello-Gladstonian' successors.[82] Butt's party sought the restoration of an Irish parliament, as did the Parnellites, but the strong federalist tinge to Butt's (and O'Donnell's own) convictions meant that his party was concerned to promote an Irish contribution to imperial affairs in any future parliament governing 'the common Empire'. Buttite Home Rule was both federalist as well as gentrified in tone: the first Home Rulers looked to a bicameral Irish parliament, which would represent the Irish peers and command their intellectual and political resources. The first Home Rulers also repudiated any tendency towards machine politics (this in contradistinction to the formidable Parnellite caucus that emerged in the 1880s); allied with this was the original conviction that Home Rule MPs should be representatives of local opinion, and not delegates. Finally, O'Donnell stressed that the original Home Rulers repudiated any hint of sectarian ascendancy (this evidently in contrast to the influence of the Catholic Church within the Parnellite movement); and that they rejected agrarian revolution.

These characteristics stemmed in large part from the leadership supplied by Butt, which was moderate and reasoned, and – as befitted a lawyer and scholar – respectful

towards British constitutional practice. This rationality and caution was deeply felt, but it was also designed to impress British parliamentarians: it was thus a subtle combination of conventionality and deference, and as such (and especially in the context of the somewhat remote and facetious Tory leadership) it was utterly ineffectual. Butt's polite demand for the consideration of Home Rule was swept aside in March 1874, when first tentatively presented ('He did not at present ask the house to concede Home Rule to Ireland. That question remained to be discussed, and perhaps to be discussed for many years').[83] His land bill, submitted in 1876, was easily defeated (45 of his own nominal supporters helped to vote it down); he was unable to satisfy his ever-suspicious clerical supporters by devising a suitable university bill; and the more raucous elements within his own support broke free from his genteel example in May, when they staged a 'scene' over the question of the Fenian prisoners. The resubmission of his demand for Home Rule in June 1876 created further uproar, with his 'supporters' offering rival and contradictory definitions of legislative independence, and the Chief Secretary, Michael Hicks Beach, and the young member for County Meath coming into conflict over the Manchester episode. This new MP, elected only in April 1875, was Charles Stewart Parnell, and his cool and simple defence of the 'Martyrs' in the face of the intimidating 'Black Michael' (as the Chief Secretary came to be known) won the sympathetic attention of Fenians.

These early trials of Butt's leadership highlighted a variety of problems. There was no firm party discipline and no clear characterization of policy: Butt defined his 'party' as a group of independent and sympathetic representatives rather than as a disciplined, machine-driven body. He had a strong respect both for property and for the Empire – a respect which tended to limit his room for manoeuvre in the Commons and his popular appeal in Ireland: he was too much of an imperialist and too much of a gentleman to regard Britain's difficulties as anything other than Ireland's difficulties, and – like Carson – his instinct was to rein in Irish opposition when Britain's diplomatic or imperial adventures looked set to bring war. In addition he did not regard parliament as a full-time occupation or commitment, and was guilty (in common with his moderate support) of frequent absenteeism: his catastrophic personal finances meant that, despite an admittedly somewhat modest 'tribute' fund, he had to maintain his career at the bar. These qualities and convictions were treated as problems by an increasingly influential and militant element within the Home Rule Party, and they were to provide the grounds for the attempted overthrow of Butt's leadership in the years between 1877 and his death in May 1879.

To argue that Butt inspired this opposition is not simply to suggest that his failings conjured it into existence: on the contrary, he created both problems as well as solutions. To a certain extent the opposition to Butt arose not from contrary strategies or convictions, but rather from a caricatured interpretation of Butt's own vision: problems arose because Parnell and his truculent allies were young men in a hurry, where Butt was an old man who appeared quite content to mark time. The anger of these young turks arose because the party was achieving little or nothing,

and their response took two forms: parliamentary obstruction and the strengthening of ties with the 'advanced' nationalists outside the Commons.

Yet, while these strategies were a reaction against Butt's passivity, they owed something to his initiatives. Butt was interested in the possibility of parliamentary obstruction, although he was not prepared to carry obstruction to what he regarded as an indiscriminate or undignified level. At the conference that launched the Home Rule League, held in November 1873, he admitted that 'extreme cases might justify a policy of obstruction', though he confessed that he regarded the benefits as limited and possibly counter-productive.[84] Nevertheless, once elected, he embarked on a moderate and brief campaign of obstruction to the Conservative government's Expiring Laws Continuance Bill (1874), which brought no tangible gain but rather – for Butt – the acceptable alternative of a moral victory. The battle was renewed in the spring of 1875, with the Peace Preservation (Ireland) Bill, a measure which Butt promised to oppose with vigour: 'we believe that we can promise that the Irish party will in this matter, at least, exhaust all the forms of the house to attain their just and righteous object'.[85] But what David Thornley has called Butt's 'policy of argument' – the policy of debating and questioning in detail – was tempered with an unrelenting concern for the dignity both of the Home Rule Party and of the Commons, and in practice he could be relied upon to go to the verges of wilful obstruction, and there to stop.[86] This procedural brinkmanship caused frustration among some of his colleagues from the start: already in 1874 a different and more thorough-going version of Buttite tactics was being tested by J.G. Biggar, the MP for Cavan, a hard-dealing Belfast man with little respect for genteel conventions. By the parliamentary recess of 1876–7, it was clear that Butt's more moderate obstructionism was winning moral victories, and gentle compliments from the Conservative front bench, but little else; and there emerged within the Home Rule Party a small coterie, centred on Biggar and Parnell, who (though differing somewhat in their ultimate convictions) were prepared to develop a more ruthless approach to parliamentary procedure.

Biggar and Parnell were joined by Frank Hugh O'Donnell, returned at a by-election in January 1877, and by Edmund Dwyer Gray, the proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*, returned for Tipperary in May 1877; there were three other obstructionists, including John O'Connor Power. Together these men abandoned the restraints of their nominal leaders and embarked upon a campaign of disruption aimed at government business. Every procedural opportunity was exploited: measures were talked down, and where natural eloquence failed, the reading of Blue Books provided a substitute. These tactics were summarized under four headings, called facetiously (by Parnell, evidently) 'Biggar's Four Gospels': '1. To work in Government time. 2. To aid anybody to spend Government time. 3. Whenever you see a Bill, block it. 4. Whenever you see a Raw [a sensitive issue?], rub it'.[87] Two episodes in this season of parliamentary warfare were of particular significance. First, in April 1877 Butt was stung by Parnell's obtuseness into making a public rebuke ('an unforgiveable sin for an Irish nationalist', F.S.L. Lyons has commented, 'to condemn fellow countrymen in a foreign country').[88] Second, the obstructionist campaign reached a

well-publicized climax at the end of July 1877, with the protracted debate on the South Africa Bill, a measure designed to formalize the annexation of the Transvaal. This resulted in an all-night sitting of the House on 31 July–1 August and brought the mounting tensions between an appalled Butt and his wayward following to a head. Butt attempted to reassert his authority at a meeting of Home Rule MPs held on 6 August, but succeeded only in providing a forum for the bitter animosities that were brewing within the party. Hereafter the confrontation grew more direct, and more acrimonious.

The obstructionist tactics of the Biggar–Parnell coterie brought as little tangible gain as the genteel parliamentary gamesmanship of Isaac Butt: they did, however, arouse tremendous popular interest and enthusiasm (press reports of 'seven Irish agin the English' were calculated to fire patriotic emotions).[89] The well-publicized cussedness of Biggar and Parnell helped therefore to rally popular support for a party and for a parliamentary strategy which had otherwise failed to capture the imagination. Their actions helped to redefine Irish parliamentarianism in other ways. The obstructionists divided the Home Rule Party, humiliating Butt and discrediting his policies with a broad section of the Irish electorate: the confrontation of August 1877 was swiftly followed by Butt's deposition (at the hands of Parnell) from the Presidency of the Home Rule Confederation. But the actions that divided the obstructionists from their moderate leadership simultaneously helped to fashion links with an alternative source of support: the Fenian movement. In fact Butt's humiliation with the Home Rule Confederation probably owed much to the Fenians, who had heavily infiltrated this body.

The sudden fame of the obstructionists was attained at precisely the moment when the Clan na Gael were consolidating their influence within British and Irish Fenianism. Butt had of course launched the Home Rule League with the tacit support of some leading Irish Fenians, and his leadership had been originally sustained by memories of his defence of the Young Ireland and Fenian prisoners. However, although he pioneered the relationship between parliamentarianism and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, he reaped only scanty political profits: for, while the constitutional Fenianism of the late 1860s had helped to create the Home Rule movement, the senior leaders of the Brotherhood remained doggedly (if passively) insurrectionist. In addition, John Devoy and the Clan na Gael were decidedly unimpressed by Butt's delicate pirouetting, and put pressure on their Irish counterparts to reinforce a traditional, militant line: the influence of Clan na Gael lay behind the purge of 1876–7, when those sympathetic to the parliamentary experiment were expelled from the Brotherhood. Devoy's influence over Irish Fenianism was further affirmed with the creation in 1877 of a joint committee of the IRB and Clan na Gael, and by the high levels of funding that the Americans were supplying to their Irish brethren. But it would be wrong to infer from this either that Devoy and the Clan na Gael were all powerful, or that they were opposed in principle to parliamentarianism: the problem for Devoy lay partly with the Buttite formulation of Home Rule (his colleague William Carroll described the Home Rulers of 1879 as offering 'a heart-sickening picture, a miserable caricature of the movement of

Grattan without a scintilla of its fire and spirit'); another problem lay with the influences behind parliamentarianism.[90] Devoy and Clan na Gael were ultimately prepared to accept the parliamentary experiment, but only if it were redefined along more aggressive lines and only if they were able to exercise some degree of control over this redefinition.

The last months of Butt's leadership were characterized by two distinct but related developments. First, the animosity between the old leader and the obstructionists was becoming more overt and more highly charged. The increasingly complex and dangerous entanglements of British diplomacy at the end of the 1870s highlighted both Butt's imperial sympathies and the distance between him and his more radical following: the party was divided over the pro-Turkish policy of Disraeli's government, and over the wars in South Africa (1877–9) and Afghanistan (1878–80). Butt's humiliation of August 1877 was confirmed in 1878, when Parnell was re-elected as President of the Home Rule Confederation. In February 1879, at a conference of the by now somewhat demoralized Home Rule League, John Dillon attempted to carry a vote of no confidence in Butt's leadership: though this failed, the public condemnation of the leader's alleged near-treachery was a renewed blow. The stand-off lasted until May 1879, when Butt died; and indeed the divisions continued to ache until May 1880, when Parnell was able to over-throw the stop-gap leader (William Shaw) who had been nominated by the dying Butt and sustained by the moderates.

While Butt was increasingly beleaguered, Parnell was winning allies: Butt's isolation in 1878–9 was paralleled by the consolidation of Parnell's position, and in particular by the strengthening of his ties with Fenianism. In early 1878 Parnell met the Clan na Gael ambassador William Carroll on several occasions, including once, in March in London, when, ever slippery, he remarked that 'the Fenians want to catch us, but they are not going to': Parnell was aware that the endorsement of Clan na Gael came with a price.[91] On 24 October 1878 this price was fixed: Devoy telegraphed Parnell from the United States offering the support of the Clan na Gael, but under certain conditions including, significantly, the call for a 'vigorous agitation of the land question on the basis of a peasant proprietary'.[92] In effect the relationship between Fenianism and parliamentarianism was being recast, with a new emphasis on American financial and political support and on the centrality of the land question: the United States and Clan na Gael had played only a marginal role in Butt's calculations, and while land was important to constitutional Fenianism and to the early Home Rule League, the movement shied away from anything smacking of revolution or even agitation (the early connections between land, Fenianism and Home Rule remained, and – according to Paul Bew – provided a foundation for the agitators of 1879).[93] Devoy also wanted an abandonment of federalism – the, for Butt, crucial imperial dimension to Home Rule – and the substitution of a more general demand for self-government (a call which in fact thoroughly suited Parnell's preference for ambiguity). Devoy sought a generally more active and 'aggressive' parliamentary policy, an apparently subsidiary condition which was in fact a subtle commentary on Butt's passivity and gentility.

Parnell had substantial informal support from Fenians in Britain, Ireland and the United States, and he had no need to offer any precise response to Devoy's overture. In addition, this first 'New Departure' was rejected by the Supreme Council of the IRB in January 1879, although individual Fenians were free to pursue its tenets. The proposal was further and more fundamentally undermined by the rapidly shifting and deteriorating condition of the Irish economy, which created new political demands and opportunities. Parnell's silence, the truculence of the Supreme Council and, above all, the rural economic crisis compelled Devoy into further negotiations with the constitutionalists in the spring of 1879, which produced a reformulation of the 'New Departure' on 1 June: this offered a more specific defence of the insurrectionary position, while also defining a little more exactly the forms of land and constitutional settlement that would be satisfactory to those subscribing to the agreement. This second 'New Departure' also called for 'an absolutely independent party' created by those MPs 'elected through the public movement'.[94] But, although this informal contract apparently brought American militants and Irish parliamentarians into an agreement, it not did embody the core convictions of either partner. The Fenian commitment even to a more aggressive constitutional strategy appears to have been somewhat cool; while they saw a substantial land reform – they called for compulsory purchase – as being unattainable by normal constitutional means. For his part, Parnell had hitherto placed little emphasis on the Lalorite view, held by Devoy and Michael Davitt, that the land and national questions were insepar-able; and, unlike Devoy and Davitt, he believed that land reform was attainable by constitutional means, and might indeed prove to be the way by which landlords would be finally lured into the national movement. The great compact of 1 June therefore fudged as much as it settled; and almost certainly Parnell's agreement was highly tentative and highly qualified. Parnell had profited too much by silence and by ambiguity to be bound by the Fenians in potentially damaging ways. He was content to accept their support, while smiling icily at the terms.

One of the strengths of Parnell's political leadership rested with his cool, noncommittal appraisal of his options. Another strength, however, lay with the genial plundering of the ideas and initiatives supplied by others. For, above all, Parnell's political strength lay in opportunism. In the later 1870s his opportunity came. He was promoted to a national prominence on the strength of the tenacious obstructionist policies pioneered by Biggar; he had been taught by Butt the political potential contained within constitutional Fenianism. Now, in 1878–9, Devoy supplied a political alliance and a political agenda, resurrecting the ideas of Fintan Lalor and indeed of Butt; Michael Davitt, a recently released Fenian prisoner, supplied an organizational initiative in the shape of the Land League of Mayo, created in August 1879. More important than all this, however, was a deepening agricultural crisis, which broke the prosperity of the early and mid-1870s, and the moderate political attitudes and institutions which depended, partly, on a sense of well-being: the crisis of 1878–9 created a broadly based economic threat and widespread distress, in effect forging a rural coalition of different types of farmer and agricultural

labourer. These were the formidable tools available to the new leader of Irish nationalism at the time of his accession, in May 1880.

4.5 Idealists and Technicians: The Parnellite Party, 1880–6

O pallid serfs! whose groans and prayers have wearied Heav'n full long,
Look up! there is a law above, beyond all legal wrong,
Rise up! the answer to your prayer shall come, tornado-borne,
And ye shall hold your homesteads dear, and ye shall reap the corn!
Fanny Parnell, 'Hold the Harvest!' (1879)[95]

The style of Parnell's following was to a very great extent a determined reaction against the Butt era: discipline replaced a gentlemanly freedom, vulgar demonstration replaced eloquent remonstration, and popular militancy replaced elite diplomacy. Isaac Butt's bourgeois homeliness was superseded by the authentic hauteur of the Irish gentry; Butt's legalistic and scholarly precision gave way to Parnell's aristocratic and enigmatic vagueness. Butt's gradualism, indeed his resigned approach to political debate, were replaced with ambitious demands and a compelling urgency. Charles Stewart Parnell and his lieutenants looked elsewhere for political models (Tim Healy, for example, drew spiritual inspiration from O'Connell and rhetorical stimulus from John Mitchel); but their movement makes sense as much as the conscious negation of its predecessor as the lineal descendant of earlier popular protest movements.

Parnell, despite his rather studied indifference to Irish history, acknowledged a debt to the Independent Irish Party of the early 1850s, and this analogy provides a valuable, if ambiguous, guide to his strategic thinking.[96] The Independents wielded influence within the House of Commons as an – at least nominally – autonomous grouping, content to endorse either of the main British parties and willing to exploit any available parliamentary impasse. There were some survivors from the Independent era – the O'Gorman Mahon, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy – who were either members of the Parnellite Party or who otherwise facilitated the Home Rule cause (Gavan Duffy, for example, was an important agent easing communication between the Parnellites and Tories in 1885). Like the Parnellites, the Independents were actively endorsed by the Catholic clergy, and secured a brief electoral ascendancy through a passionate identification with a Catholic cause (opposition to Lord John Russell's Ecclesiastical Titles Act); like the Parnellites they combined a spiritual as well as secular urgency, for they also drew heavily on the discontents of Irish farmers. But Parnell was never unduly anxious about historical detail (except perhaps in the case of his own family's ancestry and attainments), and his interest in the Independents of the 1850s simultaneously reflected his assessment of his own achievement as well as unconsciously flagging its limitations. For while the party benefited from the fragile sectarian unity embodied in the Tenant League, it developed as a predominantly Catholic institution: in addition, despite its much-vaunted 'independence', the party

was continually prey to the seductions of British parliamentary politics, as witnessed most notoriously by the case of Sadleir and Keogh. The constraints imposed by a primarily Catholic electoral base and by a Liberal parliamentary alliance would also later jeopardize the Parnellite project. Moreover, just as the Independent Irish Party was founded on tenant grievance and yet eventually lost the votes of substantial farmers, so too Parnellism – at least as defined by Parnell in 1890–1 – lost the support of those who had once been its electoral life-blood.

Parnell's career – and by extension the life of the movement which he spawned – has been defined in terms of three 'classic' phases: the years from 1875 to 1885, from 1885 to 1890, and the last brutal months of the Split, from December 1890 to October 1891.[97] In the first of these periods the Parnellite alliance was constructed – an improbable amalgam of graziers, small farmers and labourers, Dubliners and country people, Catholics and Fenians; in the second period this alliance was brought into association with an equally unwieldy electoral coalition, Gladstonian Liberalism; and through the third and last period Parnellism was either redefined or, according to recent arguments, properly articulated for the first time. Each of these phases displays Parnell's tactical skills and his alarming self-confidence in a varying light; viewed as a whole they reveal the essential but also fatal complexity of his movement.

Between 1879 and 1882 Parnell succeeded, partly through skill and partly through good fortune, in helping to raise a protest that was sufficiently potent to give him leverage over the British government, while also falling far short of the agrarian revolution that some of his more radical lieutenants had envisioned. Although Parnell had encouraged the cautious suit of the Fenians and of the Clan na Gael, and although he had emerged as one of the most prominent hardliners within the Home Rule Party, his commitment to a full-scale nationalist revolution remained decidedly cool: he identified himself with extremist agrarians, he condoned violent activity, but he remained an ardent parliamentarian with a curious concern for his own landed class, and indeed for the good order of society as a whole. His initial response to the mounting land agitation in the west of Ireland was therefore highly cautious: although he attended a key meeting at Westport, County Mayo, on 8 June 1879 (one of the gatherings which led to the creation of the Land League of Mayo in August of that year), and although he accepted the Presidency of the Irish National Land League, founded on 21 October in Dublin, he seemed to be torn between exploiting the political potential of the new land movement and shying away from the risks involved. Only after November 1879, by which time it was clear that the agrarian crisis was more than transient, did Parnell align himself irrevocably with the agrarian militants. When, in May 1880 (in the aftermath of the general election) he was elected as chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party, he was able to add a constitutional dimension to the popular authority and the Fenian endorsement which he already possessed: one of the foundations for Parnell's later ascendancy lay with this rationalization of political leadership inside Catholic Ireland.

How did the Parnellite leadership view the rural problems that were driving the agitation of 1880–1? The essential achievement of Parnell here, as with later issues,

was to preserve a semblance of unanimity within what was, in fact, a very diverse ideological environment. The Parnellite Party that developed in the House of Commons after 1880 contained a spectrum of opinion on the land question, encompassing advocates of nationalization like Davitt as well as conservatives (or pseudo-radicals) like Healy who favoured proprietorial solutions: it encompassed 'Whigs' like Captain W.H. O'Shea alongside those, like J.G. Biggar, of more 'advanced', often Fenian sympathies, who saw the land agitation as a prelude to a national peasant uprising. In fact Biggar and his like hated their 'Whig' colleagues with a passion which, if anything, exceeded their detestation of Orange Toryism: Barry O'Brien observed that 'in Ireland the Tory is regarded as an open enemy, the Whig as a treacherous friend. It is the Whigs, not the Tories, who have habitually sapped the integrity of Irish representation'.[98] The value of Parnell to his movement was that he generally occupied a mediating position between these extremes, and that, with his aristocratic credentials and personal charisma, he could create consensus out of the most unpromising materials: even Healy, his most outrageous critic in the months of the Split, accepted that one of Parnell's political talents lay in minimizing the differences that divided individual followers. Barry O'Brien, again, noted that 'Parnell's great gift was the faculty of reducing a quarrel to the smallest dimensions'.[99]

Parnell himself did not favour any *Jacquerie*, and while he was interested in the idea of a widespread peasant proprietorship, he (sometimes openly) derided the views of Davitt and other radical colleagues who looked forward to the nationalization of the land. He saw unjust legal and economic privilege as the barrier that divided landlords from active participation in the national movement, indeed perhaps national leadership: he certainly saw the hostility of the landed interest as a major obstacle to the success of the Home Rule movement. But he addressed this problem not by advocating the abolition of landlordism ('we do not want to exterminate the residential Irish landlords', he once declared) but by seeking a comprehensive redefinition of agrarian relations in a manner which removed farmer grievance without alienating the proprietor interest: the specific form that this desire took, at any rate in 1880, was voluntary land purchase on the basis of 35 years' rent payment.[100] Although recent scholarship has tended to emphasize the integrity of Parnell's political thought, it is difficult to question Paul Bew's judgement that this prescription was 'naive': Parnell evidently believed that the land war might be directed in a manner which would underpin the unity of the Irish nation and create the conditions for subsequent landlord participation.[101]

Edward Saunderson, the parliamentary leader of the Irish Unionists, once observed that Parnell controlled the 'throttle-valve of crime'; and while this was the rhetoric of partisanship, there is indeed a sense in which Parnell sought, where possible, to regulate the Land League agitation.[102] By the second half of 1880, with the more solid farmers of the south and east joining their impoverished western counterparts in the League, and with mounting bitterness and violence, there was little scope for moderation or for elaborate reflections on the future of Irish landlordism. Nevertheless, Parnell, while promoting the most radical objectives of the League, all the while underlined the need for non-violent action. Although the dividing line

between 'non-violence' and violence in the activities of the League was generally pretty thin, Parnell does seem to have actively sought to redirect potentially criminal passions along a more tolerable pathway: his celebrated endorsement of 'moral suasion', or the boycott, at Ennis in September 1880 was at least in part an attempt to create a politically effective, legal strategy which might in addition provide parliamentary leverage.[103] The idea of the boycott, although not Parnell's own inspiration, came naturally to a man who knew how to cut intimates and to sustain frosty silences: the boycott was in fact Parnell's personality expressed as a policy. And although it scarcely operated in the disciplined terms which he envisioned, the boycott did at least provide the semblance of a constitutional alternative to a murderous chaos.

The London government's response to the Land League served initially to consolidate Parnell's ascendancy within the national movement. An attempt to prosecute Parnell and other leaders of the League between November 1880 and January 1881 hinted at official desperation: it was a lame, hopeless attempt to assert the authority of Dublin Castle, which promised only disaster regardless of whether the defendants were convicted or acquitted. Parnell *was* in fact acquitted, and the government rebuffed: but a conviction would have only served to further enshrine the League leaders in the popular estimation. Similarly, another legal initiative – the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Bill, which was enacted in March 1881 – provided Parnell and his lieutenants with a splendid parliamentary opportunity to defend Irish liberties: the climax of this measure's passage came on 3 February with the ejection of Parnell and 35 of his followers from the House of Commons. Such ministerial initiatives presented little difficulty for the Irish Party, for the arguments against coercion had been well rehearsed and the popularity within Ireland of a libertarian stance was of course assured.

But British policy in Ireland was traditionally a mixture of coercion and conciliation (even if this label has generally been applied only to Unionist policy before 1905); and it was always the conciliatory gestures that created the greatest tactical difficulties for popular Irish leaders. Gladstone's constructive approach to the land agitation came with the Land Law (Ireland) Act, passed in August 1881, and it was this measure, rather than the earlier coercive initiatives, which offered the true test of Parnell's political dexterity. The Land Act of 1881 added another component, the Land Commission, to the already labyrinthine bureaucratic machinery of the British government in Ireland: the measure made provision for the adjudication of rent levels within the courts of the Commission, and in addition it drastically curtailed the landlord's right of eviction. Tenants had the right of free sale under the terms of the new Act. This was an astonishing measure from Gladstone, a politician otherwise passionately concerned with the sanctity of contracts, with the size of government and with the status of the (English) gentry; and it was indeed recognized as a substantial concession by many in the Land League. However, the radicals within the League (such as the young John Dillon) were not prepared to perceive victory in the shape of a highly technical and ambiguous piece of legislation; nor were American militants content to see their agrarian revolution die in so miserable a fashion. Parnell therefore faced the possibility that the League would

fragment over the issue, with moderates prepared to accept Gladstone's good faith, and a radical minority ('the Kilmainham party') seeking to develop the agitation. At a League convention, held in September 1881, he therefore backed a compromise formula which squared the circle of these divisions, combining elements of both positions and urging that the measure should be tested in the courts. This was in fact a brilliant piece of Parnellite ambiguity, for it simultaneously involved the effective acceptance of the measure while enabling Parnell to reassure his radicals that legal tests would expose its utter 'hollowness'. Unfortunately, Parnell's desire not to be seen to be outmanoeuvred by Gladstone and his desire to mollify his left wing each outpaced the essential caution of the test strategy (F.S.L. Lyons has called it 'fabian'); and his speeches in the autumn of 1881 were sufficiently extreme to convince the government that he was, after all, seeking to wreck the Act and thereby to destabilize the country.[104] The reality was, as Barry O'Brien observed, that Parnell's own political position rested on his ability to charm the militants, without actually offering any commitment: 'Parnell derived his political ascendancy in no small degree from the fact that he walked all the time on the verge of treason felony'.[105] But unsurprisingly, the skill of this performance did not impress the Chief Secretary for Ireland, W.E. Forster, or (at any rate in 1881) Gladstone: and on 13 October Parnell's high-wire act took him into Kilmainham Gaol.

Imprisonment does not seem to have been a conscious goal for Parnell. Nor was it a particularly grim experience, to the extent that he had a comfortable cell and was allowed various freedoms (including, curiously for a suspected traitor, the opportunity to practise his marksmanship with an airgun). However, despite its cushioned nature, imprisonment appears to have scarred Parnell: he was separated from his mistress, Mrs Katherine O'Shea, while she was pregnant with their child; in addition gaol brought constant supervision and indeed (paradoxically) greater accessibility for a man who was distinguished by his pride and by his need to escape periodically from all forms of society. But, as he readily understood, the petty humiliations of Kilmainham brought with them certain political opportunities. Parnell prophesied famously that, when imprisoned, 'Captain Moonlight' – agrarian terrorism – would take his place; and he and his gaoled lieutenants – Dillon, Sexton, Brennan and Kettle – went some way to fulfilling this prediction by issuing a call for a rent strike to be maintained 'until the government relinquishes the existing system of terrorism and restores the constitutional rights of the people'.[106] In fact Parnell's 'place' within the national movement, though ascendant, was hard to define; and he and his imprisoned colleagues were replaced not simply by crime but by a mixture of agrarian violence, constitutional procedures and women's political action. With the suppression of the League on 20 October, the agitation threatened to break: some farmers were willing to take advantage of the new Land Act, while there was simultaneously an increase in the numbers of those willing to commit crime in the interests of their vision of agrarian justice. The women activists of the Ladies' Land League, founded in January 1881 and led by Anna Parnell, sought to maintain the League journal, *United Ireland*, to reinforce the 'No Rent' manifesto and to look after the welfare of the manifesto's casualties – the evicted tenants: some

£70,000 was paid out by the Ladies' Land League between October 1881 and May 1882 by way of relief to these victims of the Land War. One of the statistical wonders of the women's operation (as well as one of its key weapons) was a detailed rent dossier, the so-called Book of Kells, which assembled estate information from all parts of Ireland and which attracted the bemused interest even of the men.[107] In general, however, the women had few friends among their male counterparts (Davitt was an exception): the grudging respect that was occasionally offered came only as a result of the remarkable moral courage and quick-wittedness of women activists such as Hanna Reynolds. Magnanimity came more easily with time. The significance of the women's League and its trenchant pursuit of its goals came eventually to be recognized even by aggressively unsympathetic commentators such as F.H. O'Donnell, for whom Anna Parnell was the 'Grande Mademoiselle' and the women Leaguers 'Captain Moonlight in petticoats'. The veteran Fenian John O'Leary offered a crisper and less patronizing verdict: 'they may not have been right, but they were suppressed because they were honester and more sincere than the men'.[108]

The arrest of Parnell and the other leaders of the League had been decided by the British cabinet; and it was the belief of ministers, in particular Forster, that this decapitation of the League would render it lifeless. But though the operations of the League were undoubtedly checked by the imprisonments, its connection with crime was more shadowy than ministers understood; and it became clear during the winter of 1881–2 that the detentions did not present any quick-fix solution to the problem of agrarian violence. Forster's essentially coercive strategy was by this stage discredited within the cabinet, many of whom felt that 'Buckshot' had not only strayed too far from the path of Liberal righteousness but (more unforgiveably) had done so without evident gain: certainly by early 1882 Forster appears to have lost the confidence of Gladstone. Forster's vulnerability was scented by the Parnellites, who sought successfully to by-pass the Chief Secretary in order to gain direct access to the more amenable Prime Minister: the self-regarding F.H. O'Donnell, operating evidently on his own initiative, put himself in touch with Gladstone's son, Herbert (the tactic was repeated by Healy in 1885, using Henry Labouchere as an intermediary); more famously, and more productively, Captain W.H. O'Shea opened up a channel of communication between the imprisoned Parnell and both Joseph Chamberlain (one of Forster's cabinet critics) and Gladstone. The end product of this diplomacy was the so-called Kilmainham 'treaty', a political understanding which bound Gladstone to deal with the leaseholders and with the rent arrears question while obliging Parnell to accept this elaboration of the Act of 1881 as 'a practical settlement of the land question' and a basis for future cooperation.[109] Gladstone was thus prepared to accept Parnell at his own valuation – that is as a substitute for 'Captain Moonlight'; and, accordingly, he and fellow inmates were released from Kilmainham on 2 May 1882, their freedom coinciding with the resignation of the weary and undermined Forster.

Parnell's release was greeted with enthusiasm by most nationalists except his radical lieutenants (who saw the 'treaty' as a climb-down) and his own family (who exhibited the studied passionlessness of their caste). But any militant protest or party

division was out of the question, for on 6 May 1882 the new Chief Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and T.H. Burke, the Under-Secretary for Ireland, were murdered in Phoenix Park, Dublin, within sight of the Viceregal Lodge and to the bemusement of the lord lieutenant, Earl Spencer, who witnessed, uncomprehendingly, the fatal scuffle. Radical and moderate Leaguers were broadly united in their attitude (sympathy for the newly arrived Englishman, Cavendish, was sometimes greater than for Burke, an Irish Catholic gentleman who had been associated with earlier coercion); certainly Parnell, and the more militant Davitt and Dillon, together signed a popular manifesto which condemned the two murders in trenchant language. Radicals and moderates were also united in opposing the vigorous coercion bill that was introduced, perhaps inevitably, in the wake of the murders and in the context of English popular outrage. The Phoenix Park 'outrage' therefore temporarily prolonged the unity of the Leaguers; but, in reality, just as (in the words of Margaret O'Callaghan) the 'murders had a direct but not qualitative impact on Liberal policy', so they affected the shape but not the form of nationalist politics.[110] The Liberals brought coercion and an arrears settlement, as in fact they had planned; and Parnell, stimulated and aided by the Phoenix Park murders, continued on the more centrist path which he had charted with the Kilmainham 'treaty'.

In the heat of the Split, in October 1891, Parnell lamented that the 'terrible tragedy of the Phoenix Park' had robbed him of the opportunity to secure many legislative benefits for Ireland; but this was hyperbole.[111] In fact, although the murders temporarily cut off the possibility of any constructive relationship between Irish nationalists and the British government, such a bond – even when attainable – was always highly problematic for the Irish: as Parnell himself remarked in March 1884, 'I do not depend upon any English political party. I should advise you not to depend upon any such party'.[112] Rather, the murders, in temporarily discrediting a hard-line position, permitted Parnell to reconstruct the national movement without the burden of his radicals, and along lines closer to his own political preferences. In May–June 1882 he was able, with little difficulty, to distance himself both from Dillon's renewed defence of boycotting and from Davitt's advocacy of land nationalization: indeed, Dillon, threatened with tuberculosis and dismayed by his leader's apparent change of direction, subsequently went into temporary retirement. Davitt published at this time his conversion from the standard League goal of peasant proprietorship to the more radical and, by the standards of the day, eccentric aim of land nationalization: his earnest efforts to detail his new-found principles were swotted with ruthless ease by Parnell ('if I were Davitt I would never define. The moment he becomes intelligible he is lost').[113] In addition, and with the reluctant consent of Dillon, Parnell moved against the radical and independent-minded Ladies' Land League, cutting off their funds and trading the discharge of their debts in return for their 'voluntary' disbandment; but the suppression of the Ladies' Land League was in keeping not simply with Parnell's concern for radical dissent but also with his interest in the funds of the movement (the Ladies' Land League, with its generous concern for the evicted tenants, was an extremely expensive machine). Moreover, the women's sometimes flippant attitude towards Parnell's leadership can scarcely

have helped their cause: on one occasion Parnell and Dillon were greeted in the Ladies' Land League office by a sarcastic rendition of Gilbert and Sullivan's '20 love sick maidens we'.[114] With the 'left' wing of the land movement temporarily stunned, and with a tightened grasp on finance, Parnell (as F.H. O'Donnell observed) had achieved the freedom 'to make the next league'.[115] On 17 October 1882 the new Irish National League was launched, a body which differed from its banned predecessor both in having self-government as its primary function and in having Parnell as its effective creator and undisputed master. The 'uncrowned king' of 1880 had at last found a throne of sorts.

The hallmark of the new structure was organizational discipline and centralization. Although Davitt argued for substantial local representation in the government of the National League, the extent of his temporary eclipse may be measured by the fact that the League was effectively run by the Irish Parliamentary Party; it need hardly be repeated that the Parliamentary Party was by now effectively run by Parnell. In time this discipline was further tightened: heterodox local opinion on matters of strategy was efficiently smothered, as were several feeble efforts to reject central advice on the selection of parliamentary candidates. When the next general election loomed – at the end of 1885 – a rigorously policed organizational hierarchy was in place, responsible largely to Parnell himself: a small group of MPs, chaired by Parnell, vetted the lists of prospective parliamentary candidates, who were then presented to the appropriate county or borough conventions of the League. These had all the trappings of representative democracy, albeit with a clericalist colouring: each local League body had the right to forward four delegates to the county convention, where they were joined by any interested Catholic priest and one or two representatives of the Parliamentary Party. The candidate who emerged from this process was self-evidently the creature of the parliamentary leadership; and this subservient relationship was made explicit through the famous party pledge (introduced in 1884) by which the candidate undertook to 'sit, act and vote with the Irish parliamentary party' and, furthermore, to resign from his seat if called upon to do so by a majority of the party.[116]

All the parties in the United Kingdom were seeking to come to terms with the 'management' of democracy in the decades after the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1867; but – certainly in the opinion of its detractors – the Parnellite structure owed more to Tammany Hall than to any British exemplar. What was unusual about the Irish National League was not the concealment of central authority by the plumage of local representation (common enough within parallel British party organization), but rather the completeness of this central authority. For Parnell's party was a more formidable electoral machine than anything produced by contemporary British or northern Irish politics (and there were numerous organizational initiatives within British and Irish Toryism and British Liberalism); and, where the League's constitution did not function satisfactorily, then Parnell's charismatic leadership generally made good any shortcoming.

The party thus had a popular and enigmatic leader, and a local organization which masked central manipulation with a semblance of local authority. In addition to

this battery of secular resources, the Parnellites now – by 1883–4 – added the authority of the Church. Viewed in a certain light this was a rather remarkable development. Parnell, a member of the Church of Ireland, had demonstrated some sympathy with Fenianism (according to one suggestion, recently revived, he actually joined the Brotherhood immediately after his release from Kilmainham); aside from his Protestantism and his Fenian affinities (both distasteful to the hierarchy of the 1880s), Parnell had given support to the famous freethinker, Charles Bradlaugh, in his efforts to take his seat as MP for Northampton.[117] Moreover, for most of the hierarchy the Land League had been a highly suspect organization, partly because of the involvement of individual Fenians and partly because of its association with agrarian violence. But the new National League, though it still attracted some Fenian interest, was not the threat to social order that its predecessor had been. The Land League of 1879 had been founded among the impoverished small farmers of Connacht, and while it had developed from these origins, it never lost its association with what Tom Garvin has defined as the 'pre-modern, unsustained and sporadic' politics of the west: the National League of 1882, by contrast, was rooted in the relatively prosperous midland counties, where there was traditionally less violence and where the middling farmers and shopkeepers were loyal sons of the Church.[118] In addition Parnell, though a Protestant, had at least the merit of being a bad Protestant; and by 1883–4 he had also abandoned his Bradlaugh sympathies and was as deferential to the bishops as the most staunch clericalist.

The Church rewarded this obeisance, and the general rightward shift of Parnellism, with a cautious endorsement. The Parnell testimonial (a national fund designed to rescue Parnell from debt and to reward him for his patriotic achievement) was effectively launched by Dr Croke, the flamboyant, nationally minded Archbishop of Cashel, in March 1883. A much more significant affirmation came in October 1884, when the hierarchy entrusted the care of Irish Catholic educational interests to the Irish Party and its Protestant leader. By 1885 the clergy were effectively being built into the local League organization and were given an honoured position within the county conventions: in return they strived to maintain contact with the League headquarters in Dublin and worked to ensure the enactment of central policy at the local level. In addition shifts within the hierarchy favoured the Parnellite cause: the death of the highly circumspect Cardinal McCabe in February 1885 and the succession of William Walsh to the archbishopric of Dublin were particularly useful developments for the Irish Parliamentary Party.

Parnellism brought together the Church with elements of Fenianism (this, according to Barry O'Brien, had been a particular goal for Parnell); it united shopkeepers, farmers of all descriptions and the Dublin working and middle classes.[119] As always, it remained to be seen where the manufacturer of this formidable alliance planned to take his creation: as J.J. O'Kelly had remarked of Parnell in 1878, 'I am not sure he knows exactly where he is going'.[120] Indeed, to a certain extent the details of the Parnellite agenda evolved pragmatically, and in response to the opportunities supplied by British parliamentary politics. Moreover, it was also easier to define Parnellism in terms of what it was professedly *not*, rather than as a more proactive

ideology: after 1882 Parnellism was clearly not a land agitation, nor was it a radical agrarian philosophy (in April 1884 Parnell repeated his condemnation of land nationalization and of the supra-national class alliance favoured by Davitt).[121] Nor, despite this gradualism, was the movement ever going to be a magnet for northern Protestants: an attempt to launch a Parnellite 'invasion of Ulster' in 1883 had certainly brought an electoral victory for T.M. Healy in Monaghan, but it had also inspired a loyalist backlash culminating at Rosslea, Fermanagh, in October when rival Orange and League crowds met in angry confrontation (this was a key event in the political education of notable early Unionists such as Edward Saunderson). Even some of the most celebrated expressions of the League's nationalism were notable for their ambiguity: Parnell's famous declaration at Cork on 21 January 1885 that 'no man has the right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation' was as evasive as it was idealistic.[122]

In fact there is a sense in which the growth and definition of the party and the League occurred in ways which were antithetical to Parnellism. Parnellism was partly an exercise in electoral technique: it was concerned with the effective regimentation of popular politics. For this reason, Parnell greeted the parliamentary reform and redistribution measures of 1884–5 with some coolness: these Acts expanded the Irish electorate from around 4.4 per cent of the population to some 16 per cent, incorporating small farmers and labourers and shifting seats from old underpopulated boroughs such as Dungannon (which boasted 279 voters in 1881) to burgeoning new cities such as Belfast (21,989 voters in 1881). But if Parnell was not overly concerned with the adequate representation of the industrial north-east, neither was he anxious to promote the democratic rights of the rural poor, whom (in the opinion of Lyons) he saw as susceptible to 'subversive influences'. In fact the existing electorate, created through the Irish Franchise Act of 1850, had served Parnellism well, for it was not only small but also socially well defined – that is to say, it was open to easy and efficient management. And yet, despite these qualms, the reform and redistribution measures of 1884–5 not only failed to radicalize the Irish electorate, but in fact helped to consolidate the Parnellite stranglehold over popular Catholic politics (85 Home Rulers were returned from Irish constituencies at the general election of 1885, while one English constituency – the Scotland division of Liverpool – returned an additional nationalist in the shape of T.P. O'Connor). Furthermore, this accession of strength occurred at a time when neither of the main British parties was thoroughly secure. The parliamentary reform of 1884–5 served therefore to strengthen decisively both the Parnellite ascendancy in Ireland as well as the party's leverage inside the House of Commons.

Moreover, the essence of Parnellism was its commitment to the idea of an Irish Parliamentary Party, untrammelled by compromising English alliances. And yet the search for Home Rule brought Parnell, perhaps inevitably, into harness alongside Gladstone and the Liberals. It was the Liberals who, through the Kilmainham 'treaty', had first tried to establish some form of working relationship with the Irish Party; and it was one of the progenitors of the 'treaty', the Liberal cabinet minister Joseph Chamberlain, who in November 1884 sought to excavate the idea of an understanding

between the parties. Chamberlain's diplomacy, which again involved Captain O'Shea as an intermediary with Parnell, was based upon the offer of local government reform and administrative devolution in the shape of a Central Board for Ireland. By May 1885 a deal had emerged along the broad lines of the 'treaty' of 1882, whereby a legislative concession was traded for Parnellite cooperation: Parnell affirmed that he and his party would oppose but not obstruct a renewal of crimes legislation, provided that the government conceded a local government reform by way of return. Chamberlain's proposal was rejected by the Liberal cabinet in its dying weeks (the government fell on 9 June); and in any event Parnell had all along made clear that local government was not a substitute for Home Rule. But, though the Chamberlain initiative died, the lure of Irish votes and the desirability of an alliance with a skilled and dangerous parliamentary grouping remained.

Indeed, at first glance these temptations seemed to influence the incoming minority Tory government no less than the retiring Liberal ministers. And yet, it is hard to escape the impression that the Tory leadership, though concerned not to have the Parnellites as obstructive opponents, was not in fact overly keen to acquire them as allies. There were certainly tentative overtures: the Tory and Parnellite chief whips met at the time of the formation of the first Salisbury government, in June 1885, as did Parnell and Lord Randolph Churchill, a talented but unpredictable youngster among the new ministers. The most famous of these meetings occurred on 1 August between Parnell and the Tory lord lieutenant for Ireland, Lord Carnarvon. But, though this diplomacy evidently left Parnell with the impression that the Conservatives might well deliver a reform (Carnarvon had apparently expressed his sympathy for Irish Home Rule and his hopes for the satisfaction of Irish 'national aspirations'), the fact was that, unlike the Chamberlain 'Central Board' exchanges, there was never any concrete proposal, nor indeed anything approaching a sustained and purposeful negotiation.[123] Moreover, if the Tories were courting the Parnellites, then – despite some impatient and offensive outbursts from Churchill – they were also making sure of their own Irish party, through the effective application of patronage. Irish Tories were in fact well represented within the new ministry; and it is often forgotten that an Irish Tory – the Lord Chancellor for Ireland, Lord Ashbourne – was to have been present at the Parnell–Carnarvon interview, but for some reason (almost certainly regard for his own political skin) stayed away. Thus it would be quite wrong to underestimate the political subtlety of Parnell's Tory opponents: there is every indication that, while there were some rare figures, like Carnarvon, who were broadly sympathetic to the Irish case, and some pragmatists, such as Churchill, then the most influential elements of the leadership, especially Lord Salisbury, were in principle too far removed from Irish nationalism to tolerate any worthwhile understanding between the parties. Salisbury's celebrated speech at Newport on 7 October 1885 'could not be, indeed was not misunderstood' as an expression of Unionist conviction and gradualist reformism.[124] And aside from issues of principle, political practicalities militated against any serious relationship with Parnell: such a deal would have delivered the support of the Irish nationalists, but at the price of losing not just the Irish Unionists but also their backbench Tory

sympathizers (it is important to remember the influence of militant Protestantism and Orangeism in British, no less than Ulster constituencies). A deal with Parnell would have won disciplined but no doubt demanding and troublesome Home Rule allies, while simultaneously dividing the British Tories and throwing the Irish Tories into rebellion. The general thrust of Tory policy was therefore to keep its options open, and to keep the Parnellites dangling. Indeed, by the time of the general election, in November–December 1885, British Tories had been able to win the endorsement of Parnell at no cost whatever to themselves.

The Tories were in fact of greater value to Parnell than he was to them. Parnell appears to have been initially overawed by Gladstone, but he also seems to have been lastingly embittered by his gaol sentence, and for this in part he blamed the Grand Old Man (Tim Healy, on the other hand, was a significantly more fervent convert to the Gladstonian mystique). Gladstone, with his high moral tone and didactic approach to political life, was (despite his high opinion of Parnell's political talent) far removed from Home Rule realpolitik; while, for his part, Parnell seems to have cultivated a private contempt for Gladstone, which was only fully aired through the infamous Manifesto of 29 November 1890. Temperamentally, Parnell was therefore closer to Churchillian cynicism than to the rarefied atmosphere of Gladstonian Liberalism; but he must also have recognized that only the Tories, with their control of the House of Lords, were in a position to deliver a major constitutional reform such as Home Rule. In addition Paul Bew has identified the fundamental significance, for Parnell, of an alliance with the Tories: 'it was his old dream of a "class conservative" government which inspired him'.[125] Practical politics, as well as personal – perhaps even ideological – affinities all help to explain Parnell's interest in the Tories. But it was a profitless suit: the general election brought a Liberal majority over the Tories of 85, with the Irish Parliamentary Party holding the balance between the two. By mid-December it was evident that the outgoing Tory government would not launch any Home Rule proposal either by themselves or in concert with the Liberals; and at the same time it was becoming increasingly clear that, given this coyness, Gladstone was prepared to act on his own for Ireland.

The tentative announcement of Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule on 17 December – the 'Hawarden Kite' – marks, perhaps, the summit of Parnell's achievement. The comprehensive shake-down that occurred in British and Irish politics between January and July 1886, bringing a hardening of the division between Unionist and Home Ruler, simultaneously defined the extent and the limitations of this Parnellite victory. Gladstone's espousal of Home Rule certainly brought an end to the studied ambiguity of Tory policy: after January the Tory leadership came out firmly on the side of loyalism and of coercion. The auction which Parnell had sought to encourage between the two British parties for the Home Rule trophy had therefore abruptly ended, with Gladstone emerging as the inevitable purchaser – but a purchaser who could not in fact pay the price of legislative success. For the flinty attitude of the Tories meant that, short of a major constitutional upheaval, Gladstone's conversion would always remain a symbolic rather than a substantive victory.

If the disposition of forces in the British parliament secured the fate of Home Rule, then neither Gladstone's diplomacy nor his actual measure did much to challenge the force of the inevitable. When Gladstone formed his administration in early February 1886 there remained some confusion about his intentions towards Ireland – this despite the 'Hawarden Kite'. If (as has been remarked) Parnell was a master of 'opaque inertia', then equally Gladstone was adept at opaque activity: having promised his colleagues that no decision on Home Rule would be taken without full cabinet discussion, he proceeded in private to draft an interconnected settlement which linked a land purchase measure with (more famously and controversially) a Home Rule bill.[126] Senior Liberal ministers were kept in the dark about this initiative until the end of February (for the land bill) and the beginning of March (for Home Rule): equally, but perhaps less surprisingly, there was little contact in this period with Parnell or his lieutenants. It would be futile to argue that this brusque treatment of colleagues and general lack of consultation scuppered the Home Rule proposal, for Gladstone would in any event have faced great opposition (the Whig elder, Lord Hartington, had in fact refused to join the ministry on the suspicion of its Home Rule sympathies). But Gladstone's prayerful sense that he had embarked upon a divinely blessed course, and his practical desire to bind Parnellism into a conservative settlement, both allowed him to underestimate the convictions and sensitivities of his own colleagues. He banked rightly on the party loyalty of some, like his Leader of the House of Commons Sir William Harcourt; but even Harcourt was amazed at the 'criminal lunacy' of Gladstone's proposals and frightened by his bland approach to the possible departure of influential ministers such as Chamberlain.[127] Indeed, when Gladstone's hand was at last called, at a cabinet meeting held on 13 March, Chamberlain and a fellow radical, G.O. Trevelyan, both resigned, thereby threatening both the future of the bill and of the administration itself.

If the politics of the Home Rule Bill were problematic, then the details of the measure caused equal difficulty, even for those who were sympathetic to the Irish claim for self-government. The bill was introduced into the House of Commons on 8 April, followed by the Land Purchase Bill on 16 April. Home Rule was at last given a definition – as a single-chamber assembly in Dublin, comprising two 'orders' of representative, one elite and one more popular, who together would legislate for Ireland but within strict parameters. All issues affecting the crown, defence and foreign affairs were reserved for Westminster, whose general supremacy over the Irish assembly was affirmed. Control of customs and excise, where the bulk of Irish revenue sprung, remained in London. Irish customs revenue would, it was proposed, be used to fund Ireland's 'imperial contribution' of just under £4.25 million and an Irish contribution of £360,000 to the United Kingdom national debt. Any remaining balance might be returned to Dublin, where, together with any direct taxes levied by the new assembly, it would constitute the revenue of the Home Rule administration. But, while the United Kingdom parliament continued in effect to tax Ireland, at the same time Gladstone proposed that Irish representation at Westminster be abolished. Vernon Bogdanor has defined three broad areas of difficulty with this measure, of which the issue of representation is one; Gladstone in fact had to promise to reconsider this question, and his second Home Rule measure contained an alternative formula.[128] The second area of difficulty relates to the problematic division of taxation powers between the London and Dublin authorities (Parnell was unhappy with the British retention of customs and excise duties, and – even setting aside his particular case – it is clear that the proposed settlement contained the potential for a longlasting friction between the two parliaments). The last and related area of difficulty rests with the claimed supremacy of Westminster, which would certainly have been an irritant for nationalists, while in no sense appeasing the fears of Unionists that Home Rule implied imperial disintegration.

The broad approach of the Parnellites to the challenge of the Home Rule debate combined an ongoing concern for party unity and discipline with a desire to dampen any potentially damaging and distracting unrest in Ireland. Even in February, before the new government had announced its proposed settlement, Parnell was fighting to sustain the discipline of his movement: Justin McCarthy observed that his chief was 'nervously afraid of anything being said or done which might give our enemies the slightest chance or handle against him'.[129] It is partly (though only partly) in this context that the Galway by-election of February 1886 should be judged: here Parnell sought to impose Captain W.H. O'Shea as the nationalist candidate. But O'Shea, whom Parnell was simultaneously advancing and cuckolding, was unacceptable to many senior nationalists; and a serious rift was avoided only because Parnell announced, startlingly, that he held 'a parliament for Ireland in the hollow of my hand' and that he and the nation therefore required loyalty from both the electors of Galway and the party.[130] Elsewhere in Ireland T.C. Harrington, the Parnellite MP for Dublin (Harbour), fought to reinforce the rule of the National League and to rein in the agrarian militants. Even John Dillon, normally aggressive, spoke at this time (16 February) in favour of moderation.

This caution remained the hallmark of the Parnellite movement, both within and beyond Westminster, until the summer of 1886, by which time the fate of the Home Rule Bill had been decided. Although party members recognized problems with Gladstone's proposal (voting by orders, the imperial contribution, customs, the ongoing British control of the Royal Irish Constabulary were all mentioned), their tactic was to provide a qualified welcome while postponing the consideration and amendment of detail to the appropriate moment in the parliamentary timetable: the committee stage. Parnell's own chief contribution to the discussion on the measure came on 7 June, in the final stages of the second reading debate. On this occasion he accepted the bill as a final settlement of Irish national demands, while explaining the modification of his earlier call for a restitution of Grattan's parliament; he offered some rather formulaic reassurances to the Ulster Unionist minority, couched in the language of 'one nation' patriotism. He sought to rattle Tory complacency by revealing some of the details of his conversation with Lord Carnarvon in the previous summer. But even if all this constituted (in the words of John Morley) 'one of the most masterly speeches that ever fell from him', it was to no avail.[131] For the issue had already effectively been decided a week earlier, on 31 May, when Joseph Chamberlain and some 50 disaffected Liberal MPs had agreed to rebel against their

party leadership and vote against the bill. With these defections, and others, and stolid Tory resistance, the bill was rejected on the second reading division by a majority of 30 votes. Gladstone immediately dissolved parliament in order to take the issue to the country; and at the ensuing general election (of July 1886), while Ireland reaffirmed its commitment to Home Rule, Britain, especially England, pronounced in favour of the Union. This was to remain the broad pattern of United Kingdom politics until at least 1906, and arguably until 1918.

It is sometimes said that in 1886 Parnell 'undid' Parnellism, and the grounds for this suggestion are not hard to locate.[132] In 1886 Parnell bound his movement to Gladstonian Liberalism, repudiating his earlier conviction that the Irish Party should be free to scavenge for political gain. In 1886 Parnell accepted Home Rule as a 'final' settlement of Ireland's claims, thereby in fact agreeing a boundary to the march of his nation and repudiating his earlier grandiloquent claim at Cork. In 1886 Parnell moved to distance himself further from the agrarian militants who had been an essential element of the Parnellite alliance. Moreover, if the essence of Parnellism was a cool technical fascination with the mechanisms of power, and if Parnell had hitherto allowed this fascination to conquer any personal or family feeling (as in the suppression of the Ladies' Land League), then the Galway by-election witnessed a damaging confrontation between private sensitivity and political advantage. In sum, Parnell seemed to be redefining the ideals, the strategies, even the very substance of Parnellism.

But a true estimate of the changes wrought in 1886 depends on the original definition of Parnellism. Parnell's political make-up included a core of idealism which was swathed in pragmatism and egocentricity. Parnellism was in practice a combination of hazy patriotic principles and well-defined bargaining skills: its essence was as much negotiation as anything else. By implication Parnellism, changing subtly with the settlement of each bargain, was a fluid concept. Parnell's understanding with the Liberals in 1886 certainly carried echoes of the 'treaty' of 1882 and the abortive deal on Chamberlain's Central Board scheme in 1885; but – as was made patently clear in 1890–1, Parnell did not see the new alliance as an article of faith for his movement, but rather as a transient phase in its ongoing development. For as long as the Tories remained committed to, indeed dependent on, the Union, then the opportunities for political brokerage at Westminster remained painfully constrained. Viewed in this light, the 'union of hearts' formed in 1886 represented not the negation of Parnellism but rather its affirmation. For Parnellism was as much about deals as ideals.

Finally, although 1886 is frequently seen as a turning point in Parnellite development, perhaps the true redefinition of Parnell's politics came earlier, in 1882. After 1886 Parnell pursued a comparatively rightward course, distancing himself from the renewal of agrarian agitation and emerging in 1889, unscathed by the Pigott forgeries, as the darling of Gladstonian Britain. But the irony of the Pigott letters was that they purported to show Parnell's sympathy with the Phoenix Park assassins of 1882: the reality was that, while Parnell had certainly kept some very strange company (he had met the future Clan na Gael bomber, William Lomasney, in February

1881), he was clearly horrified by the murders of Burke and Cavendish. Margaret O'Callaghan and others have identified an increasing distance between Parnell and those militant nationalists in the IRB and elsewhere with whom he had once flirted (if Patrick Maume is correct, and Parnell – with spectacular mistiming – had joined the Fenians on 2 or 3 May 1882, then his concern may have been all the greater).[133] The formation of the vigorously disciplined gradualist National League in October 1882 may or may not have been a partial response to the threat perceived in the Phoenix Park murders; but it marked an acceleration in Parnell's drift towards a much less radical political position than that which he had occupied in 1880–1. Viewed in this light, Parnell's political stand between 1886 and 1890 was not so much a centrist novelty as merely the fulfilment of an agenda laid down in 1882.

4.6 A Union of Hearts and a Broken Marriage: Parnellism, 1886–91

Although it has been argued that the core of Parnellism was laid bare in the months of the Split (November 1890–October 1891), in fact the initial illumination both of Parnell and of his movement came earlier, beginning in 1886. Thereafter Parnell's increasingly cool attitude towards agrarian militancy was exposed, as was his ambivalent attitude towards cooperation with the Liberals. The early history of Parnellism was unmasked by the Special Commission appointed to investigate the Land League and, inferentially, the Pigott forgeries; the private history of Parnell and Mrs O'Shea, known for some years to parliamentarians, was finally revealed to a broader public in December 1889, when Captain O'Shea filed for divorce. One unremarked casualty of the polarization of British and Irish politics at this time was therefore the Parnellite enigma. It would be wrong to argue that Parnell ceased to exercise a charm and a fascination; but it is clear, however, that his room for manoeuvre was constricted, that his political options were limited and difficult, and that, lacking cover in the political limelight, he was becoming both increasingly high-handed and inaccessible even to favoured colleagues. It is hard to question Paul Bew's judgement that, had it not been for the divorce case revelations, Parnell would have survived as Irish leader; but equally, it does not seem unduly fanciful to suggest that Parnell's strategic confinement between 1886 and 1890, and his irritability and allusiveness, all inspired tensions among his followers which were aired only during the Split.[134]

Parnell had for long been divided from some of his lieutenants on the issue of land agitation: his ambiguous response to the Land Act of 1881 had disappointed some militants, as had the Kilmainham 'treaty' and the gradualism of the National League. Davitt was distressed to learn from Parnell that he saw land agitation as having little role to play in a future Home Rule Ireland; and he may have been more dismayed than amused by Parnell's sardonic observation that he, Davitt, would in all probability be arrested by the new Home Rule executive ('the first thing which I should do [as Irish Secretary] would be to lock you up').[135] But, these differences

aside, Parnell had been President of the Land League and had been careful to associate himself, at least in spirit, with some of his most hardline colleagues. With the renewal of the land agitation between 1886 and 1890, Parnell's relationship with the hardliners became more distant. He was probably consulted by the authors of the Plan (though he later denied this); he certainly counselled O'Brien to 'set bounds' to the operations of the Plan otherwise 'we shall be bankrupt and the Liberals will shake us off'.[136] In general his attitude was one of mild sympathy and disdain: in public pronouncements in 1887 he distanced himself both from the origins and operation of the Plan, urging restraint on the Irish people. In both private and in public the integrity of the Liberal alliance was professedly his chief concern (although even here – as will be made clear – there was some ambiguity).

Some of the economic conditions that had combined to fuel the Land War of 1879–81 (especially a fall in crop and livestock prices) re-emerged in the late 1880s; and there was a corresponding effort by some veterans of the Land League to regenerate an agitation. This initiative was led by John Dillon, William O'Brien and T.C. Harrington; and in October 1886 Harrington published a 'Plan of Campaign' in the Parnellite organ, *United Ireland*. The Plan has been described by F.S.L. Lyons as 'a device for collective bargaining on individual estates' – a proposal by which tenants on an estate would combine to establish an acceptable level of rent, which, if it was refused by the landlord, would be pooled in an estate fund: this would then be used to pay the maintenance and legal costs of those tenants who suffered eviction as a result of their defiance.[137] It was accepted that the National League would make good any shortfall in funding. The most recent historian of the Plan, Laurence Geary, has argued that, although 'it was more extensive than has hitherto been realised', still only some 203 estates (or 1 per cent of the total number) were affected.[138] In most of these cases the targeted landlord was chosen with care, the chief consideration being his (occasionally her) financial state: indebted – that is to say malleable – landlords were favoured victims.

The new Tory and Unionist ministry responded to the challenge of the Plan in a variety of ways. The original Tory administrative team (Sir Michael Hicks Beach as Chief Secretary, Sir Redvers Buller as Under-Secretary) adopted a comparatively emollient tone, highlighting a link between hardship and violence and looking benignly at some of Parnell's legislative suggestions; but Hicks Beach was replaced in March 1887, and Buller survived him by only a few months. The new Chief Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, combined preciosity and ruthlessness (he had a background both as an evicting Secretary of State for Scotland as well as a china-collecting, philosophizing dandy). His Under-Secretary, Sir Joseph West Ridgeway, adapted himself well to the tenor of the new regime, possessing what Balfour deemed to be 'an advantage of immeasurable proportions for developing a proper approach to Irish administration' – namely a complete ignorance of the country.[139]

As with the Liberals and the Land League, so the Tories sought to enact special crimes legislation: the Criminal Law Amendment Act, or 'Jubilee Coercion Act' of 1887, a permanent rather than renewable measure, was used with effect by crown lawyers such as the young Edward Carson, and undoubtedly helped to undermine

the Plan. A hardnosed policing policy was put in place, exemplified by the 'Mitchelstown Massacre' of September 1887 when the Royal Irish Constabulary opened fire on a menacing crowd, killing three protestors and wounding two (Carson, again, was present on this occasion); the Chief Secretary, soon to be known as 'Bloody Balfour', was unabashed by this controversial episode and vigorously defended the crown forces. In addition British emissaries at the Vatican were active and helped to win the condemnation of the Plan by Pope Leo XIII in May 1888; exactly five years earlier the Liberal government had attempted to influence Leo XIII over the issue of the Parnell Testimonial. Confidential government diplomacy was also effective in another area: the Dublin Castle administration was active in shoring up one key estate targeted by the Plan (the Ponsonby lands in Cork), and Balfour promoted a syndicate of solvent proprietors whose task was to buy out the hapless Ponsonby.

Just as Liberal coercionists (such as Earl Spencer) had generally favoured a more constructive legislative approach to the administration of Ireland, so too the Tories sought to balance coercion with conciliation. Land legislation in 1887 and 1888 helped to 'kill by kindness' what coercion had failed to achieve in a more direct manner: the Land Act of 1887 extended the scope of Gladstone's measure of 1881, admitting leaseholders to the benefits of the earlier Act while the Land Purchase Act of 1888 contributed an additional £5 million to the funding of the pioneering Ashbourne Purchase Act of 1885. There was an effort (for the moment abortive) to supply Ireland with a comprehensive reform of local government. There was investment in public works.

The combination of these measures with the coherent leadership supplied by Balfour and the unusual boldness of the Castle lawyers (Peter 'the Packer' O'Brien, Carson) helped to suffocate an agitation which was, in addition, rather thinly rooted in Irish popular favour. Although recent research has sought to strike a balance between the exaggerated claims of the Plan's authors and the sometimes dismissive attitude of later commentators, and although it is true that the Plan worked to secure rent reductions, it was never a national agitation, and it seems to have peaked early and to have suffered a protracted demise.[140] It undoubtedly suffered from the frigidity of Parnell. There were however some victories, dearly won: the 'Mitchelstown Massacre' provided a focus for sympathy and support, especially in British Liberal circles; and in addition the whole of the nationalist movement was enthused by the revelations of the Special Commission hearings of February 1889.

Neither of these transient successes was without cost. The Mitchelstown episode bought sympathy for the Plan and for nationalism at the price of the lives of three demonstrators. The cost of the Special Commission victory was less bloody and less tangible, but also high. The Commission was formed by an Act of parliament, passed in July 1888, and it was charged with the task of investigating a series of charges made by *The Times* newspaper against leading Irish nationalists. In 1887 and 1888, *The Times* had published a number of letters which were allegedly the work of Parnell, and which seemed to prove the existence of a close and sympathetic relationship between the Irish leader and violent nationalism: in the most controversial

of these missives, dated 15 May 1882, the author condoned the murder of T.H. Burke, one of the two Phoenix Park victims. These letters were only one aspect, but by far the most notorious, of the Special Commission hearings, which were held between October 1888 and November 1889. In a merciless cross-examination by the brilliant Ulster Catholic lawyer Sir Charles Russell, the author of the letters was revealed as Richard Pigott, a journalist and pornographer, who personified the sleazy demi-monde of late Victorian Dublin as well as the vicious intimacy of its political life. Russell's interrogation of Pigott stands (alongside Carson's examination of Oscar Wilde) as one of the classic set-piece confrontations of the late Victorian judicial system: and it was this, rather than the broader investigations of the Commission, which enthralled contemporaries.

Pigott, a talentless but pathological liar, linked the worlds of Fenianism, Dublin Castle and Irish Unionism, and sought to milk each of these three sources: he found a willing dupe in a recklessly ambitious young Unionist apparatchik, Edward Caulfield Houston. Houston offered generous expenses and a commission in return for any evidence that might compromise Parnell; and, having gone through the motions of an investigation, Pigott duly put pen to paper and supplied his credulous patron with the required materials. Pigott had genially exploited the gullibility of those who wanted to believe in Parnell's guilt: Houston and his colleagues in the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union made little effort to verify the evidence that they had bought so dearly (the letters cost £500 and Pigott, who of course pocketed this sum, cheekily claimed an additional £105 'for himself').[141] But, except for those needing faith, Pigott was clearly a doubtful political messiah: the Parnellites got at the truth well in advance of the Special Commission hearings, and even the government belatedly and fearfully grasped at the disaster that threatened. On 20–2 February 1889 the forgeries were exposed with a brisk efficiency; and while their true author escaped to shoot himself in a Madrid hotel, their purported author basked on the high ground of Liberal morality.

But the exposure of Pigott and the humiliation of *The Times* placed Parnell on an extremely vulnerable pedestal. The adulation of the Liberals was certainly welcome, and Parnell seemed to respond warmly and for the most part in a conciliatory manner: on 8 March 1889 he attended a dinner organized by the Liberal Eighty Club, where he spoke sympathetically on the value of working within the constitution and, in a highly charged symbolic gesture, shook the hand of the former lord lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Spencer (Healy's Duke of Sodom and Gomorrah). A series of moderate speeches followed in the summer and autumn of 1889 and in December he journeyed to Hawarden to be blessed by Gladstone. But even here, when he was apparently at his most straightforward, there was ambiguity: Gladstone thought that the Hawarden visit had been delayed because Parnell was concerned to see whether the Tories would first commit themselves to an Irish Catholic university. There was other evidence of Parnell's old and – even in these most unpropitious circumstances – undying interest in courting Toryism. In July 1890 Parnell alarmed his *soi-disant* Liberal allies and his own followers by offering to deal with Balfour on the land question: in what Morley called a 'plunge into unexplained

politics' Parnell proposed that by a remodelling of Balfour's new land bill, the Plan of Campaign might be brought to an end.[142] But although this might have constituted 'unexplained politics' for Morley and Gladstone, more worldly commentators such as Dillon divined Parnell's intent and feared that it would 'spread a kind of uneasy feeling among the Radicals that our opposition to Balfour and the Tory party is after all not so real'.[143]

These spasmodic gestures towards Toryism were not the only unsettling aspect of the apparently healthy Liberal alliance. Parnell, though professing concern for Liberal sensitivities, was continuously worried that the 'union of hearts' might develop into an effective institutional union between the two parties, and that the fate of earlier Irish national endeavours (incorporation into Liberalism) might be repeated. He was therefore particularly keen to guard against the assimilation of the Irish within Liberal political society. Moreover, occasional speeches in the period hinted at his old extremism, the most controversial of these being an address to Irish town councillors in May 1889 when he referred to the parliamentary policy as 'a trial' which 'we did not ourselves believe in the possibility of maintaining for all time'.[144] This was not a language comprehensible to Gladstonian Liberalism; nor were these the 'very conservative' Parnellite doctrines that were so soothing to the Liberal leader. Such statements helped to keep open a range of strategic options, but they did little to consolidate the middle ground that Gladstone believed he had charted between the two parties.

For the Parnellites this middle ground might well in time have become uninhabitable, parched through lack of legislative concession. It was also possible, though much less likely, that the Parnellite–Liberal consensus might have been threatened by some constructive working relationship with the Tories: the Unionist alliance was clearly not going to deliver Home Rule, but in 1898 it did deliver democratic county councils, and by 1903–4 some advanced Unionists were toying with the possibility of administrative devolution for Ireland. But in truth the idea of a significant political space shared between Salisbury's Unionists and the Irish Party was merely a Parnellite fantasy, a recurring image from 1885 which occasionally and temporarily teased the Irish leader. Parnell's alliance with the Liberals did not crumble because the Irish were cut off from tangible political concession, nor was it replaced by an understanding with the Tories: the alliance ended because what Gladstone saw as the moral harmony between the parties suddenly gave way to dissonance. And the origin of this lay not in Parnell's occasional militant lapses, but rather in the divorce court.

Parnellism was a magnificent, though fragile, achievement; and Parnell was a dazzling, though vulnerable, political performer. The strain of operating at every one of the tiers of the multi-decked Anglo-Irish relationship was overwhelming, and there seems to have been little compensating support or intimacy from the Parnell clan (this in contrast to the affirmative relationship between Parnell's chief antagonist, Healy, and his family networks). The crucial oasis at the centre of Parnell's searing political career was provided not by adoring parents or siblings, or by a conventional marriage, but rather by Katherine O'Shea, the wife of a colleague in

Plate 5 Charles Stewart Parnell re-elected as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, House of Commons, December 1890.
Source: Mary Evans Picture Library.

the Irish Parliamentary Party: Mrs O'Shea was in addition an Englishwoman, who had certain tenuous connections with the Liberal political establishment, but who was pleasingly remote from the Irish networks where Parnell sought ascendancy. The relationship began in 1880 and provided some of the psychological bedrock for Parnell's successful political career in the following years; but it was of course a flawed stratum. The first warnings of disaster came only in February 1886 with the Galway Mutiny, and there were serious tremors in December 1889 when Mrs O'Shea's estranged husband petitioned for divorce, citing Parnell as co-respondent. But the quake came only in November 1890, when O'Shea pressed his (uncontested) claims in court and called evidence that not only depicted Parnell as a moral reprobate, but – much worse – also defined him as a skulking fool.[145]

There had always been a Micawberish element to Parnell's strategy, and until very late in the day he seems to have been complacent in the belief that 'something would turn up': before November 1890 he expected that O'Shea might eventually be bought off, and even after the courtroom revelations he seems to have banked on the Irish instinct for unity in the face of political disaster. But here the luck that had accompanied his boldness through the 1880s ran out. Initially it seemed that Parnell would indeed pull off the greatest tactical coup of his career, by sustaining the silence of

the Church and the endorsement of the party in the face of his adultery: the bishops were at first disapproving but reticent, while on 25 November the Irish members (who were kept in the dark about the Liberal attitude) were prepared to re-elect him as their leader. However, British non-conformist leaders such as Hugh Price Hughes, whose Home Rule convictions were – like those of Gladstone – interlinked with Christian principle, now saw Parnell as a blight on a moral cause; and, lacking some of the political finesse of their Irish brethren, they were fierce in their denunciation (an uncomprehending F.S.L. Lyons has called them 'hysterical').[146] Gladstone made it clear that Parnell's continued leadership of the Home Rule movement was incompatible with his own command of Liberalism; and this forced the Irish members to reconsider their earlier and instinctive closing of ranks. On 1 December 1890 73 out of the 86 members of the party reconvened in Committee Room 15 at Westminster; and on 6 December, after a prolonged and highly acrimonious debate, Justin McCarthy led 44 of those present away from Parnell's leadership and into secession.

This 'Split' was the central feature of Irish politics until Parnell's death in October 1891: indeed it remained a dominant theme until the reunification of the Irish Party in 1900. It would be easy to interpret the arguments which drove Parnell to his death and which resonated beyond his grave as being rooted in private personality clashes and public moral affront; indeed many sensitive contemporaries (such as William O'Brien) seem to have been diverted by Parnell's personal tragedy away from the ideological conflict that was being played out in 1890–1.[147] But, while a degree of narrow animosity undoubtedly fed the peculiarly bitter exchanges between Parnell and Tim Healy ('the most acute Catholic nationalist intelligence of his time'), there was more at stake in the conflict than this.[148] Healy (whose 'rhetoric disclosed a disquieting fanaticism') spoke for middle Ireland – for popular Catholic morality, and for the prosperous farmers and their economic dependents in the countryside and in the small towns: in other words, he represented the core of what had been Parnellism, and indeed it has been suggested with some truth that it was this 'Parnellism [which] destroyed Parnell'.[149] Parnell's campaign, which for years was seen as an incoherent postscript to his political career, is now judged as a revelation – albeit a crude revelation – of his fundamental convictions and strategies ('a laboratory of his political technique, in necessarily coarsened form').[150]

The Split should thus be seen less as a disjunction in Parnell's political evolution than as an unveiling. His strategy was as of old – to build a coalition of forces around a simple cry, that of 'independent opposition'; he emphasized that the anti-Parnellites, by submitting to Liberal 'dictation', were compromising the parliamentary independence which alone benefited Irish nationalism. He reactivated the sentiments contained within the speech of May 1889, which he had delivered to the town councillors of Ireland: he stressed that constitutionalism was only a highly fallible means to the end of legislative independence. He flattered the Irish Republican Brotherhood, without wholly abandoning this qualified parliamentary creed; he and his supporters looked for endorsement both to veteran Fenians as well as to intellectuals and fellow travellers of the younger generation. He elaborated his

indictment of the Plan of Campaign, while continuing to express the concern for smallholders and evicted tenants that he had been offering from the time of the Land War: indeed, in the months of the Split, he sought legislation that would discriminate in favour of the small farmer interest and against the substantial farmers who bolstered his opponents. He reaffirmed his faith in a non-sectarian nationalism, though in a more liberated and therefore cruder manner than before: his attacks on the Church's intrusion into politics became ever more aggressive, buoyed by his own passionate convictions on this score as well as the evolving alliance between the clergy and his opponents. He carefully guarded his reputation for religious tolerance (especially since Healy was accusing him of sectarianism); but a heightened concern for the role of his fellow Protestants within the new Ireland (one of the central if neglected themes of his career, according to Paul Bew) was also evident in these months of the Split.[151]

But Parnellism was not merely a political philosophy and a strategy, it was also a political style; and if the Split was merely an unveiling of the core of Parnellite thought, then this very process involved a fatal demystification. Parnellism was revealed, demystified and destroyed in one single process. This had begun before the Split with the Special Commission which, while vindicating Parnell on the crucial issue of the Pigott forgeries, had also published much that was distinctly unflattering about the operations of the Land League and its leaders. The O'Shea divorce hearing had supplied the details of Parnell's sometimes furtive and farcical courtship; and the ensuing political struggle had provided the anti-Parnellites with the chance to further embroider this humiliating evidence. Healy's recklessly sarcastic and abusive rhetoric gave begrudgers an opportunity to laugh publicly at a man whose haughty English manner had inspired much private resentment. Indeed, the emotional release provided by the Split brought not just taunts but also violence: Parnell, who had once been reverenced as a demi-god, was assaulted not just verbally but also physically (most famously at Castlecomer in December 1890). His own style – passionate idealism expressed in tones of frosty restraint – was modified and debased: his display of force and aggression during the Parnellite capture of the *United Ireland* offices in December 1890 involved an abandonment of the political cool for which he was renowned and respected. The very fact that he was forced back into Ireland and onto public platforms after a very long absence hinted at a desperation which had little role in the public image of a detached, omniscient political intelligence. James Bryce argued in 1903 that Parnell's self-confidence was an essential cement for his movement ('a chief ground of their obedience to him and their belief in his superior wisdom'); Frank Callanan has observed that Parnell's 'composed audacity, and his mystique of invincibility, belied his vulnerability'.[152] But when this 'composed audacity' began to grow dishevelled and the self-assurance cracked, Parnell lost support. He who had once brazenly defied the conventional laws of politics became simply a conventional, over-ambitious nationalist failure.

Parnell's position after December 1890 was indeed desperate, and he recognized his plight by his determination to fight – even though a superficially attractive compromise was available. He rejected comparatively favourable terms for a settlement

at Boulogne in January and February of 1891; but accepting any diminution of status at a weak point in his career would have been a humiliation and therefore a much more dangerous concession than might otherwise have seemed apparent. His intense personal involvement at three by-elections (Kilkenny in December 1890, North Sligo in April 1891 and Carlow in July 1891) was distinctive not merely because of his passion but because he had for long disdained participation in such contests: the three successive defeats that his candidates sustained overturned his reputation for electoral invincibility. He had been famous not as a fluent public speaker but as a careful and (when appropriate) a precise speaker. But this precision evaporated as the stress of the contest began to tell, and some of his later speeches degenerated into confusion: Dillon, noting Parnell's last speech at Creggs, Roscommon, on 27 September 1891, wrote tersely – 'Parnell at Creggs yesterday, incoherent scurrility – sad, sad'.[153]

What changed during the Split was not perhaps Parnell's rather eclectic political philosophy, but rather his political style: frenetic campaigning replaced an indifference to the Irish campaign trail, a Byronic gusto replaced an Augustan frigidity, an intellectual confusion born of stress and exhaustion replaced a taut precision of language. Parnell had perhaps little choice but to fight his corner – and to fight viciously; but, whether he had won or lost, his relationship with his movement would have been irremediably altered. He would have survived, cut off from English support and from the effective sanction of the Church, not as the disdainful autocrat of old but as the poltroon who had betrayed one of his own supporters and who had hidden from his vengeance on a fire-escape. He would have survived, haunted by the woundingly accurate assaults of Healy and by the private contempt of ordinary Irish people, like the old woman at Castlebar for whom he was merely an 'ould blackguard'.[154] But in reality the chances of survival were slim, given the forces which swiftly ranged against him; and if there had been any doubt as to the outcome, then the alteration in Parnell's public conduct that was evident from the moment he returned to Ireland in December 1890 would have signalled the depth of his political despair. For the Victorian Unionist Edward Dowden, Parnell was the fallen archangel Lucifer; for F.S.L. Lyons, Parnell was Macbeth, 'bear-like' fighting his course.[155] But Parnell was also Shakespeare's Richard III: a ruthless political warrior who at the end fought because there was no alternative; a vicious technician of power whose personal and political sins were for long contained, but in the end combined to ensure his downfall.

Parnell died on 6 October 1891. He had helped to direct an agitation which produced the most important single land reform of the nineteenth century: the Act of 1881. He had created a disciplined Parliamentary Party and popular movement dedicated to the restoration of Irish legislative independence; he forced Home Rule onto the political agenda of a reluctant British parliament. He united the Church and Fenianism in one national movement; he brought together farmers of all descriptions, the urban middle classes and the Dublin working class in the call for Home Rule. He alone of Irish popular leaders in modern times, as an Irish Protestant nationalist who was interested in the role of Protestants in Irish society, had the capacity

to overcome the endemic sectarian and cultural divisions of the island. His appeal was great, his philosophy eclectic and vague, and his opportunism boundless. He applied (as did Edward Saunderson) eighteenth-century modes of thought and expression to the task of organizing a late nineteenth-century popular movement. In death, as in life, his appeal transcends the murky boundaries of constitutional and physical force nationalism. His legacy spoke both to the Irish upper middle classes who, before the accession to the eurozone, carried an icon of the Uncrowned King on their £100 notes and to the ideologues of Provisional Sinn Féin who found a home in Dublin's Parnell Square.

5

Greening the Red, White and Blue: The End of the Union, 1891–1921

5.1 The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1891–1914

Parnellism, like Sinn Féin, was a brilliant but artificial alliance; and the pressure of sustaining an elaborate semblance of unity caused the explosion of 1891, as indeed it would later cause the meltdown of 1921–3. For most of the 1890s, until the rather cosmetic reunion of 1900, three former lieutenants of the Uncrowned King, while differing in attitude towards the legacy of their dead master, tried independently to create at least the structural elements of his political success (a parliamentary presence, extra-parliamentary organization and an uncritically loyal press). For most of the 1890s there were at least three competing nationalist organizations – the National League, the National Federation and T.M. Healy's People's Rights Association – with attendant newspapers; for most of the decade these bodies were locked into a mutually damaging rivalry where minor political differences were pursued with a passable imitation of fury, and where deep-seated ideological divisions were blurred by ruthless tactical manoeuvring.

To some extent the political maturation of the 1890s was the natural consequence of Parnell's autocratic rule in the previous decade – a delayed reaction to an era when internal debate was carefully regulated and when able senior nationalists were kept in a curious state of partial dependence and subservience. But the divisions of the 1890s were not simply the indirect by-product of Parnell's political style; they were also a commentary on the variegated nature of his movement as well as on its ideological inconsistencies – and, indeed, on the highly complex nature of the Parnell Split. There was at least a coherence to the Healyite position where local political rights and the authority of the Church were simultaneously underlined, in contra-distinction to the classical emphases of Parnellism; but even this had roots in Parnell's half-hearted concern for the dignity of local elites and for that of the