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**THE LAND WAR AND ITS LEADERS
IN QUEEN'S COUNTY, 1879-82**

Two Volumes

**A thesis submitted to the
Department of Modern History, University of Dublin
in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

by

John William Herbert Carter

March 1991

Vol. I

THE LAND WAR AND THE CHANGING
IN QUEEN'S COUNTY, 1845-52

The Volume

A thesis submitted to the
Department of History, University of Dublin
in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis
2389.1

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I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of Dublin, is entirely my own work. It has not been presented as an exercise for a degree at any other university.

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Signed..... *J. W. H. Carter*

Date..... *13 March 1991*

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SUMMARY

This thesis covers the land war and its leaders in Queen's County, 1879-82. It is based largely on hitherto unknown records and correspondence gathered by the author in the county, and on material in the public archives in Dublin. This intensive local study confirms and modifies some assertions made by historians, while it also investigates aspects of the land war which have been neglected not only in the county but in the country as a whole.

The land war did not effectively start in Queen's County until the winter of 1880-1. A search for its causes shows that conditions in the county at the end of the 1870s were not so extreme as to impel its tenant farmers into a land war. It was mainly due to middle-class local leaders inspired by Parnell and Davitt that, despite bitter local opposition, two Parnellites were elected as M.P.s for the county, and then a small majority of its farming population were organised into branches of the land league.

Indignation meetings and demonstrations created the impression of tenant solidarity. But it was an illusion. An examination of the functioning of the land league in the county shows that it was torn by dissension, duplicity and self-interest, and was *in extremis* before its suppression.

On the other hand, the landlords were demonstrably disunited, and, until October 1881, slow to organise any sort of collective response

to land league aggression. At the same time, some landlords, who were magistrates, were too timid to use their powers.

A study of the genesis, structure and work of the ladies' land league in the county provides some of the necessary rural perspective on the women. They were left in an impossible position when the land league was suppressed. The men could not and would not let them direct the course of the land war. Also, the police were an effective deterrent. Nevertheless, it is clear from an investigation into the many manifestations of disorder that the county endured its most violently disturbed period after October 1881.

When the land war ended, the landlords had been provoked into a more vigorous and collective response to their tenants' demands, and they were financially better off than they were in 1880. In contrast, those hardest hit by the depression of the late 1870s had gained nothing; the county was still poorly represented in parliament; and its tenants were disappointed, disillusioned and discontented.

In 1882 the land war had still to be won in Queen's County.

ABBREVIATIONS

There are other short titles used in the footnotes. In such cases the full title is given in the first citation. In dates from 1801 to 1899 the first two digits are omitted where the month and year are given.

Bew, *Land and the
national question*

Paul Bew, *Land and the National Question in
Ireland 1855-82* (Dublin, 1978)

Donnelly, *Land and
the people*

James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Land and the People
of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy
and the Land Question* (London, 1975)

Davitt, *Fall*

Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in
Ireland: or the story of the Land League
revolution* (London and New York, 1904)

H. C.

House of Commons [in the citation of
parliamentary papers]

L. E.

Leinster Express

L. L.

Leinster Leader

Lyons, *Dillon*

F. S. L. Lyons, *John Dillon: a biography*
(London, 1968)

Lyons, *Parnell*

F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*
(London, 1977)

Moody, *Davitt*

T. W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846-82*
(Oxford, 1981)

M. H. C.

Mansion House Committee for the Relief of
Distress in Ireland, 1880

N. L. I.	National Library of Ireland
O' Hanlon, <i>Queen's County</i>	V. Revd John Canon O' Hanlon, P.P., M.R.I.A. and Revd Edward O' Leary, P.P., <i>History of the Queen's County</i> , vol. 1, (Dublin, 1907); vol. 11 compiled from O' Hanlon's papers by Revd Edward O' Leary, P.P., M.R.I.A., and Revd Matthew Lalor. P.P. (Dublin, 1914)
P. R. O. I.	Public Record Office of Ireland, Dublin
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
<i>Slater's Directory</i>	<i>Slater's Royal National Directory of Ireland</i>
T. C. D.	Trinity College, Dublin
<i>Thom's</i>	<i>Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the year 1844 [etc.].</i> Dublin, 1844- (annual) (Title altered in 1881 to <i>Thom's Official Directory</i> ,...)
S. P. O., C. S. O., R. P.	State Paper Office (Dublin Castle), Chief Secretary's Office, Registered Papers
Tierney, <i>Croke</i>	Mark Tierney, <i>Croke of Cashel: The Life of Archbishop Thomas William Croke 1823-1902</i> (Dublin, 1976)

Note: Abbreviations used in the footnotes comply with the 'Rules for contributors to *Irish Historical Studies*', revised edition, by T.W. Moody, in *Irish Historical Studies*, supplement I (Dublin, January 1968).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis covers the land war and its leaders in Queen's County, 1879-82, and in so doing sets out to redress the neglect the county has suffered from historians of the land war.

The present study has inevitably and rightly been influenced by the treatment given to the land war by historians, and, in this intensive local examination of what has become almost a familiar subject, confirms many of their arguments.¹ Nevertheless, the author has also taken the opportunity to investigate aspects of the land war which have been neglected not only in Queen's County but in the country as a whole.

Any analysis of the land war in the country as a whole must have gaps because of the magnitude of the task, and perhaps because there is something seductive about the national leaders and the dramatic places and episodes of the land war. A concentration on the land war in one county does more than simply illuminate one piece of the complicated mosaic of the land war. It contributes towards a more satisfactory understanding of the land war and its leaders in the country as a whole. Therefore, while the focus of this thesis is on Queen's County, it is not to be rated merely as a local history, for it has a clear national perspective.

1. Where specific points are gleaned from the works of other historians, they are acknowledged in the footnotes; otherwise, for secondary works on the land war see the bibliography.

In the impressive body of scholarly literature resulting from the intensive investigation of the land war over the last twenty years, such references as are made to Queen's County are commonly confined to James Fintan Lalor, his brother Richard Lalor, and the land meeting at Knockaroe on 22 February 1880, which was attended by Davitt. The recently published masterly books by Dr John Feehan - *The Landscape of Slieve Bloom: A study of its natural and human heritage*, (Dublin 1979), and *Laois: An Environmental History*, (Ballykilcavan, 1983) - because of their particular emphasis on the environment, ignore the land war. Other local histories of districts within the county, even within their limited scope, have shown little advance past the anecdotal 'drum and trumpet' stage.¹ Even the outstanding history of the county, Canon John O'Hanlon's *History of the Queen's County* (Dublin, 1907 & 1914), devotes less than fourteen of its 814 pages to the land war - and these are without any pretence of critical analysis.

If there are clear, valid reasons for considering the land war in one county,² a local study of this kind presents particular organisational and intellectual difficulties. There is the constant burden of assembling and evaluating a bewildering mass of small

1. For example, see articles in the issues of the *Laois Association Yearbook* 1984-9 (Carlton Publishing Co. Ltd., Dublin).

2. For article on local history see Nicholas Mansergh, 'Some reflections upon the local dimension in history' in William Nolan and Thomas G. McGrath (eds.), *Tipperary, History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1985).

details, and at times one is compelled to describe what often appears to be chaos. On the other hand, county boundaries offer the compensation of imposing a geographical restraint; in the case of this thesis, the timing of events within Queen's County also imposed a logical time-span for each of the chapters.

Chapter I attempts to weigh the various influences which brought about the land war in Queen's County.

Before the government and the landlords could be engaged effectively, the most pressing problem to be confronted in Queen's County between the harvests of 1879 and 1880 was distress and its relief. Though sources are fragmentary, and hence the product of any investigation into distress and its relief in any part of Ireland must be tentative, chapter II presents a reasonably convincing impression of distress in the county, and its relief by one of the principal funds. Then it traces the sometimes violent, uneasy espousal of Parnellite parliamentary representation, and the establishment of the twenty-four branches of the land league in the county.

Chapter III analyses the series of events in Queen's County from November 1880 to May 1881, which so created an atmosphere of anarchy that the executive felt compelled to suspend habeas corpus in the county. Some of the necessary rural perspective on the ladies' land league is provided by a study of its genesis, structure, leadership, and some of its work in the county.

Chapter IV covers the period from May to October 1881 - the most disorderly, clamorous, and apparently combative phase of the land war

in Queen's County, and the last twenty-four weeks of the land league's legal existence. In this chapter, the extra dimension given to public meetings and demonstrations by support for suspects gaoled under the Act for the Better Protection of Person and Property in Ireland, 1881 is explained. Although attention is given to the various manifestations of disorder in the county throughout this thesis, here particular emphasis is placed on the role played by bands in the land war. At the same time, the self-interest, dissension, and fundamental fraudulence of the land league are demonstrated, and Parnell's attempts to keep the splitting land movement together - particularly at the land league convention in Maryborough on 26 September 1881 - are described.

Chapter IV also considers what evidence there is in the context of Queen's County to support Gladstone's castigation of 'all the classes who possess property' for their 'general cowardice' and 'lack of moral force'.

The penultimate chapter, which broadly covers the land war in Queen's County from October 1881 to May 1882, is divided into four parts. (I) analyses the struggle for rents in the county after the no-rent manifesto, and, modifying the conventional view of the land war as a victory for tenants, suggests that the land war left most landlords in the county better off than they were in 1880, and forced

1, *Nation*, 15 Oct. 81.

them into bestirring themselves into a more assertive and collective response to recalcitrant tenants. (II) describes the campaign which compelled the Queen's County Hunt to suspend fox hunting for almost two seasons. (III) is divided into four sub-sections: (1) discusses the preparedness of the magistrates and the police in the county to combat agrarian crime after the autumn of 1881; (2) explains why John Redington was gaoled for the second time - of the twenty-two suspects from Queen's County who were gaoled, he caused Dublin Castle most anxiety; (3) analyses the prosecution of Fr Thomas Feehan, the vitriolic president of the Rathdowney branch of the land league, and the only priest from the county to be gaoled during the land war; (4) analyses the many sided character of agrarian crime in the county, with particular emphasis on the winter of 1881-2 - the most violently disordered period of the land war. (IV) examines the futile struggle of the ladies' land league to nurture the land war in Queen's County, and considers how effective were the police.

Chapter VI presents the main conclusions which emerge from this thesis.

The research for this study was done mainly in County Laois and Dublin city. In 1980, motivated by Robert Lloyd Praeger's *The way that I went: An Irishman in Ireland*, and using a set of 1839 six-inch ordnance survey maps, the author visited virtually every farm in the county. These excursions (which have continued intermittently ever since) have aided the accuracy with which the land war in the county

is described: ' through them, and through advertisements in the local newspapers, personal introductions were made, oral evidence (rarely accurate) was gathered, and access to hitherto unknown estate records, hunt records and shop accounts was gained.

In Dublin, in the four years 1985-8, valuable material was found through exhaustive searches in the public archives; in the official parliamentary publications, inquiries, reports and returns; in the pamphlets, memoirs, reports and letters of contemporaries; and in the magazines and newspapers of the period.

All the material used in this work is listed in the bibliography.

1. For example, in the map of Ireland in T.W. Moody's *Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846-82*, p.636, 'Tenakill', which presumably indicates the home of James Fintan Lalor, is marked wrongly: it does indicate correctly a house called Tinnakill House, three miles west of Mountrath in Tinnakill townland, but this was not Lalor's home. To confuse matters: there are two other Tinnakills (using the spelling in the 1839 six-inch ordnance survey maps) in the county: Tinnakill Castle, three miles north-east of Mountmellick, is a ruined tower house; and Lalor's home (now a ruin) - variously spelled Tenakill House and Tinnakill House - is about three hundred yards north-west of Raheen chapel in the tiny townland of Raheen, which is less than four miles east of Mountrath.

WHAT CAUSED THE LAND WAR IN QUEEN'S COUNTY?

The traditional picture of rural life in Queen's County before the land war of 1879-82 as painted - especially on public platforms - by many land league leaders in the county was a simplistic one. It is likely that in part it reflected and probably helped to create a folk-attitude to reality. The mass of the people was portrayed as insecure in their holdings, living permanently on the verge of starvation and being preyed upon by parasitic landlords who rack-rented, evicted at will, and who were habitually 'absent' spending their ill-gotten gains abroad. In his letter read to a meeting of the Queen's County Independent Club on 29 January 1879, Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, was typical: he wrote of 'the monster grievance of Ireland - the *fons et origo omnium nostrum malorum*', which, he asserted, was 'landlord absolutism, class ascendancy - that monstrous and arbitrary power that evicts in passion, that impoverishes and starves a people with its avarice, and fattens on misery.' Then, when harvests failed and prices collapsed in the late 1870s, a desperate land war, born of the need to survive, was fought by tenants against a landlord class supported by a 'barbarous code of laws'.²

Such a stark and simple scenario is inaccurate. What follows is an

1, *L.E.*, 1 Feb. 79; cf. below, pp 126.

2, From the description of the 'laws supporting landlordism' by Fr James Cosgrave, the Aghaboe catholic curate (*L.E.*, 15 Jan. 81).

attempt to weigh the various influences which brought about the land war in Queen's County. This chapter is divided into four parts. Part 1 analyses the agricultural depression in the county in the late 1870s. Part 2 describes relations between landlords and their tenants in the county before the land war. Part 3 offers evidence on the prosperity of farmers in the county before the land war. Here the role of credit in the lives of farmers is investigated. Part 4 expresses the author's views on why the land war happened in the county.

1 The Agricultural Depression.

Land use in Queen's County in the 1870s and 1880s was broadly the same as in the counties of Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenney and Tipperary. (King's County had relatively more 'turf bog' - almost 23 per cent - and hence only about 71 per cent of its land was farmed compared to an average 85 per cent in the five above-named counties.)¹ Farming in the midlands was oriented chiefly towards livestock. For example, more than 60 per cent of the total land farmed in Queen's County was in rough grazing,² while more than half of the land under crops produced hay and turnips - the principal fodder crops.³

Farmers in the midlands generally tended to be more prosperous than farmers in Connacht. For example, a clear contrast may be drawn

1, Appendix 1, below, p.412; *Agricultural statistics, 1881* [C3332], H.C. 1882, lxxiv.

2, Ibid.

3, Appendix 2, below, p.412.

between the relative strength of farmers in Queen's County and Mayo, the leader in what Joseph Lee describes as the 'agitation calendar'.¹ Simple statistics illustrate this contrast: in the mid-1870s, farmers in Queen's County on holdings over one acre had, on average, 150 per cent more horses, 50 per cent more cattle and pigs aged over one year, 13 per cent more sheep, and 32 per cent more poultry; also, farmers in Queen's County had an average of about 14 acres under crops in contrast to the Mayo farmers' average 5.5 acres.²

Using Vaughan's method of calculating agricultural output,³ it is possible to produce a realistic index of changes in the total value of agricultural output in Queen's County,⁴ and of the relative value of its tillage and livestock production.⁵ It may be noted from Appendix 3 (below, p.413) that the value of gross agricultural output in the county slipped annually from a peak in 1874 to 1877, there was a partial recovery in 1878, but 1879 was the worst year of the 1870s. The three years 1877-9 produced the lowest average gross farming income in the county of any triennial period in the years 1871-82.

However, calculating agricultural income provides a broad generalised view of farming. All farmers in the county were not similarly affected by the bearable 13 per cent drop in gross farm income from the triennial period 1874-6 to the triennial period

1. Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society 1848-1919*, p.83.

2. *Agricultural statistics, Ireland, 1883* [C4069], H.C. 1884, lxxv, 38,53.

3. W.E. Vaughan, *A study of landlord and tenant relations in Ireland between the famine and the land war, 1850-78*, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Dublin, 1973), pp 336-58.

4. Appendix 3, below, p.413.

5. Appendix 4, below, p.414.

1877-9. Most farms in the midlands were mixed, and all farmers suffered a reduction in income to some degree in the years 1877-9. Yet, farmers reliant on livestock and livestock products (in Queen's County, producing about 75 per cent of farm income) fared better than the farmers reliant on tillage. For example, in Queen's County between 1874 and 1877, farmers' gross income from the main livestock (cattle) dropped about 13 per cent, while, at the same time, gross income from the main tillage crop (barley) dropped about 28 per cent.

Tillage did poorly in 1876. In Queen's County all crops, except wheat (which accounted for less than 1 per cent of the gross income from crops)¹ suffered a decrease in yield² and price.³ Then the very wet 1877 by and large proved worse: the exceptions were turnips, which improved marginally from a below-average yield of 11.6 tons per acre to 12.8 tons per acre, and hay of poor quality from 1.5 tons to 2.2 tons per acre.⁴ Thomas W. Webber, who was employed by Captain Robert A.G. Cosby as his land agent in Stradbally, summarised the year thus:

The season of 1877 proved unfavourable, and the potato and corn exceedingly short. The latter were saved with difficulty owing to the constant wet weather, and both oats and hay were spoiled in large quantities. The hay was abundant but very low in price so that money could not be got for it. Barley was a fair crop but fully one half was spoiled in the stacks and rendered unfit for malting. Owing to these failures following on the bad harvest of 1876, the farming interests...have suffered considerably and rents were badly paid, while the war in Turkey has kept up the price of bread and Indian corn on which the farmers largely depend for food.⁵

In 1878, agricultural income in Queen's County improved slightly with

1. Appendix 4, below, p.414.

2. Appendix 5, below, p.414.

3. Appendix 7, below, p.415.

4. Appendix 4, op.cit.

5. Cosby papers; rent book for 1877.

livestock and crops variously effective in generating income. However, the overall increase in the value of gross farm output in the county of about 4 per cent did not compensate for the two previous years. Then, 1879 proved 'calamitous to agricultural interests'.¹

Rainfall in 1879 was singularly damaging to farming throughout Ireland. Total rainfall for the year was about average, but during the crucial months from April to September it was both capricious and heavy. Though there would have been regional variations - heavier rainfall in the Slieve Bloom Mountains area, and lighter rainfall in the east midland areas of Queen's County, Carlow and Kilkenny - rain-gauge recordings made by Captain Loftus Bland J.P. at Blandsfort House (his home, three miles north-east of Abbeylisk) reasonably represent an index of rainfall in the midlands from 1874 to 1890.² Between April and September 1879, rain fell at Blandsfort on 123 days at a monthly average of 3.54 inches: this contrasts with the same six months over the previous five years (which includes a very wet 1877) when there was an average of 97 wet days at 2.72 inches per month.³

While the numbers of cattle and sheep in Queen's County changed very little from 1876 to 1879, the price of cattle fell by almost 12 per cent, butter by 27 per cent,⁴ mutton by almost 14 per cent and wool over 30 per cent.⁵ Also, in 1879, stock farmers were unable to harvest enough fodder: the turnip and mangel crops were the worst on

1. Cosby papers; Webber's report for 1879.

2. Appendix 8, below, p.416; Appendix 9, below, p.417.

3. Ibid., and sources there cited.

4. Appendix 6, below, p.415; Appendix 7, below, p.415.

5. Appendix 7, below, p.415.

record, and hay, though belatedly saved during an unusually dry October, was of very poor quality. However, though sheep and cattle farmers were worse off in 1879 they fared better than farmers who depended on tillage for most of their income.

All crop yields dropped in 1879.¹ Barley, the chief cash crop in Queen's county, was so badly damaged by the drenching weather that it probably made less money than the official agricultural statistics would suggest: constabulary 'observations on the produce of the crops' in the county stated that in the Mountrath district 'barley, which is the more extensively grown than any other, was the worst, owing to the wetness and coldness of the season', while the Maryborough district drew the observation that 'owing to the wet season, barley, the staple crop of this district, was of such a quality as to be unsaleable, in fact our principal malster here has refused to buy altogether.'² (Significantly, between March 1878 and January 1879, the employees making sacks in J & L.F Goodbody Ltd., Clara, King's County had to accept a 15 per cent reduction in their wages.)³

But it was the small farmer and the labourer who suffered most during the agricultural depression. (Here the small farmer is regarded as one holding between one and fifteen acres: about 47 per cent of the holdings over one acre in Queen's County were in this category.)⁴

1. Appendix 5, below, p.414.

2. *Observations of the district inspectors of the Royal Irish Constabulary and of the sergeants of Metropolitan Police...*, *Agricultural statistics of Ireland for 1879* [C2534], H.C.1880, lxxvi.

3. Diaries of J.& L.F. Goodbody Ltd., Clara, King's County (P.R.O.I., Off.12.B.3).

4. Appendix 10, below, p.417.

Small farmers in the country as a whole, who had few savings, could ill-afford even one bad year, but when their essential potato crop failed miserably in 1879 for the third year in succession the effect for them was ruinous.

It is difficult to be precise about the importance of the potato to the Irish smallholder in the 1870s. As market prices usually related to potatoes for the table, simply multiplying yield by market price gives a misleading index of the value of potato crops. Higher prices did not compensate producers for the shortages and, as demand was relatively inelastic, potato surpluses were in part wasted, and did not earn proportionately increased income. The smallholder depended on the potato to feed pigs and poultry - his two important sources of income. Obviously sensitive to below-average potato yields, both pig and poultry numbers fell in Queen's County from 1877 to 1880: pigs decreased by 33 per cent and, though poultry numbers fell just 2.2 per cent,¹ they probably laid fewer eggs. Though the ending of the Russo-Turkish war in 1878 permitted cheaper bread and Indian corn, the potato was still an essential part of the diet of small farmers and labourers: for them, with little income or hope of employment in 1879, the year ahead was a forbidding prospect. Constabulary predictions throughout the country in October 1879 were gloomy about how long the potato would 'maintain the poor'. For the four districts in Queen's County the predictions were:

1. Appendix 6, below, p.415.

Abbeyleix district:	'likely to last until next March.'
Ballylynan district:	'may maintain the poor about three months.'
Maryborough district:	'will probably be exhausted by Christmas.'
Mountrath district:	'will maintain the poor for three or four months.'

The distress of the progressively pauperised small farmer and labourer in late 1879 was worsened by the scarcity of their fuel, which was caused by the wet weather. In October 1879 the constabulary reports commonly stated that 'not half the usual quantity' of turf was saved, and 'that of inferior quality'.² Wood was generally unavailable. For most, coal was not a viable alternative: there were no grates in most poor farmers' and cottiers' houses, which were not close to the few coal-mining areas, and even in the Castlecomer Plateau area (encompassing west Carlow, north Kilkenny and south-east Queen's County) farmers and labourers could not afford enough readily available and cheap (in Callan 'never cheaper') coal or culm.³

1. T.W. Grimshaw, *Special report on agricultural produce and fuel supply in Ireland, as ascertained by inquiries made in October 1879*, p.35.

2. Ibid., pp 31-57.

3. Ibid., p.32.

2 Landlord and Tenant Relations in Queen's County

An integral part of the myth about landlords in Queen's County, as propagated by tenant leaders, is that landlords were commonly absentee 'squeezing the last shilling from a starving people to squander in some foreign country'.¹ What was the nature of landownership in the county, and how absent were the landlords?

Table 1 following, based on a parliamentary return for 1876,² classifies 336 proprietors of one hundred acres or more according to the size of the estate they owned in the county. These 336 proprietors owned almost 98 per cent of the county.

Table 1 Proprietors of land of one hundred acres or more classified according to the size of their estate in Queen's County, 1876.

size of estate (in statute acres)	number of proprietors	percentage of total no. of proprietors	percentage of land in the county owned
100 - 499	175	52.1	10.0
500 - 999	74	22.0	12.3
1,000 - 4,999	75	22.3	37.0
5,000 +	12	3.6	38.4
total	336	100	97.7

The majority of the proprietors of estates in the county owned less than 500 acres. However, it is notable that there was a broad stratum of 149 proprietors of middle-sized estates ranging in size from 500 to

1. Fr Matthew Keefe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, in his letter read to the Knockaroe meeting held on 22 Feb. 80 (*L.E.*, 28 Feb. 80; cf. below, p. 93). Fr Keefe also wrongly asserted that such absentee landlords were 'most of the ten thousand' Irish landlords.

2. *Return of owners of land*, [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81. [20 April 1876].

4,999 acres: the average size of the estate owned by these proprietors was 1,405 acres. The largest estate in the county was Sir Charles Coote's 47,452 acres centred on Ballyfin House. The twelve landlords owning the largest estates (in acreage) owned 163,123 acres or more than 38 per cent of the area of the county, and the total valuation of their property was £80,484 or more than 31 per cent of the land valuation for the county as a whole. There was a wide range in the relative valuation of the estates in the county: for example, of the twelve largest estates, Sir Capel Molyneux's 5,464 acres in the north of the Slieve Bloom mountains was valued at £952.10d.0d. (about 3s.6d. per acre) while Robert A.G. Cosby's 10,110-acre estate centred on Stradbally, was valued at £6,738.5s.0d. (about 13s.4d. per acre).¹

How widespread was absenteeism among landlords? If one defines absentee as resident outside Ireland, then the great majority of Irish landlords were not absentee. Appendix 13 (below, p.419) drawn from an 1870 parliamentary return giving the most accurate data available on the residences of landowners of one hundred acres or more in Ireland, shows 12.6 per cent of such landowners in the county resided outside Ireland, and these owned 24.1 per cent of the land in the county. (In Ireland as a whole, 13.3 per cent of such landowners resided outside the country.)² Such a narrow definition of absentee would have satisfied few tenant leaders. For example, Arthur O'Connor, the M.P.

1. *Return of owners of land*, op.cit.

2. *Return for the year 1870 of the number of landed proprietors in each county classified according to residence*, ..., H.C. 1872 (167), xlvii, 775-84.

for Queen's County, who was to gain a reputation for his potent use of statistics in parliamentary debates,' insisted at a well-attended public meeting in Maryborough on 17 October 1880 that, of the 'landlords of one hundred acres and upwards in Queen's County', only 135 'were not absentee'.² Clearly, O'Connor was referring to the 1870 parliamentary return (from which Appendix 13 is drawn) in which 135 landowners were classified as 'resident on or near the property'. If one accepts O'Connor's definition - and probably most tenants would have agreed with O'Connor - then absenteeism seems more serious: in Queen's County only 44.9 per cent of the landowners resided 'on or near' their property, and these owned 46.4 per cent of the land of the county.³

It would be incorrect to use absenteeism as a gauge of landlord-tenant relations. The structure of Victorian rural society ensured that most tenants had little direct contact with their landlords. The society of the big house was far removed from the tenant's cottage. Residence did not guarantee good relations, and absenteeism, especially if the management of an estate was left in the hands of a respected land agent, certainly did not imply the 'squeezing' of 'the last shilling' from tenants.

How much did the landlords squeeze the last shilling from or 'rack-rent' their tenants? In his seminal study of rents on fifty-six estates Vaughan convincingly demonstrated the inaccuracy of describing

1. Cf. below, p.407.

2. *L.E.*, 23 Oct.80.

3. *Return for the year 1870 of the number of landed proprietors in each county classified according to residence*,..., H.C. 1872 (167), xlvii, 775-84.

landlords as a whole as rack-renting.' Between 1851 and 1876, when the value of agricultural output increased steadily in Ireland, Vaughan calculated that the tenant's share of agricultural output increased by 11 per cent while the landlords' share fell by 11 per cent: the tenants' gross income increased by 56 per cent while the landlords' rental income increased on average by 20 per cent.² If rack-rent is taken as rent stretched to the utmost annual value of the land, then clearly landlords did not commonly rack-rent, for they took less from the tenants in rent than they were capable of paying.

Evidence on rent in Queen's County obtained by the author corroborates Vaughan's thesis. First, obvious deductions may be drawn from a sample of general comments made by discriminating public speakers when the land war was in its embryonic stage. Second, Appendix 14 (below, p. 420) offers statistical evidence on the movement of rents on six estates in the county.

Fr Thomas Nolan, the parish priest of Abbeyleix, and Fr Thomas O'Shea, the parish priest of Camross, well serve as examples of reasonable commentators on landlords. Because both priests were independent and veteran advocates of the rights of tenants their public assessments of named landlords ring true.

At the half-yearly meeting of the Queen's County Independent Club on 25 June 1879 the chairman, Fr Thomas Nolan, described his own landlord, Viscount De Vesci, as a 'very good, kind, humane-feeling man' who, he said, 'never rack-rented': having stated that he had

1, Vaughan, A study of landlord and tenant relations (Ph.D. thesis), pp 336-58,

2, Ibid., pp 138-9,

'great confidence in the landlords of Queen's County', Fr Nolan added, 'I know Lord Castletown, the marquis of Lansdowne, Lord Stanhope and all these leading men, and they are not tyrants, and do not deal tyrannically with their tenants.'¹ Sir Charles H. Coote, who owned the largest estate in the county (47,452 acres)², was the landlord most frequently commended on public platforms.³ For instance, in Mountrath on 14 November 1880 at a meeting to establish a land league branch, Fr Thomas O'Shea said:

I am not here to speak against landlords as a whole, particularly in this town. I have not come here to speak against just and fair rents. I would sooner abandon the question for ever than speak against just and fair rents in the town of which Sir Charles Coote is the landlord, (cheers) If the landlords everywhere were like him, you would not have any need for a tenant league.⁴

Until 1881 there were no legal obstacles on landlords raising rents on the expiry of terms of tenancy. However, landlords seemed to overlook the increasing value of agricultural output preferring to leave rents unchanged, often for long periods. On the six estates in Appendix 14 (below, p.420) it is notable that rents fell significantly behind the growth in tenants' gross agricultural income. Even on the Cosby estate, which of the six estates had the largest rent increase, rent on the estate as a whole increased by only 3.2 per cent in the years 1871-6 while the average annual gross agricultural income in the county increased by 7.5 per cent.

1. *L.E.*, 23 Oct. 80.

2. *Return of owners of land*, ..., [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 April 1876].

3. Cf. below, p. 277.

4. *L.E.*, 20 Nov. 80.

It is likely that the adjectives 'good' and 'bad' - commonly used by tenants to describe their landlords - partly reflected tenants' perception of their share of agricultural income compared to a landlord's share received in rent. It is reasonable to concur with Patrick Cahill's general estimate of landlords in Queen's County before the land war. Cahill, who as editor of the *Leinster Leader* from 1881 was distinctly unsympathetic towards landlords, was one of the principal speakers on 2 November 1879 at a meeting of tenants in Raheen to advocate the remission of rents. Citing the earl of Portarlington (owner of 11,110 acres in the county)' as an example of a 'good' landlord, Cahill said, 'We have no quarrel with the good landlords: in the Queen's County...you could count the bad ones on the fingers of one hand.'²

However, while Cahill's broad picture might, if all the Queen's County estate rentals were available, bear close scrutiny, rents - even those on the estates of 'good' landlords - gave cause for legitimate complaint. Rents absorbed a large proportion of tenants' agricultural output.³ But, the burden of rent was distributed differently among tenants on neighbouring estates, and even on the same estate. For example, it is likely that the tenants on the Cosby

1. *Return of owners of land...*, op.cit.

2. *L.E.*, 8 Nov. 79.

3. Estimates of the proportion vary. For example, James F.V. Fitzgerald estimated in 1881 that 'in tillage lands' the rent was 'about two-fifths of the returns or profits, after allowing for the cost of production' (James F.V. Fitzgerald, *A practical guide to the valuation of rent in Ireland* (Dublin, 1881), p.19); Professor L.M. Cullen in his *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972), p.138, wrote: 'rent can only have absorbed 30 per cent of post-Famine net farm income.'

estate, which was much disturbed during the land war, resented their rents increasing more than those of the tenants on the neighbouring Lansdowne and Walsh estates.¹ The tenants on the two main parts of the Cosby estate had their rents increased at different rates: the tenants in the Timahoe area, where much drainage had been carried out in the 1860s and early 1870s, had their rents increased by 43 per cent in the period 1865-79, while, at the same time, their fellow tenants in the Stradbally area had their rents increased by 20 per cent.² It is likely that the rental on Lord Castletown's estate also was an example of unevenness in the burden of rents on tenants on the same estate: in May 1881 Lord Castletown, who owned 22,241 acres in Queen's County,³ was criticised by the Aghaboe parish priest, Fr Matthew Keeffe, because the tenants on the small Coolderry townland (two miles north of Durrow) on his estate paid disproportionately higher rents than the tenants on the rest of his estate.⁴

On the evidence noted above, it is reasonable to conclude that, while there seemed to be an unevenness in the burden of rents on tenants, the great majority of tenants were not rack-rented: their income from their holdings generally increased at a faster rate than landlords' income from rents.

If landlords in Queen's County did not rack-rent, did they invest in their tenants' holdings? More than two-thirds of the tenant farmers in the county had holdings of less than thirty acres,⁵ and

1. Appendix 14, below, p.420.

2. Cosby papers: rentals 1865-79.

3. *Return of owners of land*, ..., op.cit.

4. Fr Matthew Keeffe to editor, *L.L.*, 14 May 81.

5. Appendix 10, below, p.417.

these had little capital except their stock and buildings. Any substantial capital investment in their holdings would have to come from landlords. But, with the multiplicity of small holdings, investment in the improvement of such holdings on a grand scale did not make economic sense. Some investment in arterial drainage - beyond the pockets of most tenants - was undertaken through loans from the Board of Public Works,¹ but expenditure on tenants' buildings was very limited.

Because the Board of Public Works would not advance loans to landlords to build on farms rented at less than £50 per annum, building expenses usually had to be raised by either the tenant or the landlord. It is likely that, for the most part, such building expenses were borne by the tenants themselves. This probably gave tenants an increased sense of proprietorship in their holdings, and heightened their sense of indignation over threatened or executed evictions. Such perceived neglect of tenants by their landlords allowed tenant leaders to arouse anti-landlord feelings: for example, part of Richard Lalor's justification for his description of the eviction of Malachy Kelly in February 1880 by Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes as 'most cruel and unjust' was that Kelly had had to thatch his dwelling house and build an out-house at his own expense because Borrowes had not 'kept a promise' to provide slates and timber.²

1. Two examples illustrate this: (1) Lord Lansdowne spent £7,000 on his estate in Luggacurren in the years 1862-80 (statement made by John T. Trench, the estate agent, in *Report of her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the acts amending the same*, vol. iii; *Minutes of evidence, part II* [C2779-11], H.C. 1881, xix, 454.) (2) Captain Cosby won Royal Agricultural Society prizes for his drainage in the 1870s (*The Irish Builder*, vol. xiv (1872), p.189; *ibid.*, vol. xix (1877), p.211).

2. Richard Lalor's speech to the meeting in Knockaroe on 22 Feb. 80 (*L.E.*, 28 Feb. 80); cf. below, pp 90-5.

Simple arithmetical calculations could easily dissuade landlords from investing in their tenants' holdings. For example, if in 1873 Captain Cosby had built each of his tenants a small piggery of the type he had constructed behind a pair of concrete cottages in Stradbally - costing £5.6s.6d. each in 1873¹ - he would have expended more than a third of his gross income from rents:² the same money invested in government stock probably would have earned Captain Cosby, without any risk or effort, at least as much income as he might have earned from possible extra rents.

While building of architectural merit was undertaken by some landlords after the Great Famine - good examples still surviving in Queen's County in 1990 are houses in Abbeyleix built by Viscount De Vesci, houses in Luggacurren built by Lord Lansdowne, and 'cottages' in Stradbally built by Captain Cosby - this building was mainly for estate employees. Also, as may be deduced from a comment in *The Irish Builder* on the apathy of landlords in competing for prizes offered by the Royal Agricultural Society for 'drainage and cottages' in 1875-6, building in even this category decreased in the 1870s. *The Irish Builder* stated on 15 July 1877:

That an apathy does exist is apparent from Captain Cosby's being the only cottages entered for the province of Leinster. We believe that Captain Cosby was awarded a prize or prizes at the previous year's competition, so he seems to have the field and the prizes all in his own hands.³

Reports in *The Irish Builder* and *The Farmers' Gazette* suggest that while landlords did invest in agriculture they did so mainly in their

1. Cosby papers: unsorted expense accounts.
2. Ibid., rental 1873.
3. *The Irish Builder*, vol. xix (15 July 1877), p.211.

own demesnes. A model of the Adair farm at Bellegrove (near Ballybrittas) was exhibited in the agricultural museum of the Royal Dublin Society in the 1850s and the 1860s.¹ Sir Hunt Walsh invested extensively in breeding sheep at Ballykilcavan near Stradbally.² The farm buildings in Sir Charles Coote's demesne in Ballyfin were 'a very fine example of the way Victorian agriculture at its best achieved the maximum utilisation of local resources of energy and materials.'³ William Young developed strains of turnip seed, experimented with mangels, potatoes, hedging and fruit plants, and was a successful breeder of Hampshire Down sheep on his 821 acres in Brockley Park near Stradbally.⁴ Reports in the *Leinster Express* of landlords sponsoring prizes and exhibiting in the annual shows of the Queen's County Agricultural Society and the Upper Ossory Farming Society also indicate landlords' interest and investment in agriculture. However, it is probable that the majority of tenants were little affected by such interest and investment by landlords.

Calculations by Ó Gráda suggest that, on average, landlords spent between 3 and 4 per cent of their gross rental on 'improvements'.⁵ For Queen's County (as for all the other Irish counties) a comprehensive and exact account of landlord investment is impossible because of limited estate records - the most reliable guide to landlord investment. Nevertheless, it has been possible to estimate

1. *The Farmers' Gazette*, 17 Sept. 53, 29 Apr. 55, 18 Feb. 65.

2. *Ibid.*, 18 Feb. 65.

3. John Feehan, *Laois, an environmental history*, p. 276; *The Dublin Builder*, 15 July 61, pp 575-6

4. *L.E.*, 5 Mar. 81; *The Farmers' Gazette*, 23 Aug. 90.

5. Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The investment behaviour of Irish landlords 1850-1875' in *Agricultural History Review*, 23, pt. ii (1975). Samuel Clark also cites this source in *Social origins of the Irish Land war*, p. 161.

the investment on the estate of Lord Castletown, one of the largest landlords in the county.

In the years 1840-80, according to Matthew Franks, his estate agent, Lord Castletown spent over £21,206 on 'buildings, draining and other improvements' for the 'improvement of tenants' holdings' on his 22,241 acre estate. The annual rental on his estate in 1880 was almost £16,967. Though the rental books of Castletown's estate are missing, nonetheless, it is possible, on the basis of the two sums given, to reach some conclusion about his investment in his tenants' holdings. If one assumes that Castletown's rents increased 20 per cent in the years 1840-80 (probably a generous increase as his rents in 1881, except for those on a small townland, were considered by Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, as 'moderate, some under the government valuation')) then his annual rental in 1840 was about £14,139. Even considering the Great Famine and possible difficulties in collecting rents in the early 1860s and the late 1870s, because no rental increase is allowed, a simple multiplication of the 1840 rent by forty-one equalling £579,699 probably greatly underestimates Castletown's gross income from his rents in the years 1840-80. On the basis of even these figures, Castletown invested a miserly 3.7 per cent of his gross income from rents in improving his tenants' holdings. It must be stated, however, that Castletown's capacity for expenditure was severely restricted because his estate was heavily mortgaged (in 1880 he paid £1,960 - almost 12 per cent of his gross income from rent - to the Representative Church Body), his account in

1. Fr Keeffe to the editor, *L.L.*, 14 May 81.

the Munster Bank was overdrawn, and he paid considerable allowances to relatives.¹

No matter how well-intentioned, landlords in Queen's County did not and, from an economic point-of-view, could not invest in the majority of their tenants' holdings. It is likely that Captain Cosby's concluding statement to the Cowper commission on 10 December 1886 expressed sentiments felt by many landlords: he said, 'On my rental there are five hundred names on 11,000 acres, and how is it possible for them to live? The small holdings are the curse of the country.'²

If the preponderance of landlords in Queen's County were not absent abroad, did not rack-rent, and though they invested little in their estates, how tyrannical were they in exercising their right to evict their tenants?

Even though the land act of 1870 made the management of estates more difficult for landlords - especially by its legal recognition of a tenant's interest in his holding by entitling him, if evicted, to claim compensation for disturbance and for his improvements - enormous legal power over the mass of tenants was still retained by landlords before the land war: despite financial constraints and legal formalities, the 'landlord retained his legal right to evict as he pleased' those tenants unprotected by leases.³ The great majority of Irish farmers were tenants from year to year, and hence particularly vulnerable to eviction: in Queen's County in 1870 10,180

1, Franks to Castletown, July 81 to Mar, 82 (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MSS 13752(9-12)).

2, *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881, and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, vol.ii; Minutes of evidence and appendices* [C4969'], H.C. 1887, xxvi, 865.

3, Moody, *Davitt*, pp 118-19; Richey, *The Irish land laws*, ch. IX.

agricultural holdings or 78.1 per cent of the total holdings were held by yearly tenants, while 2,572 or 19.7 per cent of the total were in the hands of leaseholders.' (The percentages for Queen's County were similar to the percentages for the country as a whole.)² For those tenants whose tenure was legally insecure eviction was a grim possibility. Families had little option but to emigrate or go into the local workhouse.

In a well-argued pamphlet published in November 1880 the Irish Land Committee criticised tenant leaders for maligning Irish landlords.³ In their attempt to prove that the right to evict had been 'unfairly or capriciously exercised in Ireland', tenant leaders had, according to the pamphlet, gone back 'behind the act of 1860' to the 'years of the Great Famine'. To illustrate the point, the Land Committee cited John Dillon's address on an unspecified date to a land league gathering in Clonmel in which he 'was compelled to ask the meeting to consider landlordism, not by what it was doing, but by what it did to the Irish people in times gone by'. The pamphlet concluded its judgement of 'maligning' tenant leaders with, 'it is not with times gone by we are dealing - we are dealing with the present.'

Official statistics supported the Irish Land Committee. For any part of Ireland a contrast could be drawn between 'the present' and 1849-53 - the years of the great clearances. For example, in Queen's County in the five years, 1849-53, 1,118 families (5,669 persons) were evicted without readmission; this is almost three times the total for

1, Appendix II, below, p.418.

2, Ibid.

3, Irish Land Committee, *The land question, Ireland: confiscation or contract*, pp 20-1.

the following twenty-five years, 1854-78, when 387 families (1,909 persons) were evicted without readmission.¹

Because eviction with its forbidding implications was such a potent threat to tenants, its frequency could be considered a measure of the tyranny of landlords. Even a cursory inspection of official eviction returns suggests that landlords were unwilling to evict: in Queen's County in the ten years 1869-78, a net total of 58 families were evicted (62 families were evicted but 4 were readmitted) or an average of 1 for every 1,769 holdings.² Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the willingness of landlords to use the threat of eviction as an instrument of estate management, especially for the collection of rents, must have tormented some tenants. In the four years 1877-80, the number of civil-bill ejectment decrees granted by the courts in Queen's County was more than seven times the number of families evicted without readmission: for all Ireland, during the same four years, civil-bill ejectment decrees granted totalled almost five times the number of families evicted without readmission.³

The actions of two land agents in Queen's County illustrate how the threat of eviction was used to aid the management of estates. Thomas W. Webber, land agent to Captain Robert A.G. Cosby, wrote at the end of his rental report for 1877: 'On the Stradbally estate alone over forty ejectments for non-payment of rent have been served at the March sessions, and decrees have been given... It is expected that the money will be paid in most cases or the land re-let by consent.' Also,

1. Appendix 18, below, p. 422.

2. Ibid.

3. *Return of civil bill ejectments...* for each year 1877, 1878 and 1879..., H.C. 1880, lx, 379-87; - for 1880, H.C. 1881, lxxvii, 686-9.

Webber's report for the following year included the statement, 'The April sessions of 1878 were memorable for the estate as having produced nearly fifty ejectments. The money was all paid up except in a few cases.'

The second land agent noted was Alexander Kirkpatrick whose relationship with the earl of Portarlington and his tenants reminded Fr John Phelan, the parish priest of Emo, on 31 May 1881, of the tale of the two sea-monsters Charybdis and Scylla in the straits of Messina because Kirkpatrick had 'had a difficult task to steer clear of the dangerous rocks on either side of him, but he proved equal to it', and had 'brought them through it successfully'.² When Kirkpatrick testified before the Bessborough commission on 9 September 1880 he was asked if he had had any civil-bill ejectments for the non-payment of rent served on tenants 'within the last three years'. He replied that his 'practice' was that he gave tenants up to 1 December to pay the March rents 'there having been always a hanging half-year gale on the property'. Then, if the tenants did not pay the rents by the first Friday in December he sent their names to a solicitor 'to serve ejectment processes for the January sessions'. Kirkpatrick later added, 'in every case they came in...and paid up, and in no case did it proceed to going to the sheriff.'³

At a time of increasing agricultural income, tenants were more likely to resist eviction - even the threat of eviction, no matter how

1, Cosby papers; rentals for 1877 and 1878.

2, Fr Phelan's speech after a deputation had presented an address to the earl of Portarlington on 31 May 81 (*L.E.*, 4 June 81).

3, *Report of her majesty's commissioners...*, vol. ii: *Digest of evidence, minutes of evidence, part I* [C2779-1], H.C. 1881, xviii, 138-9.

familiar as a means of garnering rents. Tenants had more to lose. If agrarian outrages are in part considered as a response to eviction or a defence against possible eviction, then their frequency might also be considered as an indicator of landlord-tenant relations. Official statistics for the 1870s suggest that if there was serious hostility between landlords and tenants in Queen's County and its five neighbouring counties it did not express itself in crime. For example, even in 1878 and 1879 - two years of agricultural depression - a total of only 138 agrarian crimes (16.3 per cent of the total crimes reported by the constabulary) were reported in the six counties Queen's County, Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenney, King's County and Tipperary.¹

3 Prosperity and Credit in Queen's County.

It has been established so far that in the post-famine years before the land war of 1879-82 the increase in the value of agricultural output broadly outstripped increases in rents. By inference, the prosperity of most farmers increased.

A good indicator of standards of living is the quality of houses. Appendices 19 and 20 (below, p.423) show that there was a marked improvement in housing in Queen's County before and after the land war. For example, in the decade 1871-81, when the total number of

¹, *Return of [agrarian] outrages reported to the Royal Irish Constabulary office from 1 January 1844 to 31 December 1880* [C2756], H.C. 1881, lxxvii, 887-914, (8 Jan.81).

houses in the county decreased by 1,308, the total number of first and second-class houses increased by 299: at the same time, while the total number of families living in the county decreased by 1,689, the number of families living in fourth-class houses decreased by 1,841, and families living in first and second-class houses increased by 383.

The increase in savings before 1879 also betokened increased prosperity. Bank deposits, described by Cullen as 'a sensitive barometer of prosperity in countryside and rural towns',¹ rose consistently and rapidly from 1863 to 1876: in 1863, almost £13 millions were in bank deposits: by 1876, this sum had increased to almost £33 millions.² Also, in the years after the famine, there was an increase in savings in post offices where small-holders were more likely to save.³ However, any assertion of a correlation between rising rural prosperity and increasing post office savings must be treated with caution for the following reasons: (1) the sum on deposit in post offices tended to increase annually even in years of depression; (2) increasing education⁴ probably led to de-hoarding; (3) receipt of emigrants' remittances led to a greater familiarity

1. L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*, p.150. Philip Ollerenshaw in *Banking in nineteenth-century Ireland*, pp 115-20, objects to Cullen's description for the following reasons: (1) Aggregate bank deposits cannot show the spatial impact of any depression, or the relative response of urban and rural accounts to agricultural depression, (2) Aggregate bank deposits are 'likely to exhibit an upward bias' because the increase in the number of bank branches in the 1870s led to dehoarding, (3) In the late 1870s, deposits were withdrawn from Irish joint-stock banks, and invested elsewhere.

While conceding that there are reasons for objecting to Cullen's use of the adjective sensitive, the author maintains that bank deposits must respond to, and broadly indicate changes in the 'prosperity in countryside and rural towns'. Also, despite his objections, even Ollerenshaw admits 'Cullen's term contains some truth' (*ibid.*, p.118).

2. D.B. King, *The Irish question*, p.279.

3. Appendix 21, below, p. 424.

4. Appendices 24 and 25, below, p.427.

with post offices; (4) post office savers were disproportionately urban-dwellers (71 per cent of the total number of accounts in the fifteen post offices in Queen's County were in the post offices in five towns: Abbeylaxey, Mountrath, Maryborough, Mountmellick and Portarlinton.)¹; (5) sums on deposit, usually small, varied considerably in size from post office to post office. (In 1882, the average sum per savings account in Clonaslee was less than £4, while in Borris-in-Ossory the average was more than £38.)²

A feature of post-famine Irish towns was their response to the growing rural prosperity. At a time of decreasing population, the towns fared better than the countryside. For example, between 1851 and 1881 the population of Queen's County as a whole decreased by 34.5 per cent, but the population changes in the four largest towns were as follows: Mountrath 10.3 per cent decrease, Portarlinton 13.7 per cent decrease, Mountmellick 14.5 per cent decrease, and Maryborough 38.2 per cent per cent increase.³ Then, while prosperity in the rural areas increased, there was a significant increase in the number of shops supplying the demand for more goods. Table 2, following, indicates the growth in the number of shops in the four main towns in Queen's County 1856-81.⁴

1. Appendix 21, below, p.424.

2. Appendix 22, below, p.425.

3. W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1831-1971*, pp 30-1. The figures are complicated because in 1851 the inmates of public institutions were not included in the town populations. Also, in 1851 the area of Maryborough was considered as 300 acres, and 504 acres in 1881; the area of Mountmellick was 221 acres in 1851, and 560 acres in 1881; at the same time, the boundaries of Mountrath and Portarlinton remained unchanged (ibid.). However, these complications do not invalidate the broad conclusion.

4. *Slater's Directory*, 1856 and 1881.

Table 2 Combined numbers of retail traders in Mountrath, Portarlington, Maryborough and Mountmellick in 1856 and 1881.

category of retail trade	number in 1856	number in 1881
bakers	24	26
boot & shoemakers	20	34
butchers	11	12
grocers/shopkeepers/tea & spirit dealers	57	119
linen & woollen drapers/haberdashers	32	38
proprietors of public houses/inns	54	81
total	198	310

When the assistant commissioners of the royal commission on agriculture travelled 'through several counties in each of the four provinces of Ireland' between September 1880 and January 1881, they were told 'tales' by 'small farmers as to their indebtedness, which seemed so incredible' that they 'took the trouble' wherever they could to verify them by referring to the books of shopkeepers. 'In a few instances' (not in Queen's County) they 'found' that farmers understated the sums they owed, and in no case were they able to detect wilful exaggeration.'

It has been possible for the author to inspect some account books relating to one retail business in Queen's County for the period 1872-82. While the account books are in a poor condition, incomplete and often illegible, it is possible to draw reasonable conclusions about one rural shop, and by implication other rural shops and shops in the small towns in the county which were dependant on rural customers.

1 Royal commission on the depressed condition of the agricultural interest; assistant commissioners' reports [C2951], H.C. 1881, xvi, 841-8.

The account books relate to the business of Matthew Dunne in Ballyfin.¹ Though it is likely that farmers in the Ballyfin district did much of their shopping in Mountrath, Mountmellick or Maryborough (each of these towns is about five miles from Ballyfin) nonetheless, Dunne ran a profitable business.² Along with farming, running an agency for butter, manures and seeds, he owned a shop and a bakery.

Dunne charged no interest when routine retail business was involved and where cash payments for goods were regular or where credit requirements were either for small sums or for periods not much more than a month: he also charged no interest to customers who paid part of their bills doing jobs for him such as turf-cutting, 'stubbling' fields, and cleaning drains. Customers who owed money for more than a month were charged between 5 and 7.75 per cent³ - probably depending on Dunne's perception of their credit-worthiness.

An important element of Dunne's income came from the interest he charged on small farmers' bills. From 29 October 1880 to 14 March 1881 seventeen customers paid £5.19s.10d in such interest charges⁴ - almost equal to the £6 rent per annum paid by John Delaney for six acres in the nearby townland of Rosskelton.⁵ Based on four account book entries, where the time element is specified, it would seem that the rate of interest he charged was about 10.5 per cent per annum.⁶

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Matthew Dunne's business was

1. Dunne papers, in the possession of Michael and Miriam Mooney, Ballyfin Post Office, County Laois.

2. Appendix 23, below, p.426.

3. Dunne papers: account books, 1872-9.

4. Ibid., account books, Oct.80 - Mar.81.

5. Membership list of 'Raheen National Land League', p.18 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

6. Dunne papers (op. cit.): account books, 1876-9.

his willingness to give credit. On 30 January 1877, Dunne calculated that with £14 worth of 'flour on hands' and £50 worth of stock in his shop, he was owed £562: at the same time, his liabilities came to £683.¹ A comparison with the £434 arrears of rent owed by tenants on Captain Cosby's 10,110 acre estate at the same time puts Dunne's figures in perspective.² Unfortunately, because Dunne's account books for 1876 are missing, it is not possible to verify his figures, but because they were based on his own calculations, and for his own information, they are likely to be reasonably accurate. It is reasonable to assume that the credit given by Dunne was of a magnitude which supports the assistant commissioners' statements quoted above.³

Such levels of credit, probably sustainable only during years of growing rural prosperity, must have been a perpetual worry to shopkeepers. For many, ruin must have seemed close-at-hand, and hence they were willing to use the civil-bill courts to force customers to pay long overdue debts. The *Leinster Express* in its editorial on 17 February 1877 reported: 'from many quarters we hear complaints of delays, inconveniences and expenses attending the recovery of small debts in Ireland': according to the newspaper, the 'delays' were because the civil-bill courts sat only every three months, the 'inconveniences' were to many creditors who found the towns where the courts sat 'remote', and the 'expenses' were incurred by the creditors who were not adequately compensated for the cost of travelling to court with their assistants and account books.

1. Dunne papers: unpaginated agent's stock account and day book.

2. Cosby papers: rental, 1876.

3. Above, p. 27.

In spite of such impediments, as the recession deepened in the late 1870s there was a significant increase in the number of civil-bill suits entered and lodged in courts throughout Ireland: excluding ejectments, the total number of civil-bill suits lodged in the country in 1879 was 39 per cent more than the total for 1876, while in Queen's County the total for 1877 alone was more than 39 per cent higher than the total for 1876. In the triennial period 1877-9, 396,887 civil-bill suits were entered and lodged in courts in Ireland as a whole, and of these only 23,054 (less than 6 per cent) were ejectments, while 207,435 (52 per cent) resulted in decrees for the plaintiff for sums of '£20 and under': at the same time, 6,223 civil-bill suits were lodged and entered in the courts in Queen's County, and of these only 407 (less than 7 per cent) were ejectments, while 3,419 (55 per cent) resulted in decrees for the plaintiff for sums of '£20 and under'.

With customers able to buy less, and credit given at inflated levels, many retailers must have teetered on the brink of collapse. Probably no one was immune from being sued by shopkeepers. Certainly a clergyman's collar was no protection for John H.C. Whitestone, the Church of Ireland curate in Durrow, Queen's County. On 12 March 1880, Whitestone wrote to Peter Mac Mahon, a Kilkenny solicitor, 'in the course of ten days or a fortnight, you or Mr P O'Flanagan [a Durrow draper] shall hear from me to your satisfaction. I regret extremely that he considered himself obliged to write to you for payment of my accounts.'² On 25 March 1880, having received another solicitor's

1, *Criminal and judicial statistics for Ireland*, [C1822], H.C. 1877, lxxxvi, table 87; [C2152], H.C. 1878, lxxix, table 87; [C2389], H.C. 1878-1879, lxxvi, table 87; [C2689], H.C. 1880, lxxvii, table 87.

2, Whitestone papers: letter book, p.6.

letter, Whitestone appealed directly to O'Flanagan:

I am very sorry that I cannot meet same [payment of his debts] at present, and promise you faithfully on my word as a gentleman that the first money I receive you will get part of it... I know it is hard for traders to be out of their monies at this time, but we are suffering as well as you... I hope you will trust to my honour, and not feel obliged to proceed further.¹

Then, on 30 March 1880, a relieved Whitestone answered O'Flanagan's 'courteous letter' with, 'I will give £8 or £10 on 10 July. I may possibly be able to realise a sum of money sooner so as to hand you some on account, and if so will gladly do so.'²

From evidence in his letter-book Whitestone had serious, though unspecified financial problems: on 8 May, he wrote to his brother of 'the unfortunate state' he was in 'with no end of writs etc. being threatened'. At least one shopkeeper other than O'Flanagan threatened Whitestone with a civil-bill action. On 17 April 1880 in a letter to a 'Mr Mc Quaide' of Kilkenny (probably a stationer), he wrote:

No one is more anxious to settle their [sic] accounts than I am, and having recourse to harsh measures cannot make me pay when cash is not quite convenient. I could understand your taking legal proceedings did I owe you £20 or £30, but when it is only £4 I must confess you are rather hard.³

How Whitestone resolved his financial problems is not known. Clearly, when one notes the official returns for civil-bill suits in Irish courts given above,⁴ he was only one among many taken to court for unpaid shop bills. Entries in Matthew Dunne's account books such as 'allowed out of old decree, £1' and 'cost of decree, 14s.0d.'

1. Whitestone papers: letter book, p.8.

2. Ibid., p.7.

3. Ibid., p.14.

4. Above, p.30.

suggest that, along with other shopkeepers, he, too, was willing to use the courts to make his customers pay their bills.

Along with shops, the other major source of credit in the midlands before the land war was the banks. Almost concurrent with the extension of the banking system (joint stock bank offices in Ireland increased from 197 in 1863 to 426 in 1877)¹ was a period of 'inflated credit which set in about the year 1866'.² According to Gilbert de L. Willis, secretary to the grand jury of County Kildare, this expansion of credit offered by banks was explained firstly by the extension of the banking system, and secondly by the replacement of 'old experienced and cautious officers - whose general policy discouraged rather than invited applications for advances from the farming classes' - by 'younger and less experienced' branch managers who 'were tempted to lend too freely' by (1) 'the competition for business which arose from the starting of rival banks in the same town', and because (2) until about 1877, 'the directors of most of the Irish banks allowed their managers an almost unlimited and very unsafe discretion both as to the extent of the advances made by them, and the nature and value of the security obtained in each case.' According to Willis, while this expansion of credit 'enabled many thrifty men to extend their business and increase their profits' it also 'tempted all classes to spend more than their income and to adopt a standard of living beyond their means and position in life'.³

The extent of farmers' indebtedness to banks is unknown. Willis estimated that about half of the occupiers of land in Ireland were

1. Paper submitted by Willis to the Cowper commission, [C4969], H.C. 1887, xxvi, 976-7.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

'beyond all doubt, more or less heavily in debt'.' (It is probable that, because banks preferred short-term loans, and since administrative costs were proportionately higher on small loans, only the larger farmers were able to obtain credit facilities from the banks.) After the bad harvest of 1877 the banks became seriously alarmed for the first time. The directors of the Munster Bank (there was a branch in Rathdowney and Mountrath) instructed their managers that, while they should exercise 'no undue pressure' in exacting payment of existing advances, they were neither 'to allow their clients to increase their liabilities' nor to 'make new advances to any important extent' during 1878 without 'special leave' from the board of directors in each case.² Most banks adopted a similar policy,³ and then - as the economic crisis deepened and deposits in the joint stock banks decreased by more than 10 per cent (from £32.8 millions in 1876 to £29.4 millions in 1880)⁴ after consistently rising since 1863⁵ - 'By the middle of 1879, the banks were practically in line with individual creditors' in demanding that their debtors pay their liabilities.⁶

Some indication of how the banks' credit freeze affected tenants may be gleaned from the anecdote related by George A.M. Pellew in *In castle and cabin, or talks in Ireland in 1887*. Pellew wrote of an

1. Paper by Willis (op.cit.).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid; Willis had 'reason to believe that most, if not all, the Irish banks' adopted a similar policy (ibid.).

4. D. B. King, *The Irish question*, p.279. While agreeing with Ollerenshaw that there are 'problems' with 'attempting to correlate the decline in deposits with agricultural depression' (Ollerenshaw, *Banking in nineteenth-century Ireland*, pp 115-20), nevertheless, the author maintains that bank deposits must have reacted to the economic crisis of the late 1870s (cf. above, p.25, n.1).

5. Ibid.

6. Paper by Willis (op.cit.), pp 976-7.

unidentified tenant farmer who, having claimed that he had been a 'manager of a country bank' for twelve years, stated:

This agricultural crisis would have come on long ago if it had not been for the action of the banks. I was dining with a landlord in 1879 who was boasting of how well his rents were paid; at that moment I knew that my bank had advanced money to practically all his tenants. At last the banks suddenly stopped giving the farmers credit, and that helped to bring on the crisis.¹

Thomas W. Webber in his agent's reports offers reliable insight into the role played by bank credit in the rental on Captain Cosby's estate in Queen's County during the three years 1877-9. There is no reason to suggest that the banks behaved differently towards tenants on other estates, at least in Queen's County. Webber wrote for the year ending 1 January 1878, 'the banks have advanced much to the tenants at a high rate of interest, and next year's produce is in many cases forestalled.'² Then, for the year ending 1 January 1879, Webber's report stated that the banks, which were 'too numerous in the country',

became alarmed by failures in every quarter, and have come down on the farmers in every case for payment of last year's advances, and are now more cautious, and rightly so, of lending more money except on the most tangible security. Thus, many tenants who paid their rents last year by borrowing from the banks have been unable to pay this year, and the arrears list is the largest shown for many years on the estate.³

Webber's final reference to banks in his reports was a summary: 'This year [1879] the banks refuse to advance money to tenants, and the arrears are large in consequence.'⁴

A social grouping whose living conditions tended to be neglected by

1. Pellew, *In castle and cabin*, p. 44.

2. Cosby papers.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

tenant leaders was the agricultural labourers.¹ This class, reduced by the Great Famine and emigration, still constituted a large part of the rural population before the land war: in 1871 Queen's County had an average of about 137 labourers for every 100 occupiers of land above one acre.²

Before the agricultural depression of the late 1870s, there had been some improvement in the quality of most labourers' lives. Their wages had improved. In the years 1850-74 on the Ballykilcavan estate near Stradbally, the daily wages of men increased from 10d to 1s.8d. (an increase of 100 per cent), and the wages of female labourers increased from 4d to 10d (an increase of 150 per cent).³ As wage increases outpaced the prices of basic food, the diet of most labourers and their families improved: though the potato was still the essential ingredient, there was increasing consumption of coarse wheat bread made from inferior flour, 'stirabout' made from sour milk, and Indian meal.⁴

However, one has to be cautious about making broad generalisations about the quality of the lives of labourers before the land war. The economic position of an individual agricultural labourer depended on gender, the skill and responsibility of the farm work, whether bound or casual, whether stock or field worker, the number of children, and the generosity of employers. One-seventh of the labourers in Queen's

1. Cf. below, p.298, n.1.

2. *Census of Ireland for the year 1871*, pt.i, *Leinster*, H.C. 1872, lxvii, 818-27; *Agricultural statistics of Ireland for the year 1877* [C1938], H.C. 1878, lxxvii, 64.

3. Appendices 26 and 27, below, p.428.

4. Donnelly, *Land and the people*, p.245-6. Indian meal and flour were important sales items for Matthew Dunne in Ballyfin (Appendix 23, p.426).

County were women, and they were commonly paid about half as much as men for unskilled work such as weeding and picking potatoes;¹ even if paid the same wage as a bound worker, the casual labourer was usually laid off during the winter months; stockmen were paid more than field workers (in Ballykilcavan in 1849, when the senior ploughman was earning 10d per day, a herd was employed at 12s per week - out of which he paid an assistant - and was given 'a house, grass and hay for a cow, a quarter acre for potatoes to find his own manure')²; the more mouths to feed on a low wage the less each received, and while a labourer might subsist with three children he could starve with more; finally, in a Victorian rural society where class consciousness prevailed, the agricultural labourer tended to receive harsher treatment from farmers than from landlords who, farther removed in status and usually richer, paid better and gave more perquisites.³

Though their living conditions had improved, the agricultural labourers continued to be the most depressed class in Queen's County. They were without any organisation or potent bargaining power, badly paid and housed, and still largely dependant on the potato. They were the hardest hit by the depression in the late 1870s.

1. Appendices 26 and 27, below, p. 428.

2. Walsh papers: statement inside the cover of an 1849 labourers wage-book.

3. For example, labourers on the Walsh estate in Ballykilcavan near Stradbally were treated generously: regularly, they were given dripping from meat roasted in the kitchen in Sir Allen Walsh's house - 51 lbs in 1869, 46 lbs in 1870, 107 lbs in 1871, 58.5 lbs in 1872 (Walsh papers: kitchen accounts 1869-88). At the same time, they were given the use of 'enough ground for potatoes', and were allowed to collect fallen branches from trees on the estate. According to John Clancy, a septuagenarian retired employee on the Walsh estate whose grandfather had worked for Sir Allen Walsh, the great advantage in working on an estate was that 'You were treated with respect', whereas 'if you worked for an ordinary farmer you could be treated worse than a horse' by being 'left out in the fields in all weathers' (information given by Peter Walsh-Kennis, Ballykilcavan, Stradbally, County Laois).

4 What Caused the Land War in Queen's County?

From the evidence in parts 1, 2 and 3 it is clear that the traditional picture of rural life in Queen's County before the land war of 1879-82, as painted by many land league leaders, was false. Instead of living 'permanently on the verge of starvation' the mass of the population of the county after the famine experienced a marked improvement in their standards-of-living. The value of agricultural output, literacy, savings, and standards of housing all increased significantly. If landlords invested little in their tenants' holdings, most were neither absentee nor tyrannical. Rack-renting on a large scale was mythical, evictions rare, and, though the use of process-serving as an aid to estate management may have been provocative, agrarian crime was negligible. Clearly, the county was not in a ferment of discontent ready to explode into a land war.

What follows is an explanation of the causes of the land war in Queen's County, which, though sparking intermittently in 1879 and 1880, did not ignite until 1881.

(1) The agricultural depression

While the Irish agricultural depression of the late 1870s was an essential element, it did not of itself account for the outbreak of the land war in Queen's County. The hardest hit were the small farmers and labourers. These two groups did not have the experience, social status or ability necessary to organise any cohesive action: they were, in any case, destitute and reliant on private charity, the

poor-law system and some government help simply to survive. Even when the good harvest of 1880 removed any threat of famine these two groups were generally no more than rank and file members of land league branches - contributing to noise and incident, but not leading. It is reasonable to suggest that any simple connection between orchestrated land league action and distress did not apply to the county in the late 1870s.

Also, though the bad harvests and low prices in the late 1870s reduced all farm incomes in the country, in Queen's County, which was so livestock oriented, the depression was not chronically disastrous. The value of the gross agricultural output in 1879 - the worst year of the depression - was only about 8 per cent less than the average for the decade 1871-80, and was higher than for any of the years 1883-92¹ when the convulsions of the land war were not repeated. Clearly, while the agricultural depression was important, additional explanations for the outbreak of the land war have to be given.

(2) 'A revolution of rising expectations'

James S. Donnelly in his *The Land and the People of nineteenth-century Cork* argued that the land war was 'a product not merely of agricultural crisis, but also of a revolution of rising expectations'.² In Donnelly's view, when the recession of the late 1870s broke an extended period of growing prosperity the people were

1. Appendix 3, below, p.413.

2. Donnelly, *Land and the People*, pp 250-2.

mobilised into revolution to prevent the erosion of their accumulated material gains. While the general rise in prosperity has been well demonstrated, Donnelly's argument has a fundamental difficulty. As Donnelly himself has indicated in his book, in the thirty years after the famine there were two depressions: along with the depression in the 1870s there was one of almost equal severity in the early 1860s. Why a land war should follow the depression in the 1870s and not the earlier depression is not explained by the difference in the periods of growing prosperity.¹

Notwithstanding this difficulty, if Richard Lalor's speech to the Queen's County Independent Club on 14 January 1880 is anything to go by, Donnelly's hypothesis has some merit in explaining the disposition of farmers in Queen's County. After listening to Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, and Fr Thomas O'Shea, the parish priest of Camross, speaking on 'landlordism', the 'land system', and the difficulty tenant farmers were having in paying their rents, Lalor said that he knew numbers of farmers in his own Raheen locality 'who were now pretty well-off, but who had had to go to school without shoes or stockings'.² Significantly, Lalor concluded with a belligerent 'Do the landlords want the farmers to go back to the old state of things? If they do, they will be disappointed!'³

1. This criticism is pinpointed by Vaughan in his pamphlet *Landlords and tenants in Ireland 1848-1904*, pp 31-3. (For the same criticism see Andrew W. Orridge, 'Who supported the Land War? An aggregate data analysis of Irish agrarian discontent, 1879-1882' in *The Economic and Social Review*, vol. xii, no. 3, April 1981, pp 214-5.)

2. *L.E.*, 17 Jan. 80.

3. *Ibid.*

(3) Landlords

As has been established already, landlords, in general, were much maligned by land league leaders in Queen's County. Yet it must be observed that the landlords themselves partly accounted for the land war. By their lack of investment in their tenants' holdings they were increasingly viewed by tenants as living luxurious lives divorced from and irrelevant to farming. Then as the recession of the 1870s ate into farmers' pockets, rents, taking an increasing proportion of farm incomes, came to be perceived as rack-rents. Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, probably reflected the image many tenants had of their landlords by the end of 1879. In a long letter published in the *Leinster Express* on 1 November 1879, Fr McGee, without giving any source, concluded by stating that tenants in the county

think the landlords might contrive to live on a little less than they expend. At present they draw out of this miserable country at least fifteen millions a year, and where it goes or how no one inquires. They are comparatively a very small class, yet within thirty years they have swept from us four hundred and fifty millions. They don't work. No one complains. They merely hunt a fox in winter, and go to balls, cattle shows and levees. All required of them is not to rack-rent or ruin the tenantry.

Queen's County landlords whose rents, for the most part, were lower than the 'potential rental capacity' of their land,¹ initially responded to the agricultural depression by either eviction or concession. Official records show a significant increase in evictions,² and probably there was an equally significant increase in

1. W.E. Vaughan, 'An assessment of the economic performance of Irish landlords, 1851-81', in F.S.L. Lyons and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds.), *Ireland Under the Union*, p.181.

2. Appendix 18, below, p.422.

the threats of eviction which were unrecorded officially. As Fr McGee admitted to a meeting of the Queen's County Independent Club on 25 June 1879, 'what makes the case worse in Queen's County is that the landlords, with some five or six exceptions, are poor themselves.' Such poor landlords allowed arrears of rent to accumulate or granted remissions of rent. (Of course, poor is a relative term, as such poor landlords' lives were opulent compared to those of most tenants.) Evictions and the threat of eviction intensified the insecurity of tenants. Concessions indicated landlord weakness. Both forms of response by landlords to the agricultural depression encouraged the tenants to join the land league, which was opposed to landlords remaining in existence at all,² and - ironically - helped to spawn and spread the land war in the county.

(4) Credit crisis

Associated with the 'rising expectations' hypothesis is the effect of the credit crisis in the late 1870s. As already stated, with the reduction of farmers' incomes, farmers' indebtedness increased. The larger tenants found themselves not only owing mounting arrears of rent to their landlords but were also in debt to banks, which refused to give them any more credit, which might help them through their difficulties. Shopkeepers were also in crisis: not only were they owed large sums by the mainly small farmers but they, in turn, were in

1, *L.E.*, 28 June 80.

2, Davitt, *Fall*, pp 161, 242.

debt to their own suppliers.

By the end of the 1870s the credit system, which had kept the farmers and the shopkeepers going, was paralysed. Any abatement of rents was clearly in their financial interests. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that mercenary opportunism motivated both groups to organise and direct land league branches in Queen's County.

(5) Emigration curtailment

Even after the heavy emigration years immediately after the Great Famine there was a constant flow of emigrants from Queen's County. During the years 1854-73 a yearly average of 1,096 persons emigrated.¹ Then the economic slump in America and England in the years 1873-9 reduced the employment opportunities in the two major destinations of Irish emigrants. Without giving her sources, Anna Parnell reported that 'in 1878 captains of Atlantic liners said there were as many emigrants going one way as the other.'² Bad harvests in Britain at the end of the 1870s curtailed even that source of seasonal employment. Emigration from Queen's County during 1874-9 fell to a yearly average of 513.³

How disturbed or frustrated - socially, sexually,⁴ or otherwise - were the young men precluded from emigrating is impossible to measure. Lee suggests that in Mayo by the end of 1879 there were 5,000 extra

1. Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish historical statistics*, p.288.

2. Anna Parnell, *The Land League: Tale of a Great Sham* (N.L.I., MS 12144), p.36.

3. Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish historical statistics*, op.cit.

4. Cf. below, pp. 364-5. The sexual frustration aspect of agrarian crime was noted by Donnelly in his *Land and the People*,... (op.cit.) pp 249-50.

young men - 'a pool of potential activists' - who were left with time on their hands.' Adopting a rough method Lee may have used, there may have been about 1,500 young men in Queen's County in 1879 who were precluded from emigrating.²

Without realising it, a self-described 'heavily taxed farmer', from Queen's County, in his letter to the editor of the *Leinster Express* on 9 February 1878, may have been noting evidence of a 'pool of potential activists'. He wrote: 'The neighbourhood of Rathdowney is infested with stout, able tramps well-fit for labour. If they do not get what they want they curse and abuse, and leave our gates open, and allow our cattle to go on the public road.'

In any case, it is likely that when tenants in the county were not getting what they wanted in 1881-2, such 'boys'³ - whether to release frustrations or not is impossible to state - were involved in the land war violence.⁴

(6) Leadership

The vague, unwritten coalition in 1878-9 of parliamentarians, tenant farmers and fenians known as the 'new departure', the foundation of the National Land league of Mayo on 16 August 1879, and the foundation of the Irish National Land League in Dublin on 21 October 1879, have

1. Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society*, p.66; Joseph Lee, 'The Land War', in Lian de Paor (ed.), *Milestones in Irish History*, p.110.

2. By setting the yearly averages for the years 1874-9 against the previous years' averages, and taking a reducing population into account. (Of course, assuming that a number of people would emigrate is fundamentally flawed; it is simple conjecture.)

3. Donnelly, *Land and the People*, p.249.

4. Cf. below, pp 364-5.

been expertly documented elsewhere' and need not be repeated here.

The necessary material and mental resources to mount cohesive agitation were available in Queen's County, but to marshal them required effective national and local leadership. As will be shown in the next chapter, national leaders, especially the two principal 'new departure' leaders, Parnell and Davitt, were vitally important in establishing the land league in the county: inspired by them, veteran cleric and lay tenant-right agitators combined with young and energetic shopkeepers, farmers and catholic curates to forge a widespread anti-landlord alliance.

While altruism and material self-interest were obvious, if different, motives for the actions of some local leaders, it is likely that the simple desire for power stimulated others. Though local power in the 1870s - control of boards of guardians, grand juries, the magistracy - remained in the hands of landlords, their influence was waning. When Richard Lalor and Arthur O'Connor were elected as the M.P.s for Queen's County in the general election in 1880, the greatest disadvantage of their defeated opponents was their landlord background. Town commissions, coronorship elections, and increasing membership of boards of guardians must have given some non-landlords a taste for power,² and, for them, identification with Parnell, Davitt

1. For the 'new departure, see Moody, *Davitt*, pp 250-58, 261-6, 325-6, 336-7; for the Land League of Mayo, see *ibid.* pp 317-20; for the foundation of the Irish National Land League, see *ibid.* pp 325, 334-7.

2. For the 'growing politicisation of the tenantry' in post-famine Ireland, and the 'increasing fervour' of their challenge after 1872 to the 'monopoly of power' held by the 'landowning elements' in boards of guardians in 'every part of the country', see William L. Feingold's Ph.D. thesis, 'The Irish boards of poor law guardians, 1872-86 : a revolution in local government', pp 64-113. Also, for the advance of Parnellism in 'local politics, 1879-1881' in Ireland see Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872-1886*, pp 91-122.

and the land league, and the consequent opportunities to influence events from public platforms and the committees of land league branches must have been seductive.

That there was distress, depression, debt and discontent in Queen's County at the end of the 1870s is incontrovertible. But conditions were not so extreme as to impel its tenant farmers into a widespread land war orchestrated by the land league. Farmers were and are instinctively independent, and therefore difficult to mobilise into any sort of collective action. That the land league was eventually established in the county, and a land war waged (even if mainly from the winter of 1880-1) were mainly due to the impressively effective and dominant leadership of Parnell and Davitt and their inspiration of local leaders.

II

MARRYING QUEEN'S COUNTY TO PARNELL AND THE LAND LEAGUE, 1877-81

Though Queen's County did not rush into the embrace of Parnell and the land league, by February 1881 a radical transformation had been effected in its parliamentary representation and the organisation of its tenants. All through the 1870s, the county was represented in parliament by Kenelm T. Digby and Edmund Dease - both home-rulers and members of Roman catholic landowning families: also, during the 1870s the mass of the tenants in the county had no formal organisation to represent their interests. By February 1881, there were twenty-four branches of the land league in the county and, after the success of Richard Lalor and Arthur O'Connor in the 1880 general election, the county's parliamentary voice was distinctly middle-class and identified, not with the landed interest, but with the land league. However, before the landlords and the government could be effectively engaged, the most pressing problem to be confronted in the county between the harvests of 1879 and 1880 was distress and its relief. It is noticeable that after the autumn of 1880, as privation receded in the county, there was a perceptible gathering of momentum in agrarian agitation and the formation of branches of the land league.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 investigates the distress and its relief in Queen's County, 1879-80. Part 2 traces the county's uneasy espousal of Parnellite representation, 1877-80. Part 3 describes how the land league was established in the county.

1 Distress and Its Relief in Queen's County, 1879-80

Since sources are fragmentary the product of investigation into distress and its relief in Queen's County must be tentative. It is impossible to be precise about the extent of distress. Reports of destitution - generally from clergy - have to be treated with caution because of likely special pleading and the fact that, as Fr Thomas Fenelon, the curate in Rosenallis, admitted, 'in their greatest need the people have a delicacy in telling even the priest the extent of their wants.'¹ Also troubling, though there are some records, is that the amount of charity given may be estimated only roughly because it was most commonly private and confidential.

Poverty is an idea intuitively clear but difficult to define except in terms of the degree to which needs (needs as a concept is also contentious) are satisfied. Pauperism seems easier to describe, and here is taken as a state in which a person has less than he needs to survive, and is prepared to go into a workhouse. That all classes - certainly in Queen's County - were poorer in consequence of the depression of the late 1870s has been established in chapter I.² However, reduction in means did not imply the same for all. For some there were social problems. Others became paupers when in 1879 the potato crop, producing an average of 2.1 tons per statute acre in the county, was a failure for the third year in succession:³ for these

1. Letter to Patrick Cahill, which he read to a meeting of the Queen's County Independent Club held on 25 June 79 (L.E., 28 June 79).

2. Above, pp 2-8.

3. Appendix 5, below, p. 414.

the problem was simple survival.

When Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, appealed to the Mansion House relief fund for help in March 1880, he supported his case by providing details of 'destitute and pitiable' people in Stradbally, Timahoe, Vicarstown, and their surrounding districts.¹ It is reasonable to believe his 'cases of absolute distress' typify those in the county threatened by famine between the harvests of 1879 and 1880. Appendix 28 (below, p.429) derived from Fr McGee's lists, suggests that those in need of relief were the habitually distressed, the broken small farmers, the unemployed tradesmen and labourers, and their dependants. All were or had become paupers.

After the failure of crops in 1879, calls on the government to institute emergency measures grew more insistent.² Particular emphasis was placed on the need for the government to provide employment by act of parliament.³ But the government was slow to recognise the seriousness of the Irish crisis, and though it had set up a commission on 14 August 1879 under the duke of Richmond its preliminary report - concluding that no emergency legislation was called for - was not produced until 14 January 1881.⁴ Disapproval of government inaction was expressed in the motion proposed by Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, to an approving Queen's County Independent Club on 24 January 1880:

1. Stradbally file, (Archives division, City Hall, Dublin, Records of the Mansion House Committee for the Relief of Distress in Ireland, 1880 (hereafter designated M.H.C. records) CH 1/52/750).

2. Minutes of meetings of Mountmellick board of guardians, from 20 Dec. 79 to 7 Feb. 80 (Laois County Library).

3. Motion proposed by Fr John McGee to a meeting of the independent club (L.E., 8 Nov. 79); resolution discussed at a meeting of the Athy board of guardians (ibid., 24 Jan. 80).

4. Moody, *Davitt*, p.355.

That from the manner in which the government is acting in reference to the famine from which the people of a large portion of Ireland are at present suffering, and which is extending every day, we hereby declare that the government is either incompetent to perform its functions or is wilfully negligent of its duties.¹

At the same meeting of the independent club, Fr Keeffe further denounced the government because 'they gave money freely enough to rectify the frontiers of Afghanistan or to slay the poor savages of Zululand, but they have no money to give the starving Irish people.'²

Averse to funding public works, the government relied chiefly on the poor law system to cope with the distress. People in increasing numbers, despite their innate unwillingness, were obliged to turn to the poor law unions for relief. Table 3, following, illustrates the growing demand in Queen's County for the services of the poor law unions.³ (Because more than 11 per cent of the county was within Athy poor law union its numbers relieved are combined with those of Abbeylax, Mountmellick and Donaghmore poor law unions.)

Table 3 Total numbers relieved in Abbeylax, Donaghmore, Mountmellick and Athy poor law unions in 1877 and 1880

year	average daily number of paupers in workhouses	number of persons relieved during year ending 29 Sept.		total
		indoor	outdoor	
1877	847	4,068	2,173	6,241
1880	1,071	7,812	3,109	10,921

Some extra assistance was provided by the government. In January 1880 terms to Irish landowners and sanitary authorities for borrowing

1. *L.E.*, 17 Jan. 80.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Thom's* 1879, p.663, and 1882, p.663.

from the board of works were improved.¹ This probably encouraged at least John George Adair² and Earl Stanhope³ to employ distressed tenants on their estates in Queen's County. In February 1880 boards of guardians received copies of the distressed tenants seed potatoes bill⁴ which, when enacted on 1 March 1880⁵ empowered guardians to borrow money without interest from the board of works for the purpose of supplying distressed tenants - to a maximum of £5 in value to each tenant - with seed potatoes at cost price either on credit or not as they saw fit.⁶ Also, in February 1880 the local government board circularised boards of guardians informing them that the prohibition of outdoor relief in the case of a man holding more than a quarter of an acre of land applied to the occupier himself; that if any of his family was 'permanently disabled from labour' the guardians could relieve either in or out of the workhouse; that the destitute wife and children of such a man might be relieved out of the workhouse.⁷ As a result, relieving officers were clearly more open-handed. It is significant that in the above four poor law unions the total number in receipt of outdoor relief for the year ending 29 September 1880 increased the following year from 3,109 to 6,836 or by almost 120 per cent.⁸ Then in March 1880 the government authorised the appropriation of £1,500,000 from the church disestablishment fund for loans to

1. Moody, *Davitt*, p.355; Donnelly, *Land and the people*, p. 261.

2. Adair to the editor (*L.E.*, 7 Feb. 80) stating that he employed tenants in distress on drainage works near Mountmellick.

3. Letter to the editor over the name K. Drury in the *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Mar. 80 referring to employment in the Ballinakill district.

4. Minute of meeting of Mountmellick board of guardians on 14 Feb. 80 (Laois County Library).

5. 1880 Seed Supply (Ireland) Act, 43 Vict., c.1, 1 Mar.

6. *L.E.*, 14 Feb. 80.

7. *Copy of circular of 7 February 1880*, ...H.C. 1880(9), lxii, 337-8, (10 Feb. 80).

8. *Thom's* 1882, p.663.

landlords and sanitary authorities, and gave poor law guardians increased powers in providing relief.¹

Though some action was taken by the government, the expenditure it initiated was too slow to have much impact during the grim months from November 1879 to June 1880. It was private charity which accomplished most in relieving the distress. In the towns in Queen's County shopkeepers, professional people and clerics of all denominations formed relief committees. Circulars were sent around for subscriptions, money was collected from door to door, the circumstances of each case was enquired into to discriminate between 'the really destitute and the professional mendicant',² and then money or tickets for essential items such as food, clothes and fuel were given to the genuinely needy.³ Though there is an absence of particular records it is likely that the small Society of Friends community in the county - mainly centred in Mountmellick and numbering about one hundred persons⁴ - contributed generously towards the relief of distress. A circular from the yearly meeting committee was read at preparative meetings 'calling on Friends everywhere to consider their duty as to the present distress and encouraging us to contribute to its relief'.⁵

In Queen's County not all appreciated the gravity of the distress.

1. Relief of Distress (Ireland) Act, 43 Vict., c.4, 15 Mar.

2. In Athy, both the police and the clergy helped to identify the genuinely destitute (L.E., 21 Dec. 78).

3. Maryborough relief committee was effective; apparently, without being mean in its charity, the committee in December 1880 was still able to give to the local St Vincent de Paul society £32 which was surplus from its 1879 fund (ibid., 25 Dec. 80).

4. Deduced from 1878 lists of members in the Friends' Historical Library, Dublin.

5. Minute of the Mountmellick Friends' monthly meeting on 31 Dec. 79 (Friends' Historical Library, Dublin, G 14 1857-88, MM.V.A. 10).

Scenes such as those described by Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, on 9 September 1879 in a letter to the Athy board of guardians, must have impinged on the conscience of many. Fr McGee stated that Stradbally was 'unhappily becoming more and more crowded with paupers...we have one entire street or square in Stradbally occupied almost exclusively with these hapless waifs.'¹ Yet, even on 23 May 1880, a fatalistic Fr John Doyle, the parish priest of Maryborough, could say to his congregation that farmers:

especially small farmers of ten to twenty acres and often with large helpless families, cannot get along prosperously... God could have made us all rich if He so willed but He has arranged it otherwise. There will, He tells, be poor. 'The poor ye shall always have with you.' If He were to divide the whole earth evenly amongst the human race tomorrow and left them free to dispose of it, some of them would probably have lost their share before a week, many within a year, and as time went on things would be much as they are... Trust to providence, as you have always done, and industry, thrift and economy will, with the blessing of God in His own good time, bring us peace and plenty.²

Also exhibiting, what now seems, discreditable detachment were about fifty landowners, chaired by Colonel Robert Fisher from Castlegrogan (near Rathdowney), enjoying the Upper Ossory Farming Society's annual dinner on 23 September 1879. Having held a show in an adjoining paddock, the society held its dinner in the boardroom of Donaghmore workhouse.³ It is not likely that the inmates of the workhouse - whose numbers were increasing - appreciated the strident music of the military band as it accompanied the various toasts.

1. *L.E.*, 13 Sept. 79.

2. Letter of Fr Doyle composed from notes of his observations made at mass on 23 May 80 and printed in *ibid.*, 29 May 80. The same letter was addressed to the *Freeman's Journal* on 24 May 80.

3. *L.E.*, 27 Sept. 79.

Landowners paid about five-eighths of the poor rates in Ireland.¹ Hence, it is likely that some landowners - themselves with lightened pockets, and anxious about an increasingly unsettled country - reacted as did Dickens's materialist Mr Scrooge on being asked to subscribe to 'a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth'.² Fr James Cosgrave, a curate in Aghaboe, speaking of his experience on the local Mansion House relief committee noted that, though all the local landlords had been petitioned for help, only 'Mrs Grattan Bellew gave £2, and Richard Caldbeck gave not only money but his time most ungrudgingly.'³ Yet, landlords and their families in the county were charitable. The women arranged entertainments of various sorts to raise funds,⁴ and at Christmas especially directed the supply of food and clothes to the destitute.⁵ Each year, particularly at Christmas time, the *Leinster Express* published expressions of gratitude from mainly catholic clergy to local landlords for donations to relieve the poor: in 1879, there was an observable increase in such expressions.⁶

1. William, L. Feingold, 'The Irish boards of poor law guardians, 1872-86: a revolution in local government' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1974), p.23.

2. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p.16. Mr Scrooge's answer was: 'I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned [workhouses and prisons] - they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.'

3. Fr Cosgrave at a public meeting in Aghaboe to form a branch of the land league (*L.E.*, 6 Nov. 80).

4. Mrs Skeffington Smyth of Mount Henry, near Ballybrittas, organised a 'musical matinee' in Cannes, and raised £70 for 'the relief of Irish distress' (*ibid.*, 24 Apr. 80).

5. Mrs Grace of Gracefield (five miles south-east of Athy) gave beef (*ibid.*, 20 Dec. 79); Mrs Adair, wife of the much vilified John George Adair from Bellegrave near Ballybrittas, annually donated vegetables, beef and clothes (*ibid.*, 30 Dec. 82); Lady De Vesce from Abbeylaxey had a dole (Minute book, Relief (sic) account, Maryborough Ladies' Land League (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9221)).

6. Viscount De Vesce gave £10 to the Maryborough relief committee (*L.E.*, 13 Dec. 79); Sir Charles Coote gave £50 to Fr Andrew McDonald for the 'poor' in the parish of Mountrath, and Henry Pattison gave £10 to Fr Thomas O'Shea for the 'poor' in the parish of Camross & Killinure (*ibid.*, 20 Dec. 79).

During the spring of 1880, some paupers and their families were employed sowing crops, and thereby gained a brief respite from their deprivation. Then, followed the hungry months waiting for the harvest. Many survived on a diet based entirely on Indian meal, which was both plentiful and cheap. It is tempting to suggest that the deficiency disease pellagra¹ might account for the 'apparitions' in Ballyfin chapel during the first week of May 1880.² Rumours that apparitions, similar to those witnessed at Knock, had been seen, caused a sensation in Queen's County. People, convinced that the 'visions' were of a divine or supernatural character, flocked in their thousands to the locality.³ At mass in Ballyfin chapel on Sunday morning 9 May the local curate, Fr James Maher, disabused his congregation. He told them that on the previous Friday evening he and two other priests stood on the altar, and watched the course of the sun:⁴ when the sun's rays passed through the window (which was and is now tripartite) the reflection thrown on the wall seemed like three robed figures - an effect, he said, which was considerably heightened by 'the tremulous motion of the foliage outside'.⁵ When the windows were darkened the shadows disappeared, and when the windows were uncovered the shadows reappeared. Fr Maher concluded by appealing for assistance to stamp out 'the delusion which had taken such a hold on

1. Pellagra 'occurs when the diet is one based almost entirely on maize, because the grain lacks the ability to encourage the synthesis of nicotine acid, a member of the B complex' (Helen Jeans, *Grains, Nuts, and Seeds*, pp 15-16).

2. E. Margaret Crawford, 'Indian meal and pellagra in nineteenth-century Ireland' in J.M. Goldstrom & L.A. Clarkson (eds.), *Irish population, economy, and society. Essays in honour of the late K.H. Connell*, pp 113-33.

3. *L.E.*, 8 May 80.

4. *The Carlow Sentinel*, 15 May 80, names the two priests as the local parish priest, Fr William Comerford, and Fr Patrick Dunne, a curate from Maryborough.

5. *L.E.*, 15 May 80.

the popular mind', and which, if 'not nipped in the bud, might be the cause of a vast amount of evil'.¹ That Sunday evening, between two and three thousand visited the chapel, but only a few individuals on the following days.²

The four principal funds established to relieve distress in Ireland were variously effective in Queen's County. £12 was granted to the Aghaboe relief committee by the duchess of Marlborough's fund.³ The *New York Herald* committee was persuaded by the Aghaboe secretary, Fr James Cosgrave, to make nine payments of £4.10s. to clothe seventy-five children for their confirmation in June 1880;⁴ the same committee granted £10 each to the Offerlane⁵ and Rosenallis relief committees.⁶

Convinced of the urgency of the distress, the central organisation of the land league decided on 30 December 1879 to accept and disburse relief funds.⁷ However, because shortly before the land league was suppressed in October 1881 its records were dispersed, it is impossible to estimate how much relief it gave to Queen's County. Generally, the league channelled its relief through local committees⁸ and league branches with priests the usual agents of distribution.⁹

The available records of the Mansion House relief committee present

1. *L.E.*, 15 May 80.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Aghaboe file (M.H.C. records, CH 1/52/809).

4. *Ibid.*

5. Offerlane file (*ibid.*, CH 1/52/755).

6. Fr Martin F. Maher, the parish priest of Rosenallis, to the Mountmellick board of guardians (Laois County Library, minutes of meeting of the Mountmellick board of guardians for 5 June 80).

7. Moody, *Davitt*, p.356. (Moody cites the *Freeman's Journal*, 31 Dec. 79 as his source.)

8. The local committees in Mountmellick, Aghaboe, Offerlane, Stradbally, Ballyfin, Rathdowney, and Durrow, according to the 'quare sheets' in their Mansion House files, received a total of £119 from the land league (M.H.C. records, CH 1/52/688, CH 1/52/809, CH 1/52/755, CH 1/52/750, CH 1/52/804, CH 1/52/716, CH 1/52/708).

9. Fr James Sinnott, writing on 22 Apr. 80 to his parishioner, Richard Lalor, declined to accept what he said was the honour of 'distributing the remittances sent by the land league for the relief of distress' in the Raheen area (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8574(3)).

the only comprehensive impression of the distress in the county, and its relief by one of the principal funds. The Mansion House relief fund, established on 2 January 1880, was administered by a committee chaired by the lord mayor of Dublin, Edmund Dwyer Gray, owner and editor of the *Freeman's Journal*. The voluntary committee 'of representative men of all parties and creeds' was supported by a small staff of salaried clerks. The committee dealt, 'not by direct communication with those who seek or may need its relief',² but solely through local agencies which had to satisfy the committee of the 'existence of acute and exceptional distress in the district from which the claims to be relieved come'.³

844 local committees - reduced to 769 by 14 August 1880 - were formed in Ireland as a whole.⁴ 12 functioned in Queen's County.⁵ Each local agency or committee had to 'include the clergyman of all denominations in the district, the chairman or vice-chairman of the board of guardians, the chairman or vice-chairman of the dispensary committee, and the medical officer'.⁶ It is clear from a study of the correspondence of the general committee in Dublin that scrupulous attention was paid to the composition of local committees throughout Ireland. No further aid was forthcoming to a local committee until it complied with instructions from Dublin about its composition. Only

1. From a telegram 'to be sent' to Melbourne, the chief municipal towns in England and Scotland, and selected cities in America requesting aid (Mansion House committee minute book entry for 6 Jan. 80, M.H.C. records, CH 1/4).

2. Standing order 3 (ibid., CH 1/10).

3. Standing order 5 (ibid.).

4. Mansion House committee minute book entry for 14 Aug. 80 (minute book, op.cit.).

5. Twelve committees in the county received grants from the Mansion House fund (ibid., record of grants, 2 vols, CH 1/37 and CH 1/38).

6. Standing order 4 (ibid., CH 1/10).

one deficient local committee in Queen's County - formed in Rosenallis on the suggestion of the local parish priest, Fr Martin F. Maher - was reminded that it should include the local Church of Ireland rector, in its membership.¹ Table 4,² following, shows the composition of the local committees in Queen's County and Ireland as a whole.

Table 4 Composition of Mansion House local committees

	catholic clergymen	protestant clergymen	medical practitioners	poor law guardians	other laymen	total
Queen's County	26	22	13	18	102	181
% of total	[15]	[12]	[7]	[10]	[56]	
Ireland	1,319	747	462	911	4,147	7,586
% of total	[17]	[10]	[6]	[12]	[55]	

When the Mansion House relief fund closed on 14 August 1880, £179,577 had been raised world-wide.³ (For the sources of this sum see Appendix 29, below, p.430.) Contributions to the fund were mainly in cash, but it also received a variety of useful gifts such as grain from America,⁴ a bale of cloth from Arnott & Co., Dublin⁵ (second-hand clothes were not accepted because of the risk of infectious diseases),⁶ and cases of preserved meat from Northampton, England.⁷ While commodities were, of course, distributed - the gifts to the fund, shoes purchased in London,⁸ Indian meal purchased and

1. Rosenallis file (M.H.C. records, CH 1/52/581).

2. Tables showing the composition of local committees (ibid., CH 1/35).

3. Mansion House committee minutes for 14 Aug. 80 (op.cit.).

4. Ibid., minute for 2 Mar. 80.

5. Ibid., minute for 20 Jan. 80.

6. Ibid., minute for 5 Feb. 80.

7. Ibid., minute for 11 Feb. 80.

8. Ibid., minute for 4 Mar. 80.

transported to the western islands,¹ and so on - relief of distress was mainly through cheques payable to local committees and drawn on the fund's account in the National Bank. The local committees then dispensed tickets entitling the destitute to specified measures of food, clothing or fuel.

Through the life of the Mansion House committee the bulk of its charity, like that of the other principal funds, flowed mainly to the west of Ireland. For instance, by the end of February 1880 when 660 local committees had been formed in Ireland and grants totalling £45,049 had been made, Galway and Mayo received £7,535 and £7,175 respectively or between them almost a third of the total.² Queen's County received a relatively paltry sum: between 5 February 1880, when the Clonaslee committee received the first grant,³ and 14 June 1880, when the Aghaboe & Ballacolla committee received the last grant,⁴ the twelve local committees in the county received forty-nine grants totalling only £900 to support the 7,420 'stated to be in want of assistance'.⁵

Circumscribed by limited funds, and besieged by pleas for help from all over the country, the Mansion House committee was in an invidious position. To provide even a subsistence 6d per week per head to the 7,420 in Queen's County during the months of February, March and April in 1880 - when £825 of the £900 was granted - would have required

1. A special sub-committee for the western islands was formed (M.H.C. records, minute book, op.cit., minute for 3 Feb. 80).

2. Ibid., minute for 2 Mar. 80.

3. Clonaslee file (ibid., CH 1/52/484).

4. Aghaboe & Ballacolla file (ibid., CH 1/52/809).

5. Two volumes recording grants made to local committees, in alphabetical order (ibid., CH 1/37 and CH 1/38); Appendix 30, p.431.

£2,411.10s. An examination committee was specially summoned to consider whether 'better means' could be adopted for equalising grants made to local committees and for checking wasteful expenditure.¹

People, grateful for help given, often reproached the hand that fed when the required more was not forthcoming. Two examples illustrate this. Fr James Maher, the secretary of the Ballyfin committee, answered a refusal from the Mansion House committee with: 'there will be deaths unless further aid be given... I suspect the Mansion House committee have been misinformed or are labouring under some mistake about our distress.'² The two secretaries of the Aghaboe & Ballacolla committee, the catholic curate, Fr James Cosgrave, and the Church of Ireland rector, Revd Ernest Brandon, signed a letter dated 5 June 1880 which stated: 'It is almost impossible to collect more poverty, more pinching distress into the same space than is congregated in this parish... How can your committee have the heart to cut us off?'³

'Several bad cases of famine fever' were indeed reported in that June 1880 at the Heath near Maryborough,⁴ as were 'alleged deaths from hunger' in the district of Rosenallis earlier in May.⁵ But, when Scotch dons and champions, the two kinds of potatoes extensively grown in Queen's County, produced bumper harvests in both 1880 and 1881,⁶ the feared repetition of the great famine of the late 1840s was

1, Mansion House committee minutes for 6 Mar. 80 (op. cit., CH 1/4).

2, Ballyfin file (ibid., CH 1/52/804).

3, Aghaboe & Ballacolla file (ibid., CH 1/52/809).

4, *L.E.*, 26 June 80.

5, Laois County Library, minutes of meeting of the Mountmellick board of guardians on 29 May 80.

6, Appendix 5, below, p. 414. Richard Caldbeck's potato harvest in Ballacolla measured one hundred and sixty-four barrels of 'good' champions per Irish acre, and one hundred and sixteen barrels of Scotch dons per Irish acre, which he said, had not been 'equalled even in the old prosperous days of potatoes forty years back'. He had been told that his neighbours had 'just as good potatoes' as he had (Caldbeck's letter in *L.E.*, 16 Oct. 80).

not fulfilled. In Queen's County, at least, the poor law system, some extra government help, and, most importantly, private charity had, between the harvests of 1879 and 1880, staved off widespread death from starvation.

2 Queen's County's Espousal of Parnellite Parliamentary Representation, 1877-80

The 1880 general election was an emphatic victory for Richard Lalor and Arthur O'Connor. Queen's County, along with Clare, Cork city, Roscommon, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow, declared for Parnell by returning two Parnellite home-rulers.¹ However, the successful replacement of the two lukewarm home-rulers,² Kenelm T. Digby and Edmund Dease, with the two Parnellites as the M.P.s for Queen's County was not easily accomplished. Of course, there was the predictable Tory opposition to any home-ruler. But within the home-rule camp in the county the success of Lalor and O'Connor was accompanied by bitter dissension.

As earlier indicated, all through the 1870s the county was represented in parliament by Kenelm T. Digby and Edmund Dease. Digby was first elected in the 1868 general election, while Dease was an unopposed replacement in 1870 for the Rt Hon. John Wilson Fitzpatrick who had been created Lord Castletown.³ Both were formally adopted by the Queen's County Independent Club at a special meeting on 7 February

1. B.W. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary election results in Ireland 1801-1922*, pp 122-7.

2. As Dease became a prominent opponent in Queen's County of Gladstone's home rule bill in 1893, perhaps he is the more deserving of the epithet 'lukewarm'.

3. Walker, *Election results* (op.cit.), pp 308-9.

1874 in the town hall in Maryborough,¹ and returned as home-rulers in the general election of the same year.

By 1874, support from the independent club was crucial for success in parliamentary elections in the county. The club had about two hundred members.² It was normally presided over by Richard Lalor, an engineer and tenant farmer who was a brother of the more famous letter-writing Young Irelander, James Fintan Lalor. Patrick Cahill LL.B was the club's industrious and capable secretary-treasurer. An investigation of newspaper reports of the club's meetings 1870-9 suggests that, while there was a consistent presence of a small number of merchants, solicitors, and a barrister,³ the club drew most of its support from the large farmers⁴ and the Roman catholic clergy.⁵ Always a force since its foundation - possibly in the late 1820s⁶ - it drew the grudging comment from the conservative *Leinster Express* on 17 February 1874 that 'there is no denying that it has become a power in the Queen's County.' By 1879, the *Leinster Express* acknowledged that 'the success of the home-rulers in the Queen's County is chiefly owing to the watchfulness and sustained efforts of the club' whose members, though 'not individually men of influence...collectively have a

1. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.721.

2. *L.E.*, 29 Jan. 76.

3. Frequent attenders at meetings were the solicitors Charles and Edward Corcoran, the barrister Edward Purcell Mulhallen Marum, the publican Thomas Bradley, and the auctioneer and merchant William Henry Cobbe. Later in the 1870s, prominent attenders were the two Maryborough publicans Patrick Meehan, and Patrick Doran, who became the club's treasurer.

4. Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, pp 214-5. Clark selected a random sample of fourteen members of three clubs: the Queen's County Independent Club, the Limerick and Clare Farmers' Club, and the Wexford Independent Club. Among the fourteen he established that the median size of holdings was ninety-nine acres and the median valuation was £74.

5. The fifteen members of the club's committee for 1879 included six priests (*L.E.*, 1 Feb. 79).

6. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.714.

strength to move the lever of popular excitement.''

The two M.P.s adopted by the independent club proved disappointing. Described by Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, as 'both catholic...in our hour of need we took them. They were the least objectionable that offered',² perhaps it is not surprising that, also given the example and uninspired leadership of Isaac Butt, complaints were soon raised about both Digby's and Dease's neglect of their parliamentary duties. William Fitzpatrick, a large tenant farmer from Deerpark near Mountrath and a prominent member of the independent club, reflected the views of many in a letter to Fr Thomas Nolan, the parish priest of Abbeyleix, when he bemoaned his inability to attend a public meeting of the club on 24 May 1877 because it would 'deprive me of meeting or seeing our two parliamentary representatives in the county - a rare sight indeed I need not tell you.'³

The *Leinster Express* on 13 October 1877 unsympathetically underlined the persistent absenteeism of both Digby and Dease from the House of Commons the previous session. Analysing the voting performance of the two home-rulers the newspaper stated that 'there were 314 divisions of which 54 stood identified with strictly Irish questions, and 10 others bore more or less directly on subjects of Irish interest.' The figures showed that of the 59 home-rulers, Joseph Biggar was the most conscientious (voting 61 times), while the voting record of the two Queen's County M.P.s was poor - Dease and Digby voting 17 and 5 times respectively. Censuring Dease in a letter

1. *L.E.*, 3 Aug. 78.

2. McGee to Richard Lalor, 19 Jan. 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(8)).

3. *L.E.*, 26 May 77.

to the editor in the *Leinster Express* on 19 January 1878, Richard Lalor identified fourteen divisions on Irish questions during 1876¹ from which, he stated, Dease was absent. Two weeks later, in the same newspaper, William Henry Cobbe, a Portarlinton auctioneer and merchant and a member of the independent club, provided even more comprehensive evidence of parliamentary absenteeism - this time of the more culpable Digby. Citing J.P. McAlister, secretary of the Home Rule League, as his source, Cobbe calculated that in the four years 1874-7 Digby voted in only 19 of the 183 divisions on 'Irish questions': with mild sarcasm, Cobbe concluded his letter with: 'I leave your readers to say ought not the Queen's County be highly delighted in being so honourably represented.'²

The wives of the Dease and Digby did not escape critical disapproval. Patrick Cahill, writing to Richard Lalor on 9 January 1878, reported a meeting of the independent club at which the parish priest of Abbeylax, Fr Thomas Nolan, described Digby as 'an excellent young man, good-looking, spirited, and able' but that 'he wanted ballast, and had married an extravagant American girl who made him spend, and helped him to squander his money.'³ Later, the same

1. According to Lalor, the fourteen divisions on Irish questions from which Dease was absent, were: 23 Feb., Grand Jury Presentments (Ireland) Bill, second reading; 1 Mar., Municipal Franchise (Ireland) Bill, second reading; 7 Mar., motion for a select committee on the Tralee Savings Bank; 10 Mar., two motions on the salaries and expenses of the Office of Public Works in Ireland; 31 Mar., Cattle Diseases (Ireland) Bill, in committee; 3 May, Registration of Voters (Ireland) Bill, second reading; 5 May, Cattle Diseases (Ireland) Bill, in committee; 22 June, Jurors Qualification (Ireland) Bill, in committee; 23 June, Isaac Butt's two motions on the Supreme Court of Judicature (Ireland) Bill; 27 July, Cattle Diseases (Ireland) Bill, further consideration; 1 Aug., motion in favour of pardoning Irish political prisoners; 7 Aug., Isaac Butt's motion on business of the House of Commons.

2. *L.E.*, 2 Feb. 78.

3. Cahill to Lalor, 9 Jan. 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566 <8>).

January 1878, Cahill wrote to Lalor about a meeting he had with 'several of our priests at dinner yesterday' when one of them had informed him in private that 'he had heard on good authority that Dease would not be a candidate again... Mrs Dease was tired of the whole thing...disgusted with politics.'

Family obligations were offered by Dease as some excuse for his shortcomings as an M.P. He wrote to Richard Lalor on 19 January 1878 that 'the interests on my brother's eleven children and those of my brother-in-law's six have, in no small degree, devolved upon me as well as my first duty towards my own.'² An unmoved Patrick Cahill noted that had Dease 'been half as diligent as other men, these personal claims of devotion to family affairs would be accepted as a matter-of-course, but coming after all previous negligence, no person will be disposed to back him for the sake of his brethern [sic] children.'³ Two days later, Lalor asked Dease a chastening rhetorical question: 'If you had a servant in your employment, and he was no longer able, from any cause, to perform his duties, would you not be obliged, however useful and honest he may have been, to replace him by another who could do your business?' Lalor went on pointedly to inform Dease that 'your constituents require more work from you than you are able to perform, and the inference is obvious.'⁴

It is evident that criticism of the two Queen's County M.P.s increased in tandem with the rise to prominence of Parnell and the

1. Cahill to Lalor, 28 Jan, 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566<7>),

2. Dease to Lalor, 19 Jan, 78 (ibid., MS 8566<8>),

3. Lalor to Dease, 24 Jan, 78 (ibid.),

4. Ibid.

growing disunity within Butt's Home Rule League from mid-1877.¹ Impatient with Butt, Richard Lalor had become an early supporter of the obstructionist policy led by Parnell.² It was the same Richard Lalor who spearheaded the move to have the two lukewarm home-rulers replaced. On 25 February 1878, Lalor wrote to Timothy D. Sullivan, then editor of the *Nation*, asking for the names of possible parliamentary candidates for the county. Three months later in his reply, Sullivan, complaining of the difficulty of obtaining 'the class of men who would go thoroughly with Parnell, Biggar, O'Connor Power and O'Donnell', recommended three members of the council of the league: Charles Dawson, George Delaney and Judge Little, who were 'a good deal looked to as possible candidates for seats at the next election', and who would be 'honest workers and sturdy combatants for our national cause.'³

Lalor was persistent in continuing his attacks on the two sitting members. In August 1878, he focused his attention on Digby - then staying at Boulogne-sur-Mer. On 30 August, informing Digby that he stood 'very badly with the great majority of the Queen's County electors', Lalor continued:

your almost total absence from parliament is complained of...even when you did attend parliament, you took no active part in its proceedings...instead of allying yourself with the active section of home-rule members, you went in direct opposition to them...by your want of earnestness you were in an indirect way misrepresenting your constituents.⁴

1. David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, pp 328-9. Thornley pinpoints a stormy meeting of the party on 6 Aug. 77 as the time when unity in the party effectively ceased.

2. *Ibid.*, p.330.

3. Sullivan to Lalor, 24 May 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(9)).

4. Lalor to Digby, 30 Aug. 78 (*ibid.*).

Lalor went on to advise Digby that, if he still wished to represent the county, he should state publicly that his financial difficulties (understood by Digby's supporters to have been the chief cause of his absence from parliament) were resolved, because he owed his constituents an apology for his absence, it would enlist a sympathy for him, and be a guarantee of his ability to attend faithfully to his parliamentary duties in future. Lalor, in the same letter, then suggested that Digby might still 'be able to square matters' with his 'friends in the county' if he also pledged himself 'promptly' in a public manifesto 'to join the active section of the home rule members, to criticise every measure that comes before the House improving the good, defeating the bad and, above all, to question every item in the estimates.'

In essence, Digby's answer was an avowal of his intention to devote himself in the future 'actively and energetically' to his parliamentary duties, which he felt the country had a right to expect - 'seeing what a power the Irish representation had become'.² However, he defined his duties ambiguously as contributing as far as he could to:

the promotion of our country's interests by pursuing a policy, in common with the party, which shall be firm and wise, just and constitutional, and calculated not only to promote the interests of Ireland but to strengthen the foundations of the Empire.³

Richard Lalor's own conduct was not without its critics even within the independent club. Patrick Cahill, his good friend and the

- 1, Lalor to Digby, 30 Aug. 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(9)).
- 2, Newspaper cutting of a letter dated 9 Sept. 78 (ibid., MS 8566).
- 3, Ibid.

secretary and treasurer of the club, reported to him on 13 September 1878 that 'our whiggish associates in the club and a number of the venerated clergy all over the county are vexed over your persistent pressure on Dease and Digby.' While accepting the necessity of ousting Digby from his parliamentary seat, Cahill did not agree with Lalor about Dease: he wrote to Lalor:

Dease's very presence and vote is of immense weight... We have, unhappily, too many adventurers in our ranks, and there are far too few of hereditary position and high personal character. A single vote from a man like Dease outweighs the whole vote of the seven obstructionists²... When men like Dease take their proper place in our ranks we cannot be cried down as mere *jacquerie*.³

Cahill was ambivalent about tactics to be used in parliament: he did 'not approve of what is now termed the active policy',⁴ yet he hoped for a more active policy under Butt's leadership.⁵ In spite of his doubts, he deplored Lalor's inclination 'to go too far'.⁶

Lalor was not to be deflected from his own active policy. Through the medium of a letter to Cahill he lectured the independent club at its annual general meeting held in Maryborough on 29 January 1879. Having apologised for his absence, he continued:

I am not sure that at present the club is in harmony with the opinions of the great majority of the electors of the Queen's County on the question of the future parliamentary policy of the Irish home rule members... If the club is to possess any political influence in the future, it must not only coincide with the opinions of the

1. Cahill to Lalor, 13 Sept, 78 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(9)).

2. Conor Cruise O'Brien in *Parnell and his party 1880-90*, p.23, states that the 'little group' numbered 'not more than seven or eight'; Parnell, Joseph Gillis Biggar, Frank Hugh O'Donnell, George Harley Kirk, John O'Connor Power, James Lysaght Finigan (elected in 1879), Philip Callan, 'and possibly also' Captain John Philip Nolan.

3. Cahill to Lalor, 22 Jan, 78 (Lalor papers, op.cit., MS 8566(8)).

4. Cahill to Lalor, 4 Nov, 78 (ibid.).

5. Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, p.371.

6. Cahill to Lalor, 28 Nov, 78 (Lalor papers, op.cit., MS 8566(8)).

people whom it claims to represent and counsel but it must also be prepared to express and act up to those opinions... I am in favour of an active and continuous parliamentary hostility to every ministry that will not comply with the legislative demands of the Irish people... the electors of the Queen's County are in favour of the same policy... The time has come when, in justice to itself and in justice to the people, the Queen's County Independent Club is bound to express its opinion on this question in no hesitating or ambiguous language.'

Kenelm T. Digby also had a letter read at the same meeting of the independent club on 29 January 1879. With unconscious irony, he audaciously called for union within the party so that Irish M.P.s 'may labour together earnestly and effectively to secure those objects which the country has at heart'.² The *Nation*, implying that the letter could be compared to 'Satan reproving sin', commented disapprovingly that 'no member of the Queen's County club appears to have been either amused or indignant at this posturing of the champion sluggard.'³

As 1879 advanced with its severe winter, parching spring, and inclement summer, the public apprehension of a poor harvest was realised. The year saw the launching of land agitation at the mass meeting at Irishtown, County Mayo, Butt's death, and Devoy, Davitt and Parnell agreeing on the 'new departure'. As the crisis deepened, there was a perceptible shift in political power. Within Queen's County the authority of the independent club, with its potent clerical membership, seemed less secure. In Lee's words, 'for the first time in Irish history the masses came on the political stage as leading

1. *L.E.*, 1 Feb. 79; also quoted in O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol. ii, pp 727-8.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Nation*, 8 Feb. 79.

players rather than extras.''

Though the Irish National Land League was not formally founded until 21 October 1879 in the Imperial Hotel, Dublin, what might be termed the first important land league meeting in Queen's County was held in Maryborough on 5 October 1879.² One report estimated the crowd assembled in the square at twenty thousand.³ Notable for John Dillon's utterance of the 'first explicit statement on the principle of boycotting',⁴ the meeting also signalled a manifest nailing of Parnellite colours to the county's political mast. Included among the speakers from the platform were Joseph Biggar, Timothy D. Sullivan, Arthur O'Connor and John Dillon - all staunch supporters of Parnell. On the proposal of Patrick A. Meehan (a twenty-seven year-old grocer and publican, and a future principal in the land war) and seconded by Hulton J. Harrison (a farmer from near Ballyroan who was a prominent member of the independent club) Richard Lalor was voted to the chair of the meeting. In his observations on the political situation in the county, Lalor denigrated the two sitting M.P.s, and suggested to the approving crowd suitable alternatives - John Dillon and Arthur O'Connor or, failing either of them, the Revd Isaac Nelson of Belfast.⁵

On the day following the meeting, Dillon had a letter published in the *Freeman's Journal* regretting his inability to stand for the county, and offering the explanation that 'recent circumstances in

1, Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918*, p.72.

2, Cf. below, p. 86.

3, *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Oct.79.

4, Moody, *Davitt*, p.321.

5, *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Oct.79.

connection with my private affairs...rendered it necessary for me to leave the country for some years.'¹

One of the most acrimonious meetings of the independent club was held the following month on 19 November 1879 'to consider what may be the best parliamentary policy to be pursued'.² The well attended meeting, which was chaired by Richard Lalor, included Dease, Digby, and an imposing sixteen priests.³ From the start, it was clear that Lalor's hostility to Dease and Digby commanded the support of the majority who adopted the resolution: 'that as neither of our Members represents our views on the policy to be pursued in parliament, we will not support either Mr Dease or Mr Digby at the next general election.'⁴ Yet, the moderate minority did not meekly accept this marriage of the independent club to the Parnellite faction of the parliamentary party. Particularly outraged at the manner in which Dease and Digby had been severely grilled, Fr Thomas Nolan, the parish priest of Abbeylisk, rounded on the meeting with a remarkably trenchant speech. Reminding the attendance of his own fitness to speak, and having described Dease and Digby as honourable men, Fr Nolan continued:

they are men of status in society, men of property, and it is such men of conscience,

1. *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Oct. 79. F.S.L. Lyons in *John Dillon, A Biography*, p.32, suggests that the 'recent circumstances' related to his health; with Dillon's family history, tuberculosis 'was always a possibility, and the necessity of seeking a healthier, drier climate hung over him constantly during these years.' Dillon's 'mood of despondency' soon passed, and when the Irish National Land League was formed, he was elected a member of its committee.

2. Resolution proposed by Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, and carried at a meeting of the independent club on 4 Nov. 79; the resolution carried the rider, 'and that our members be invited to attend the meeting' (*L.E.*, 8 Nov. 79).

3. *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 79.

4. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.731.

honour and religion we wanted for our representatives and not feather-headed people (Oh! Oh! and laughter) who have got nothing to lose and are not worth a farthing, are creating fenianism, and are an imposition on the country. (Oh! Oh! and Hear! Hear!) We have honourable men. We have truthful men. (commotion and cries of No!)

I often heard the people crying out against this man and that man; but some of these people would be the very first themselves to persecute us if they had the power. (Oh! Oh! and commotion) I tell you, you are not honest, (loud murmurs) and some of you would be bigger tyrants than the landlords if you were in their places. (great commotion)

What are you? Who are you, that you think you can ride rough-shod over the country? Poor uneducated feather-heads! (more commotion and cries of Chair!) Listen to me! Hear me! Some of you would treat the people with more severity than the landlords if you had the power. Many of you would be worse. (Oh! Oh!) But don't think for a moment that the religious people, the educated people of this country, will give you your own way, to let you go to perdition and be lost eternally. (sensation and murmurs of dissent)'

Having unburdened himself, Fr Nolan 'took his hat and retired.'²

Attempting to restore order to the meeting, Lalor offered the excuse for Fr Nolan that he would be 'with us today if he had his head the same as he had twenty years ago'.³ This incensed some of the older priests, and eventually when the meeting concluded there was a clear split in the ranks of the independent club. An apparently moderate, clerically dominated faction was now openly opposed by a camp perceived by Fr James Sinnott, the parish priest of Richard Lalor's own parish of Raheen, as 'patriots of...the advanced school' who, 'like their brothers in Paris, Italy and elsewhere, seem by no means disposed to brook or tolerate the least dissent from their notions and views of what is just and proper'.⁴

It would be incorrect to describe Fr Nolan's diatribe as simply the outpourings of an arrogant old priest who took umbrage at the

1. L.E., 22 Nov. 79.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Fr Sinnott to the editor, *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Mar. 80.

meeting's proceedings. Clearly offended at being pushed aside at the meeting, he saw, as did other priests, not just in the struggle for political power in the independent club, but also in the growing number of public demonstrations, evidence of a developing agitation.

The split in the independent club was aggravated at its stormy meeting on 15 March 1880 to select candidates for the county for the coming general election in April. Again chaired by Richard Lalor, the meeting was attended by the leading members including eight priests and two parliamentary hopefuls, Arthur O'Connor and the sitting M.P. Kenelm T. Digby. Because it was held initially in the yard of Gaze's Hotel, Maryborough with a wagonette serving as a platform, curious members of the public, including some vociferous inebriates, wandered in to augment the attendance.¹ From the start there was friction. A letter from Fr James Sinnott, the parish priest of Raheen, was read to the meeting in which he cast aspersions on the 'political sagacity and forethought' of Parnellites, and advised the retention of the present county members 'for to discard them at this time in favour of political aspirants with whose antecedents we are imperfectly acquainted...would...be neither wise nor expedient.'² The reading was interrupted by Patrick A. Meehan's 'Bosh!' and statement that the club had already decided on the men they would have.³

Richard Lalor, in his opening address, admitting that Digby had 'attended pretty regularly for the last session' (drawing a response

1. *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80.

2. The full text of the letter was forwarded by Fr Sinnott along with his letter to the editor, and was published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 18 Mar. 80; part of Fr Sinnott's letter to the meeting was included in the report of the meeting in *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80.

3. *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80.

from a 'voice' that it was a 'death-bed repentance'), proposed Arthur O'Connor and Patrick Egan, treasurer of the Irish National Land League, as parliamentary candidates for the county. Three prominent lay members of the club (Patrick A. Meehan, Hulton J. Harrison, and Martin Delaney, a publican and farmer from Borris-in-Ossory) spoke in support of Lalor's proposal. Then, to excited comments, Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, asked that a vote should not be called for as 'it would be a dangerous thing for this meeting to select candidates' because 'it is not a meeting of the club. It is not a meeting of electors.' Supporting Fr McGee, Thomas P. Walshe M.D. then proposed 'That inasmuch as a meeting of the clergy was to be held this day for the purpose of considering the relative merits of the different candidates, it would be better to await the result of the meeting before coming to a final decision.' Disorder erupted. Shouts from the crowd included: 'We won't wait at all!', 'Throw him off!' and 'Dr Walshe did not attend a meeting of this club for the last three years, and he comes here now to do the dirty work of the priests!'' Though it was seconded by the solicitor, Charles Corcoran, Walshe's proposal was not carried.²

Digby then entered the fray and, despite many interruptions, defended himself vigorously.³ But when he declared that he would stand for election with or without the club's sanction there was uproar. In the ensuing scuffles, one man attempted to assault Digby

1. *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80. The remarks insulting to the priests were attributed in the newspaper report to Patrick A. Meehan. In the same newspaper, a week later, Meehan denied making them; but the newspaper did not believe him, and claimed that its report was accurate in every detail.

2. *Ibid.*, 20 Mar. 80.

3. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.732.

on the wagonette, and a drunkard had to be forcibly removed from the yard. Finally, the meeting went inside the hotel with attendance restricted to about forty bona fide members.¹

Inside the hotel, Fr McGee concentrated his attack on the candidature of the London-born Arthur O'Connor. O'Connor's means, he said, might not be sufficient to carry out the contest, 'and I am not willing to subscribe for a stranger.' Having proposed for consideration a Walter Fitzpatrick from Portarlinton who was a nephew of the parish priest of Mountrath and who, with an annual income of £600, 'had sufficient means', and Edmund Dwyer Gray, the owner of the *Freeman's Journal*, Fr McGee finally settled on asking for support for Edmund Dease and Patrick Egan,²

Succeeding speeches underlined majority support for Lalor's candidates. An irate Fr McGee brought the meeting to a climax by asking O'Connor directly if the priests received him as he did, 'if they say now we cannot vote for this stranger, that you will go whether they like it or not?' Despite Fr McGee's objections, Lalor answered on O'Connor's behalf saying that O'Connor 'would be touching his honour if he were to break his promise.' To cheers, Lalor asked, 'Are we to understand Dr McGee [Fr McGee was a doctor of divinity] this - that now we are in this position - that the laity have no voice in the matter?' After a despairing proposal of an adjournment for a week which, though seconded, was rejected by the meeting, Fr McGee withdrew. The club then, by a majority vote, approved the candidature of Arthur O'Connor and Patrick Egan for the coming election.³

1. *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80,

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

As the secretary of the meeting of the Roman catholic clergy, which was held on the same Monday 15 March 1880, Fr McGee had a minute of the proceedings forwarded to the *Leinster Express* for publication. It baldly stated:

At a meeting of the catholic clergy of the Queen's County assembled at Maryborough on 15 March, it was decided that the candidates selected this day by the Queen's County Independent Club as future members for the Queen's County would not be acceptable. It was arranged that a more desirable selection should at once be devised.¹

The arrangement by the clergy came to nothing. No new 'selection' was 'devised'.

While five candidates publicly canvassed for support, four - Richard Lalor, Arthur O'Connor, Kenelm T. Digby and Captain Robert A.G. Cosby - were actually nominated to contest the election in the county. A patently unsuccessful Shackleton Hallet B.L., who sought support as an advocate of tenant-rights and denominational education, retired on the day of the nomination.² Richard Lalor - the only obvious candidate, though others were discussed, replaced Patrick Egan who withdrew within days of being accepted by the independent club - along with Arthur O'Connor represented the Parnellite home-rulers identified with the land league. Kenelm T. Digby, in the absence of Edmund Dease who withdrew for family reasons, alone represented the whig home-rulers identified with the landed interests.³ Captain Cosby contested on behalf of the conservatives, but immobilised by a

1, *L.E.*, 20 Mar. 80.

2, *Ibid.*, 27 Mar. 80.

3, Significantly, Digby was nominated by Fr Thomas Nolan, the parish priest of Abbeylisk, and among Digby's assentors was Fr John Beauchamp, a curate in Maryborough (*ibid.*, 3 Apr. 80).

fractured bone in his hip as a result of a riding accident,' his electioneering was negligible.

Though the Irish National Land League had, as yet, no branches in the county, it is probable that it exerted some influence in the election on the side of Lalor and O'Connor. An address to the farmers drawn up by Michael Davitt, and adopted by the land league on 12 March 1880, then published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 13 March, stated, 'if you give your vote to a landlord candidate you are voting for famine, rack-rents, evictions, workhouses, and exterminations.'² Though there is no evidence, it is likely that O'Connor and Lalor derived some benefit from the land league's 'loan' of £2,000 to Parnell 'for the expenses to be incurred in contesting seats held by landlords in constituencies, which the league policy would be likely to carry.'³

Parnell made two appearances in the county during the election. The first was at 3 a.m. on 22 March. He had been in America when the general election was announced, and forced to bring his highly successful tour to an abrupt end he arrived in Queenstown on 21 March. Accompanied by Joseph Biggar M.P., James Lysaght Finigan M.P. and Patrick Egan, he travelled back to Dublin by rail. When the train stopped at Maryborough, he was greeted by loud cheers, and, illuminated by about forty torches, he spoke briefly in favour of Lalor and O'Connor.⁴ Parnell, this time with Andrew J. Kettle, paid his second visit to Maryborough on 2 April, the day after the

1. When Cosby was hunting with the Kilkenny hounds in Ballyhale, County Kilkenny on 10 March, his horse fell and rolled on him (*L.E.*, 13 Mar. 80).

2. Moody, *Davitt*, p. 370.

3. Davitt, *Fall*, p. 234; Conor Cruise O'Brien in *Parnell and his party, 1880-90*, p. 41, suggests the average election expenses for home-rulers totalled £414.

4. Lyons, *Parnell*, p. 116.

nominations had been made before the high sheriff. To the accompaniment of the music of four bands, Parnell and Kettle seated in a drag, were drawn by men from the railway station to the market square where a platform had been erected. Though Kettle, on his own admission an indifferent speaker,¹ did not impress, Parnell was more successful. To rousing cheers, he predictably supported O'Connor and Lalor, and dismissed Digby by admitting that he did not know him because Digby 'did not appear in parliament'.²

An interesting feature of the election was what might be construed as a volte-face by many of the catholic clergy: clearly, they disapproved of the selection of O'Connor as a candidate by the independent club, yet catholic clergy chaired all the public meetings where both O'Connor and Lalor spoke. Even Fr John McGee, the source of much of the opposition to O'Connor, chaired the meeting attended by Parnell on 2 April in Maryborough. Without definite evidence, it is nonetheless tempting to conclude that the clergy, uneasily aware of the increasingly politicised laity, pragmatically decided to participate in an anticipated Parnellite victory. Not unreasonably, they may have concurred with the logic of Bishop Butler of Limerick who, on being reminded in the 1880s of his earlier denunciations of home-rule, replied simply: 'We must go with the people.'³

In Queen's County, which was 88 per cent Roman catholic,⁴ religion

1. Kettle remembered a letter from Richard Lalor to Thomas Brennan, secretary of the central branch of the land league, requesting a speaker for a meeting in Queen's County, to which Lalor had added the postscript, 'Don't send Kettle - he can organise, but he can't talk' (Andrew J. Kettle, *The material for victory: being the memoirs of Andrew J. Kettle*, Ed. L.J. Kettle, p.38).

2. *L.E.*, 3 Apr. 80.

3. K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-85*, p.242.

4. Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821-1971*, p.57.

did play a role in the general election. How much of a role is, of course, impossible to gauge accurately. The catholicism of Lalor, O'Connor, and even Digby must have weighed in their favour as an electoral asset. Also, Cosby, as a member of the Church of Ireland, could confidently expect the support of the great majority of the protestants in the county. Yet, there were no overt sectarian pronouncements made during the electioneering. Lalor, in particular, would have been outraged: in a letter to the editor in the *Leinster Express* on 11 October 1879, naming great Irish protestants such as William Molyneux, Charles Lucas, Jonathan Swift, Henry Flood, Henry Grattan, Thomas Davis and William Smith O'Brien, he rebuked Edmund Dease M.P. for being shocked that the Revd Isaac Nelson, a presbyterian clergyman from Belfast, should be mentioned as a fit replacement for either of the county's two sitting 'great catholic members', and concluded: 'From such a narrow-minded, bigoted, uncharitable policy as this, I hope the Almighty will protect us. We are bad enough without this ruinous and cursed policy to creep in amongst us.'

However, Lalor's apparently fair-minded attitude was not universal in Queen's county. Having asked John W. Dunne J.P. (a large farmer living in Raheenahone, Stradbally, and later a central figure in the Plan of Campaign in the county) to be one of his nominators, Lalor received a revealing response. Dunne's letter, obviously confidential, attempts to explain a dilemma, but in so doing, while exposing Dunne's gelatinous back-bone, also suggests a religious

cleavage in the county electorate. Dunne wrote:

I wish I had heard from you sooner, and this is the reason why - Cosby wrote asking my vote and interest. My answer was 'I can not vote for you, neither will I vote for a Parnellite.' You see by the answer the fix I am in.' D.V. I shall be in Maryboro', and be one of your nominees [sic] but, if you can, have some one to do so in my place as I don't wish to have the Prods throw this in my face. Of course, I will vote for you, and would feel great pleasure in the nomination - but just as I tell you - however, won't fail if I must.²

In concert, O'Connor and Lalor campaigned intensively throughout the county. They addressed meetings almost every day and twice on Sundays. They spoke in favour of Parnell, home rule and the land league, and constantly denounced Captain Cosby as being representative of predatory landlordism.³

Special care was taken at the Parnellite meetings to reassure people of the confidentiality of the ballot box. Patrick Cahill, at a meeting in Ballickmoyler on 28 March, having given an explanation of the method of voting, even averred that 'certain agents...were going among the people disseminating falsehoods as to its being quite possible to learn how each man votes.'⁴ The charge is unlikely, because reports in the *Freeman's Journal* indicate that assurances by Parnellites that the secret ballot really meant what it said, were a feature of the campaign throughout the country.

A feature of the election in Queen's County was the fate of Kenelm

1. Dunne's 'fix' was compounded by his membership of the Queen's County Hunt since 1857; Cosby had been master from April 1868 to April 1876, and probably expected Dunne to support him (Walsh papers; book labelled 'Subscription lists, accounts, and transactions of the Queen's County Hunt from 1854').

2. Dunne to Lalor, 30 Mar. 80 (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566<10>).

3. For example, Lalor and O'Connor spoke in Mountmellick on Wednesday 16 Mar (L.E., 20 Mar. 80), in Ballyroan and Stradbally on Sunday, 21 Mar., and in Ballinakill on Monday 22 Mar. (ibid., 27 Mar. 80), in Wolfhill and Ballickmoyler on Sunday 28 Mar., in Mountrath on Monday 29 Mar., and in Maryborough on Friday 2 Apr. (ibid., 3 Apr. 80).

4. Ibid., 3 Apr. 80.

T. Digby. Though he had tried to represent himself as a home-ruler and a supporter of 'fixity of tenure at fair rents' and the 'establishment of peasant proprietary where possible',¹ hostility to him was such that often he was unable to deliver even the briefest of speeches. Symptomatic of the treatment meted out to him was his reception in Rathdowney on polling day 5 April. When driving in the direction of the polling-booth he was surrounded by a menacing crowd, some of whom were armed with bludgeons. He was rescued from impending assault by Arthur O'Connor, Fr William Lynch V.G., the parish priest of Rathdowney, and a force of constabulary, and was given refuge in the parochial house. A car was procured for him, and under police escort he was conducted safely out of the town.²

The outcome of the election in Queen's County was published on 6 April 1880. 2,559, or more than 80 per cent of the electors in the county, had voted with the following result:³

Table 5 Votes polled by each candidate in the 1880 general election in Queen's County

candidates	political affiliation	votes polled	percentage of votes polled
Richard Lalor	Parnellite	1,686	39.8
Arthur O'Connor	Parnellite	1,545	36.4
Capt. Robert A.G. Cosby	conservative	899	21.2
Kenelm T. Digby	home-ruler	109	2.6

The result, an emphatic victory for Lalor and O'Connor, was greeted with popular rejoicing. Along with County Clare, Cork city, County

1. Digby's election address (L.E., 13 Mar. 80).

2. Ibid., 10 Apr. 80.

3. Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p.126; L.E., 10 Apr. 80.

Roscommon, County Westmeath, County Wexford and Wicklow, Queen's County had declared for Parnell by returning two Parnellites.¹ In the City Hall in Dublin on 17 May the struggle for leadership of the party was finally settled when Parnell, supported by Lalor and O'Connor, was elected sessional chairman by twenty-three votes to eighteen for William Shaw.²

While it is reasonable to concentrate on the county election, the election in the Portarlington borough, which returned another prominent figure in the land war in Queen's County, should not be ignored. Since 1832, with the exception of the periods 1847-52 and 1865-8, the borough was represented in parliament by a conservative.³ True-to-form, voting 86.6 per cent conservative in the 1880 general election, the borough returned Hon. Bernard E.B. Fitzpatrick, the only son of Baron Castletown of Upper Ossory, as its M.P.⁴ The actual contest was uneventful.⁵ The only real challenge to Fitzpatrick was the Trinity College professor of law, Thomas E. Webb, Q.C., for the conservative nomination. Though Webb's identification with the conservatives, who, he said, had solved the educational problem and had approached the land question in a fair and enlightened spirit

1. Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p.126; *L.E.*, 10 Apr. 80.

2. Conor Cruise O'Brien in *Parnell and his party*, p.25, n.4, quotes T.P. O'Connor, who stated in *The Parnell Movement*, p.370, that Richard Lalor, along with 'John Barry, J.J. Kelly, Dr Commins, J.G. Biggar, J.C. McCoan' and T.P. himself, stayed in the Imperial Hotel on 15 May, and had 'discussed the question of leadership, and decided to nominate Parnell'. Lalor must have returned to Queen's County before the meeting, because the *Leinster Express*, 22 May 80, describes the escorting of Lalor by crowds and bands to Maryborough station on 16 May for a train journey to attend the meeting in City Hall, Dublin.

3. Walker, *Parliamentary election results* (op.cit.), p.308. In the elections 1832-83, the highest number of votes polled was 145 in 1837, and the lowest was 78 in 1857.

4. *Ibid.*

5. For a self-congratulatory account of the election in Portarlington see Lord Castletown of Upper Ossory, *'Ego'*, pp 64-7.

'recognising the consistent, if coincident, interests of the landlord and the tenant',¹ did impress, support from the earl of Portarlington probably secured the nomination for Fitzpatrick. When the poll was declared on 31 March, Fitzpatrick had beaten the liberal Robert Keating Clay of 21 St Andrew Street, Dublin 116 votes to 18.²

The election had maintained the status quo in Portarlington, while in the county a transformation in the parliamentary representation had been achieved. The success of the two Parnellites was due largely to the impact of the deepening economic crisis on the electorate, to the prestige of Parnell, to the backing of the land league, and perhaps above all to the singular appeal of Richard Lalor. Both Arthur O'Connor and Richard Lalor were, of course, home-rulers like their predecessors Kenelm T. Digby and Edmund dease. Now, however, the new Queen's County parliamentary voice was identified, not with the landed interest but with the land league.

3 The Establishment of the Land League in Queen's County

No evidence has been discovered to suggest that the mass of the tenants in Queen's County in the 1870s had any experience of formal organisation. Even such parochial bodies as benefit societies or burial clubs did not exist. The independent club was the only organisation which purported to support the interests of the tenants.

1. Webb's address to the Portarlington electors (*L.E.*, 13 Mar. 80).

2. Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p.308; *L.E.*, 3 Apr. 80.

However, with its affluent, broadly middle-class membership meeting infrequently and always in Maryborough, the club was unrepresentative of and remote from the bulk of tenants. Also, though the club's members included such veteran tenant-right agitators as Richard Lalor and the two curates associated with the Callan Tenant Protection Society, Frs Matthew Keeffe and Thomas O'Shea,¹ tenant-right was only one among several issues such as home-rule, freedom of education, union among Irishmen, and the franchise, which were commonly promoted by the club. In January 1876, the independent club did appoint a sub-committee of twelve 'to examine and verify all cases of alleged landlord oppression' in the county, and a report was forwarded to a central committee in Dublin for use by M.P.s during a debate on a 'national land bill'.² The report must have been short. Landlord-tenant relations were usually harmonious in the county: in the seven years 1872-8, only twenty-one agrarian crimes were committed,³ and one family per 1,624 holdings per annum was evicted.⁴ Tenants had little impetus to organise.

Then, as the agricultural crisis of the late 1870s deepened, the independent club paid such increasing attention to the plight of tenants that Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, could describe the club as 'a farmers' club although we have another

1. Margaret M. Phelan, 'Fr Thomas O'Shea and the Callan Tenant Protection Society' in *Old Kilkenny Review*, II, 2 (1980), pp 48-58; a brief biography of Fr Matthew Keeffe in *Old Kilkenny Review*, II, (1960), pp 25-8.

2. *L.E.*, 29 Jan. 76.

3. *Return of [agrarian] outrages...* from 1 January 1844 to 31 December 1880 [C2756], H.C. 1881, lxxvii, 887-914, (8 Jan. 81).

4. *Return by provinces and counties... of cases of eviction... in each of the years 1849 to 1880 inclusive*, H.C. 1881 (185), lxxvii, 725-48, (8 Apr. 81).

appellation.'¹ At a meeting of the club, on 29 July 1878, Fr McGee proposed 'two remedies or expedients...whereby the tenantry of Ireland may be saved or at least relieved.' The first expedient - an 'altered parliamentary policy' - Fr McGee explained as framing a 'short simple' tenant-right bill 'providing only against capricious evictions and arbitrary screwing up of rents..., and with some simple provisions for tenants voluntarily resigning their holdings'; then, having framed the bill, and presented it to parliament, Irish M.P.s were to 'see that parliament or any party in parliament rejecting it encounter every obstruction compatible with the fundamental rules of the house or the exigencies and weal of the nation'. The second expedient, Fr McGee thought, if rightly worked, would be still more effective 'and in some sense irresistible': this was the 'organised action and lawful resistance of the tenants themselves where persecution is threatened', under the guidance of the county clubs throughout the country. These county clubs he would form into 'sort of judicature bodies', which would see that the tenant measure alluded to 'while waiting for an act of parliament...became the unwritten law of the land by which the landlord and tenant should abide.'²

Fr McGee's proposal excited little enthusiasm even in the club. He did form a 'committee' on his own in Stradbally parish which met 'occasionally on Sundays after mass to discuss matters'.³ But, organising and mobilising the tenants under the leadership of the club would be difficult because, as Edward Mulhallen Marum J.P. observed,

1. L.E., 28 June 79.

2. Ibid., 3 Aug. 78.

3. Ibid., 8 Nov. 79.

'in the more remote districts of Queen's County the people know absolutely nothing of what is being done by the organisation.' (Marum thought the 'remote districts' were as close as 'twelve or fourteen miles from Maryborough'.)'

With the third successive year of depression in 1879 increasing discontent in the county, more voices in the independent club anxiously echoed the views expressed by Fr Thomas Fenelon, the parish priest of Rosenallis, in his letter to Patrick Cahill on 23 June 1879: Fr Fenelon stated that 'unless a timely remedy' was applied, 'the consequences to society may be serious', because, as he continued:

We know well that in all times and countries there is a class more or less numerous, who only await the opportunity to carry out their evil purposes, and none more opportune for them than a time of general want, under cover of which they would be prepared to justify the worst deeds.²

Official statistics for 1879 suggest that the 'worst deeds' were yet to be committed in Queen's County: throughout 1879 there were only five agrarian crimes - four threatening letters and one 'firing into a dwelling'.³

As the autumn gale of 1879 approached, demands for a 'timely remedy' to secure 'the just property of the occupier in the soil' by 'a measure of tenant-right based on the well-understood principle of fixity of tenure, fair rent and free sale'⁴ still persisted, but there was a noticeable concentration on the specific problem of paying, what

1. *L.E.*, 8 Nov. 79.

2. Fr Fenelon's letter, which was read to a meeting of the independent club on 25 June 79 (*ibid.*, 28 June 79).

3. Appendix 45, below, p. 441.

4. Resolution proposed by Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, at a meeting of the independent club on 25 June 79 (*L.E.*, 28 June 79).

were perceived to be rack-rents. Fr John McGee spoke of a 'general opinion' to have a 'universal organisation against rack-rents, and not to pay them'.

What was described by the *Leinster Express* as a 'rent demonstration',² and by Canon John O'Hanlon as 'the first important land league meeting in Queen's County',³ was held in Maryborough on 5 October 1879. Organised by members of the independent club - probably, in the main, by the president, Richard Lalor, and the secretary, Patrick Cahill - the meeting with its bands, banners, caparisoned platform, and cavalcades set the pattern for future land league meetings in the county. Prominent speakers included Joseph Biggar, John Dillon and Timothy D. Sullivan. Though the meeting served to introduce Arthur O'Connor to his future constituents, and much rhetoric from the platform focused on support for Parnell and his parliamentary tactics, notable advice was given to the tenants who were anxious over rents due. The chairman of the meeting, Richard Lalor, evoking his brother James Fintan Lalor's principle of subsistence before rent,⁴ advised tenants unable to pay their rents to:

keep what food would support them until next September, to keep sufficient seed for the spring crops, and on no account to part with their stock for the purpose of making up the rent, if so doing would render it impossible for them to provide food for their families, and crops for their lands.⁵

1. Report of meeting of the independent club on 25 June 79 (*L.E.*, 28 June 79).

2. *Ibid.*, 11 Oct. 79.

3. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.728; cf. above, p.69.

4. James Fintan Lalor, *Collected Writings*, with a biographical note by L. Fogarty, pp. 47-8.

5. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.728.

Resolutions thereafter included a call on the 'landlords of the county not to ruin their tenants by forcing them to pay rent in the present season', and a resolve 'never to cease agitating...until the tenant farmers of Ireland are settled on the land forever, either as peasant proprietors or tenants at fair rents, with the right of free sale, should they so desire.''

Of the speeches at that meeting in Maryborough on 5 October 1879, it is on John Dillon's speech that historians have tended to concentrate.² Urging the tenants to refrain from outrage, Dillon advised each parish to form a league branch, which should meet every Sunday after mass. Tenants who had the money were to pay their rent in November; tenants whose rents were 'too high' were 'to ask the landlord to reduce them by fifty or sixty per cent, and, if he refuse, pay him no rent.' Then, if a man was evicted, Dillon advocated what was essentially a policy of social ostracism: a 'ban' should be put on the evicted tenant's land, and 'if any man then takes up that land let no man speak to him or have any business transactions with him.'³

Meetings such as the Maryborough 'rent demonstration' were disapproved of by the two catholic bishops whose dioceses encompassed more than 98 per cent of Queen's County. Dr James Walshe, bishop of Kildare & Leighlin, writing on 21 September 1879 to Fr Patrick F. Nolan, the parish priest of Tullow, doubted the 'expediency' of a meeting to be held the following Sunday in Tullow, County Carlow. Clearly unhappy about 'violent language, inflammatory harangue or

1. O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, vol.ii, p.728.

2. Lyons, *Dillon*, p.32; Moody, *Davitt*, p.321.

3. *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Oct. 79; *Nation*, 11 Oct. 79; *L.E.*, 11 Oct. 79; Lyons, *Dillon*, p.32; Moody, *Davitt*, p.321.

denunciatory phraseology', which would 'defeat the legitimate object of the meeting', and, though recognising that people had a 'right to a public exposition of their conditions and wants', Bishop Walshe favoured:

a calm and clear statement by tenants of their losses and consequent needs set respectfully before their landlord, which would receive his kind consideration and obtain such aid as could in the circumstances be reasonably expected.'

The *Leinster Express* on 1 November reported that Dr Patrick F. Moran, bishop of Ossory, when consulted by Edward Mulhallen Marum J.P., refused to give his support to a meeting planned by the local farmers' club for Kilkenny on 19 November. Like Bishop Walshe, Bishop Moran opposed the growing land agitation, and preferred private meetings of landlords with their tenants. (In December 1879, Moran characterised the leadership of the land league as 'atheist', 'protestant', 'socialist', and 'fenian'.)²

But the public meetings continued. On 2 November 1879, Richard Lalor (by now a committee member of the Irish National Land League, which had been founded twelve days earlier)³ convened and chaired a meeting of about five hundred farmers and labourers in a field adjoining Raheen chapel. Significantly, the catholic clergy stayed away. Advocating a remission of rents, the gathering pledged 'not to take any land...from which a tenant has been ejected either on account

1. Bishop Walshe to Fr Nolan (*L.E.*, 4 Oct. 79).

2. Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Creation of the Modern Irish State 1878-1886*, pp 27-8.

3. Moody, *Davitt*, Appendix H, pp 572-8; other Queen's County representatives on the committee were John Redington (incorrectly printed John Redlington in Moody, *Davitt*, p.575), the son of a tenant farmer from Pallas near Maryborough, William Henry Cobbe, the protestant auctioneer and merchant from Portarlinton, and Arthur O'Connor soon to be elected M.P. for the county.

of non-title or non-payment of rent, if such rent has been more than the government valuation.' It was also decided that three men, including Richard Lalor, should 'construct' a 'committee for the purpose of looking after the interests of the tenant farmers of the parish of Raheen, and the political interests of Ireland in general'.

On 4 November, an independent club meeting convened by circular was held in Boland's Hotel, Maryborough. Dominated by its chairman, Richard Lalor, the meeting adopted resolutions identical to those at Raheen plus a pledge 'to hold a public meeting...at or near the scene' of 'any eviction of a tenant for non-payment of an unfair rent or other act of landlord oppression': this, according to its proposer, Patrick Cahill, would 'cause such an expose as will make the wrongdoer shrink from the storm of indignation which will be raised against him!' While the proposal 'that a land committee be organised' was carried, here, unlike in Raheen, there was opposition from prominent catholic clergy who were present. For example, Fr Thomas Nolan, the parish priest of Abbeyleix, echoing Fr John McGee's proposal to the club sixteen months earlier,² preferred the idea of the club, led by the clergy, being extended to involve the 'whole country' in 'one movement' which, he said, would be 'of more importance than small gatherings of parochial committees'.³

An apprehensive editorial in the *Leinster Express* on 8 November 1879, referring to the independent club and the meeting in Raheen, observed that 'both assemblages afford us evidence that, as regards

1, *L.E.*, 8 Nov. 79.

2, Above, pp 83-4.

3, *L.E.*, 8 Nov. 79.

the Queen's County, the agitation with which we are concerned is entering on a new and, we fear, a dangerous phase.'

Thomas Webber, the land agent employed by Captain Cosby, agreed with the view of the *Leinster Express*. Webber believed that after 1879 - a year he described as 'more calamitous to agricultural interests than the previous one' when 'crops were all short, prices bad..., American competition on the increase', and 'depression of trade...universal in England' - 'political agitation finds the country ready for its operations.' Landlord-tenant relations worsened in 1879: the total number of ejectment processes entered for the Queen's County quarter sessions had grown from 110 in 1878 to 156 in 1879, and to 232 in 1880, while decrees for non-payment of rent were obtained against 72 tenants in 1878, 118 in 1879, and 169 in 1880.²

On 12 February 1880, a private meeting of about six or seven independent club members, including Richard Lalor, Patrick Cahill, William H. Cobbe and Fr John McGee, listened to attending tenants from the neighbourhood of Ballybrophy and Maryborough who complained of 'oppressive dealings on the part of their landlords'. Having questioned the tenants, the members resolved to organise meetings at Knockaroe (near Ballybrophy) and Maryborough for 22 and 29 February respectively.³

On the day before the Knockaroe meeting - the first 'indignation meeting' in the county against a particular landlord - the *Leinster*

1. Cosby papers: Webber's report for the year ending 1 Feb. 80.

2. 'Return of ejectments entered from 1 Jan. 44 to Dec. 80', signed by Gilbert Kelly, deputy clerk of the peace, Queen's County (T.C.D., Davitt papers, MS 9635/3).

3. *L.E.*, 14 Feb. 80.

Express editorial, asserting that 'a minority of the club has taken upon itself to act in the name of the association', lamented that the club, 'which has hitherto borne a high character in Irish politics should have resolved on proceedings which can have no good effect, and which are fraught with danger to the public peace'. With Davitt in mind, the editorial expressed disbelief that priests like Fathers Thomas Nolan, Thomas O'Shea and Matthew Keeffe 'would select a person of this stamp to instruct their flocks'.¹

Though Davitt's diary entry about the Knockaroe meeting on 22 February 1880 was only a succinct 'fair meeting and fine day',² twenty-three years later he could deliberately write, 'the memory of this meeting still lingers in the centre of the Leinster counties.'³ The meeting provided an important spur for a county slow to organise branches of the land league, rallying cries for future demonstrations, and, until the evicted tenant's family was restored to the holding in 1908,⁴ a sustained test-of-strength for local boycotting.

Held in a field outside the walls of the little Knockaroe chapel (about one mile east of Borris-in-Ossory), the meeting was to denounce Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes, high sheriff of Queen's County, for his action as a landlord in evicting a Malachy Kelly from a farm at nearby Bushfield. 'Apprehensive of some disturbances', as 'this was the first meeting of this sort...in the county', Thomas Hamilton R.M. had fifty armed constabulary with him 'to assist in preserving the

1. *L.E.*, 21 Feb. 80.

2. *T.C.D.*, Davitt papers, MS 9531.

3. Davitt, *Fall*, p.224.

4. Hilary D. Walsh, *Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois*, p.172.

peace'.¹ The meeting, though professedly 'an indignation meeting', was 'peaceable and orderly'² with the attendance - variously estimated as being between eight hundred and fifteen hundred - 'good-humoured, well-dressed and comfortable-looking, altho' principally of the small tenant-farmer and labourer classes'.³

It is likely that Malachy Kelly's case was, as Thomas Hamilton R.M. noted, 'not one of any particular hardship'⁴ for he still retained 'another large farm on an adjoining property'.⁵ (The adjoining 'property' belonged to Revd George Ayres, at whose suit Kelly's other holding was formally seized on 14 September 1881.)⁶ From the various versions,⁷ the undisputed facts would seem to be: Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes of Barretstown Castle, Naas, County Kildare, who owned 2,467 acres in Queen's County,⁸ decided, after the passing of the land act of 1870, that all farms on his estate over £50 valuation should be let on thirty-one year leases. Borrowes, who never employed an agent, personally inspected the farm (160 statute acres, valuation £107.15s.) with valuers, and in 1873 agreed on a lease with Kelly. Conditions in the lease included a limit of sixteen acres of tillage (only eight of which could be in corn), rotation of crops, and an upper limit of ten acres of hay. There was no hanging gale on this or any part of Borrowes's estate. Kelly, who had held from year to year at £128 per

1. Report of Thomas Hamilton R.M. on 26 Feb. 80 (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1880/5151).

2. Ibid. 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid. 5. Ibid.

6. L.E., 17 Sept. 81.

7. Report of her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, part II [C2779-11], H.C. 1881, xix, pp 1135-6; L.E., 28 Feb. 80; Walsh, *Borris-in-Ossory*, pp 169-70.

8. Return of the owners of land, ..., [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 76, [20 Apr. 76].

annum, had his rent increased by the lease to £155 per annum. When Kelly was evicted on 7 February 1880 at a cost of £23 to the landlord, he owed £211.10s.6d. in rent, £5.7s.9d. poor rate, and £4.9s.9d. county cess. Although Borrowes predictably maintained that Kelly 'was always a miserable tenant in an agricultural point-of-view', 'probably there is substance in Edward Mulhallen Marum's evidence to the Bessborough commission that it was largely due to the drop in cattle prices in the late 1870s and, to a lesser extent, increasing labour costs, that Kelly was in such arrears.'²

The catholic clergy were conspicuously absent from the Knockaroe meeting, although two letters, from Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, and Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, were read from the platform. Both similarly expressed sympathy with the meeting, deprecated the 'cruel and oppressive working of landlordism', and called on the tenants 'to protect themselves...from such cruelties by every artifice, organisation and troubles to the spoilers that conscience and God may sanction'.³

Seated on the platform with Davitt were John Ferguson, a well-to-do protestant member of the committee of the land league from Glasgow, and James Redpath, a special correspondent of the *New York Tribune* gaining his first experience of such a meeting. The local notables on the platform included the meeting's chairman Michael Carroll (a local

1. *Report of her majesty's commissioners of inquiry*, [C2779-11], H.C. 1881, xix, p.1136.

2. *Ibid.*, p.1135.

3. *L.E.*, 28 Feb. 80.

large tenant farmer and a future vice-president of the local branch of the land league), Richard Lalor, Arthur O'Connor, Patrick Cahill LL.B., Edward Mulhallen Marum J.P. (soon to be elected M.P. for Kilkenny county), John P. McCraith and William J. Menton, two solicitors from Roscrea, Patrick Doran and Patrick A. Meehan, two publicans from Maryborough, and William Fitzpatrick, John McMahon (from Ballyroan),¹ John Redington and Hulton J. Harrison, four large tenant farmers.² (As 'this was the first meeting of this sort...in the county', and in the year before the eviction of Kelly at least 31 families consisting of 141 persons were evicted in the county,³ it is reasonable to suspect the 'indignation' of at least the large farmers on the platform. Perhaps, it was not so much the 'cruel and oppressive working of landlordism' *per se* which provoked them, but a sense of insecurity when a fellow large farmer was evicted.)

While sentiments such as those expressed in the letters from the two priests were repeatedly voiced from the platform, much emphasis - especially by Cahill, Lalor and Davitt - was placed on 'land-grabbing' and the need for tenants to organise. Cahill spoke of tenants 'tempted to betray each other' where the 'friendly visit was too often...the cloak to cover the inspection of the rival who means to bid over the head of the occupying tenant.'⁴ Lalor's advice, much alluded to in ensuing meetings, was in his words: 'Do you see that black cloud hanging over the farm? There will always be a black cloud

1. Not to be confused with John McMahon, the grocer who became the treasurer of the Mountmellick branch of the land league.

2. *L.E.*, 28 Feb. 80.

3. Appendix 18, below, p. 422.

4. *L.E.*, 28 Feb. 80.

hanging over it... Leave the farm to the hares and rabbits, the foxes and wild fowl, if they are not afraid to alight upon it.'¹ Davitt in his *The fall of feudalism in Ireland* wrote of a 'speaker' - identified by Moody as Davitt himself² - placing a ban on the farm with the words: 'the landlord has thrown Malachy Kelly and his family out of their home and holding, but today you and I draw a line round this farm, and let no man dare to cross it with covetous intent if he wishes to live in peace within this county.'³ Davitt concluded his assertive speech with:

I have told you that nothing is to be got by a policy of conciliation either in parliament or from the landlords in Ireland. But there is a way of getting our rights from both; that is by resolute and determined organisation. I will repeat to you what I have repeated on fifty platforms in Ireland for the last eighteen months - the fable of the bundle of sticks. A man may break one stick but he cannot break a hundred. So also this landlord can break Malachy Kelly, but if there were one hundred Malachy Kellys in this county he could not break them... Are you satisfied that this cursed system of landlordism shall continue to exist in Ireland or not? Are you resolved that that system shall be crushed...? If you are so resolved, organise at once into branches of the National Land League - an organisation that is open and above board.⁴

The second 'indignation' meeting planned by the independent club cabal was held in the market square of Maryborough the following 29 February to protest against anticipated evictions for non-payment of rent on the 350-acre Pallas estate⁵ (about two miles west of Maryborough) of William Clarke, coroner for Queen's County.⁶ After

1. S.P.O., I.N.L.L. & I.N.L. papers, Speeches 1879-88, carton 2, p.201.

2. Moody, *Davitt*, p.367.; also, in Maryborough on 5 Oct. 84, Davitt said, 'I remember...drawing a line round the farm of Malachy Kelly, and no land-grabber in this county has dared to cross that line yet.' (S.P.O., I.N.L.L. & I.N.L. papers, carton 1, p.346).

3. Davitt, *Fall*, p.225.

4. Unidentified newspaper cutting enclosed with Thomas Hamilton's report (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1881/5151). He described the cutting as quoting the speech 'very fully and accurately' (Ibid.)

5. *Return of owners of land...* [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 Apr. 1876].

6. *L.E.*, 6 Mar. 80

the peaceful meeting in Knockaroe, Thomas Hamilton R.M. considered it unnecessary to draft in extra police to keep the peace.' Again, the catholic clergy were absent: the *Leinster Express* reported that it was 'freely circulated that specific instructions had been sent from the bishop [Dr James Walshe, bishop of Kildare & Leighlin] to abstain from attending'.² The now *de rigueur* features of such meetings - bands, banners and evergreens - were exhibited, and a crowd of about fifteen hundred heard speeches similar, on resolutions almost identical, to those at Knockaroe from Thomas Sexton (from April a member of the executive of the land league), Richard Lalor, Arthur O'Connor, Patrick Cahill, William Fitzpatrick, John Redington, Patrick A. Meehan, and other local figures. However, the meeting, ostensibly in the interests of tenants, drew a revealing editorial comment from the *Leinster Express* that 'amongst the most emphatic supporters of the demand of the Pallas tenants for an abatement of rent are several traders who have huge dealings with the tenant farmers.'³

While the spring sowing, the spring gale, and the persisting distress were of greatest concern to tenants in Queen's County, some distraction during March and April was afforded by the selection and election of Richard Lalor and Arthur O'Connor as M.P.s, and the ensuing celebratory public meetings. Tenants were heartened by the election of two M.P.s so clearly identified with the now increasingly

1. Report of Thomas Hamilton R.M. (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1880/5151).

2. *L.E.*, 6 Mar. 80.

3. *Ibid.* The newspaper did not identify the 'most emphatic supporters', but it is significant that when a branch of the land league was formed in Maryborough its vice-president, secretary and treasurer - respectively, Patrick Doran, Patrick A. Meehan and Thomas Brennan - were 'traders' (Appendix 38, below p.437; below, p.265).

inseparable cause of home rule and that of the tenants.' Lalor, at least, had no doubt about his priorities: on 21 April 1880, in a letter to the Kildare M.P., Charles H. Meldon, he wrote, 'the land question is now the question of the hour - the one above all others which demands the immediate attention of parliament.'²

Lalor and O'Connor were among the eighteen M.P.s who participated in the Rotunda land conference on 29 April 1880 under the chairmanship of John Ferguson where a programme - based on the principle of universal occupying ownership - to solve the land question was adopted. As an interim measure, it was agreed that landlords' power of ejectment for non-payment of rent and for overholding should be suspended for two years in the case of all holdings valued at £20 and under; for the same period the landlord should not be entitled to rents higher than the poor law valuation for any holding.³ That evening, a crowded public meeting in the same Rotunda, chaired by Parnell, approved the conference's programme.

A land agitation, to all appearances tenant-centred, which in Queen's County had subsided during the general election, resumed publicly during the first week of May 1880. As in the previous February, William Clarke's estate in Pallas was the source of the disturbances. When Davitt spoke at the national convention of the American land league, held in Trenor Hall, New York on 18 May 1880, he used the Pallas events to illustrate a land league entering a more militant phase. Having stated that the organisation of the land

1. Cf. Boyton's speech, below, p.102.

2. Lalor to Meldon (L.E., 24 Apr. 80).

3. Moody, *Davitt*, pp 374-5.

league was 'now going on rapidly in the four provinces', he outlined the 'two means' being used to destroy 'tyrant landlordism'. Activity in parliament, he said, would be 'the reflex of the work going on in Ireland':

In the House of Commons we pursue a constructive policy so that you will be able to reconcile the speeches in Ireland against landlordism and the speeches in the House which might not seem to be in keeping with those delivered by members of the same party in Ireland. If a landlord evicts a tenant, then the land league takes action in the courts against him... We aim to impress the farmers with the necessity of refusing to take any farm from which another tenant has been evicted, nor to bid for any cattle sold for rent. As an instance, a farmer named Redington had his cattle seized for rent; but previous to the seizure he branded their horns with the words 'rack-rent'. When the sale took place there were few bidders, although many persons attended and the cattle were sold for one-third of their value.'

The farmer instanced by Davitt was John, the son of Thomas Redington, an old independent club member. John was aged twenty-nine, and married with one child. Because his parents were septuagenarians, the father also being deaf, and 'from the combined misfortunes of the past few years...almost an imbecile',² John ran the fifty-four acre farm on which all the Redingtons lived. In 1852, the annual rent on the farm, valued at £41.10s., was raised from almost £58 to £67, and in 1865 to £80.³ In March 1879, mainly due - according to John - to the almost total failure of their barley crop in the previous four years, the Redingtons were unable to pay their rent.⁴

The disturbances in Pallas and Maryborough in May 1880 arose when the landlord, William Clarke, executed a civil-bill decree obtained in the county court against Thomas Redington for £49.5s. for rent and

1. D.B. Cashman, *The life of Michael Davitt and the secret history of the Land League*, pp 136-7.

2. Memorial of Redington (in Armagh gaol) to Forster, the chief secretary (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1882/29267).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

costs.¹ On 1 May at about 8 a.m., Sub-Inspector William D. Grene with thirty-two police (twenty of whom were armed) accompanied Thomas Miller², the deputy sub-sheriff and his two bailiffs to the Redington farm. Five cows, all branded prominently with the words 'rack-rent', and the letters 'J.R.P.' (presumably for John Redington, Pallas), were seized. When the party was about one hundred yards away, home-made tin horns were sounded bringing labourers from the fields and yards onto the road. Then, an extraordinary procession composed of cows, bailiffs, horse-drawn cars, police, and labourers, and led by John Redington, wended its way to Maryborough. The journey was slow and erratic as the cows seemed to run down every lane-way and through every gateway. Finally, in Maryborough a large and noisy crowd attended the putting of the cows into an auctioneers's yard.³

On 5 May, the cattle were auctioned. Thomas Gowing and John Dunne, both farmers and members of the independent club, bid for Redington against Clarke, and bought the cows for £36.10s. - about three-quarters of the sum in the civil-bill decree. (Even if such an auction did not raise enough to pay a decree, by obtaining a writ of *fieri facias*⁴ or an ejectment decree a landlord could still coerce legally and effectively a solvent tenant into paying his rent.) After the sale, Richard Lalor, at the head of the Maryborough Young Men's Society band, led a large crowd to the town's market square where an indignation meeting was held. Speaking from an improvised platform, Lalor, along with William Fitzpatrick, Hulton J. Harrison, Patrick

1. Though John Malcolmson was the sub-sheriff (*Thom's* 1880, p.1147), Thomas Miller deputised for him for most of the land war.

2. L.E., 8 May 80.

3. Ibid.

4. Cf. below, p.217.

Doran and Patrick A. Meehan, used the occasion to stress the need for tenant farmers to join the land league. After cheering for Lalor, Fitzpatrick, and the land league, the crowd with the cows and the band paraded through the town, stopping at the houses of Thomas Miller, the deputy sub-sheriff, and John Gaze, the auctioneer, where tunes were played as a 'sort of triumphant valediction'. Then the cows were taken back to Pallas with the crowd accompanying them part of the way.'

Still there were no branches of the land league in Queen's County. The hostility of the Roman Catholic Church was a major impediment. Of twenty-nine bishops in 'late 1879', Larkin includes Dr James Walshe, bishop of Kildare & Leighlin, and Dr Patrick F. Moran, bishop of Ossory, in his list of nine 'hostile' to the land league.² Almost all of the county, as already stated, was in the two bishops' dioceses.³ On 2 May, a pastoral letter from Bishop Moran was read to congregations in his cathedral and chapels throughout his diocese. In the letter, Bishop Moran denounced the land league which, he felt, was 'a mere mask for fenianism', which would lead the people into 'illegal associations condemned by the church, and would indoctrinate their minds with communistic theories destructive alike of social order and of religion'. 'I am not aware' he wrote, 'that these pestiferous tenets have as yet taken root in this diocese; but should any attempt be made to disseminate them here, I trust that the clergy and the people will be found united in casting them forth, and in waging an unceasing war against them.'⁴

1. *L.E.*, 8 May 80; *Carlow Sentinel*, 8 May 80.

2. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church 1878-1886*, p. 24.

3. Above, p. 87.

4. *Nation*, 8 May 80; *L.E.*, 8 May 80.

When it was decided, in spite of episcopal disapproval, to convene a public meeting in Maryborough (part of Bishop Moran's diocese) on 27 May to form a branch of the land league in the town, and to initiate steps for the formation of branches throughout the county, Fr John Doyle, *vicar forane* and parish priest of the town, reacted unequivocally. At mass in Maryborough chapel on 23 May, he told his congregation:

I consider it my duty as parish priest to advise the people committed to my care against any and every organisation, political or otherwise, contrary to the spirit and maxims of the gospel and the teachings of the church. Our Divine Lord told His apostles and the future pastors of His church that they were the light of the world and the salt of the earth. He cautioned them to beware of false teachers, who would come to them in the clothing of sheep, but who were inwardly ravening wolves... I believe the principles of the land league, as judged from the public utterances of its recognised exponents, are not in harmony with the spirit and maxims of the Gospel, and therefore I would advise you to take no part in the meeting of Thursday next.¹

Though the meeting, which was chaired by William Fitzpatrick, did take place that Thursday evening outside the market house in Maryborough, it is notable that only about three hundred attended. After Patrick A. Meehan read out letters in support of the land league from Arthur O'Connor, Richard Lalor (both were attending parliament), and Martin Delaney², and opening remarks were made by the chairman, Michael Boyton addressed the meeting. Boyton, an Irish-American with Kildare connections, was one of the local organisers appointed early 1880 by the executive of the land league.³ Speaking for about an hour on the general aims and methods of the land league, he aggressively

1. Fr Doyle's letter (L.E., 29 May 80).

2. Martin Delaney, a publican and farmer from Borris-in-Ossory who was active in maintaining the boycott on Malachy Kelly's farm in Bushfield, wished the meeting success 'notwithstanding Fr Doyle's admonitions to the contrary' (ibid., 29 May 80).

3. Moody, *Davitt*, p.361; Bew, *Land and the national question*, pp 237-8..

answered the imputations of Bishop Moran and Fr Doyle. Having asserted that the land league 'preached education, organisation, and Christianity in its purest forms', Boyton said that they were not going to allow any individual prelate or any individual clergyman, no matter how much they respected him, and though they knelt weekly at his feet in the confessional, to ascribe to them principles that they considered 'foul and calumnious'.¹ At the end of the meeting, when a proposal 'to form...into a branch of the Irish National Land League to be called the Maryborough branch of the Queen's County land league' was adopted, about two hundred members were enrolled.²

The second land league branch in Queen's County was formed on 13 June after a public meeting in Newtown - a colliery district about eight miles west of Carlow town. Once more, Michael Boyton was the principal speaker. Addressing a crowd of about 2,500, carefully watched by forty policemen, he echoed much of his speech in Maryborough. However in that nationalist area, and perhaps prompted by the Carlow-Graigie brass band's huge banner, which had a crownless harp surmounting the words 'It will sound again', his speech in Newtown had a very nationalist pitch. He said:

There are great but misguided men who state and write that we are leaving aside the great glorious cause of Irish nationality, and occupying our attention with the lesser one. It is false. Until you can take the green colour which God Almighty printed on that ground, you can never separate the greater from the lesser of these glorious causes. We are men engaged in doing the only thing that we can do to gain our independence from the British constitution, (cheers)³

1, L.E., 29 May 80.

2, Ibid.

3, S.P.O., C.S.O., I.N.N.L. & I.N.L. papers, Speeches 1879-88, carton 1, p.345; carton 2, p.31.

A significant presence on the Newtown platform along with a coterie of activists from Maryborough were two catholic priests, Fr Joseph McCrea and Fr James Dempsey, curates from the parishes of Doonane & Mayo and Carlow & Graigue respectively. While clearly in favour of a 'change in the land laws', both priests were a restraining influence on the assembly. Of the two priests, Fr McCrea was the more direct: he charged all present to 'be orderly, peaceable, and to utter no word of offence' but to respect their neighbour (even their landlord), because, he said, 'our cause does not want disorder. It is built upon the ground of justice and truth.'

There was still destitution in Queen's County. The crops in the county were good in 1880 - especially the potato - but prices were less than the previous year, and though prices for animals had improved, the numbers for sale had dropped. The net result for the county was an increase in gross income of less than 3 per cent on 1879.² Therefore tenants, already in debt to a variety of creditors, including their landlords, were unlikely to be able to pay arrears of rent and rent due in November 1880. In this context, the land league expanded and developed its organisation in the county. An editorial in the *Leinster Express* on 25 September 1880 commented: 'it is now apparent that the agitation on the land question will be conducted during the remaining weeks of autumn, and during the approaching winter with redoubled agitation.'

It is reasonable to suggest that this intensification of land

1. *L.E.*, 19 June 80.

2. Appendix 3, below, p.413.

league activity would have happened whatever the attitude of the catholic clergy - perhaps the greatest impediment to the league in the county. In the meantime, however, a remarkable transformation developed in Bishop Moran's approach to the agitation. Moran probably realised that the land league was determined to organise in his diocese regardless of his attitude, and 'concluded that he must allow his priests to participate or forfeit their influence with the people'.¹ In any case, exactly five months after his pastoral letter denouncing the land league was read to congregations in his cathedral and chapels throughout his diocese,² a public meeting was held in Kilkenny city to form a branch of the land league. Chaired by Edward Mulhallen Marum M.P., and attended by Parnell along with the M.P.s Richard Lalor, Arthur O'Connor and Edmund Leamy (M.P. for Waterford city), the meeting heard the reading of a public declaration of support from Bishop Moran, which included the words:

The present time is one of grave crisis for our tenant farmers, and it is most just that in a peaceable and constitutional way they should show their determination to defend their interests, to assert their rights, and to redress their grievances.³

Bishop Moran expressed his changed views even more directly in a letter to Monsignor Tobias Kirby, the rector of the Irish college in Rome. He wrote, 'It seems to me that the agitation for remedying our land laws, as it at present has taken hold of the country, is quite constitutional and legitimate and most national.'⁴ Thence, it was

1. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church, 1878-1886*, p.117.

2. Above, p. 100.

3. *L.E.*, 2 Oct. 80

4. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church, 1878-1886* (op.cit.), p.49.

with episcopal approval that the priests of the Queen's County portion of the diocese of Ossory could participate in the land league organisation, though with the constraint that 'we cannot be too much on our guard to prevent our good people from being contaminated by irreligious principles, and to keep them in paths of justice and equity.' '

The two other dioceses, which encompassed almost all the rest of the county (the metropolitan diocese of Dublin embraced only six hundred acres of Queen's County), were effectively administered by two coadjutor bishops: Bishop James Walshe of Kildare & Leighlin was old and feeble,² and Bishop Michael Flannery of Killaloe was 'mentally incapacitated'.³ Neither coadjutor bishop - Dr James Ryan of Killaloe and Dr James Lynch of Kildare & Leighlin - whatever his private opinions, prevented his priests' active involvement with the land league.

When the parliamentary session ended on 7 September 1880, Richard Lalor and Arthur O'Connor returned to aid the development of the land league in the county. On 29 September, Lalor chaired what was to be the last meeting of a lingering Queen's County Independent Club. Designated a 'practical meeting', it was 'to have the interests of liberal voters properly attended to at revision sessions', and to decide whether or not to give evidence to the Bessborough commission then sitting. The commission inspired no confidence among the members present. On the revision of voters' lists it was decided to ask

1, Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church, 1878-1886*, p.49.

2, O'Hanlon, *Queen's County*, p.117.

3, Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church, 1878-1886*, (op.cit.), p.24, n.1.

catholic clergy to urge the people to attend the revision sessions, and to employ the solicitor, Charles Corcoran (the club had only £2 in funds, and Corcoran only charged them for expenses and car hire) to defend electors objected to by the tories. However, more pressing matters concentrated the minds of most present. A voluble John Redington, holding a 'sheaf of ejectment processes', concurring with Richard Lalor's 'there is no use of talking and doing nothing', and chagrined that all Parnell had achieved in parliament was 'buckshot instead of bullets', felt that land league branches in every parish was the only hope for farmers. An apprehensive Fr John McGee demurred. 'Although', Fr McGee said, 'I cannot fail to recognise that the land league may be of vast benefit to the people', and that its branches would be 'very well engaged in threshing the question of tenant-right in their own divisions of the county...there are some of its principles which no priest, no logician, no ethical writer could possibly give his sanction to.' Fr McGee envisaged the club's function as separate from that of the land league: it should be extended to 'every case where catholic rights were assailed, and where the interests of the catholic and liberal party could be advanced.' Finally, a resolution proposed by Fr McGee was adopted by the meeting:

That in the opinion of this club it is expedient that branches of the land league be established in as many parishes as possible throughout the Queen's County - and as quickly as may be - and that we, the independent club, while preserving our own position and autonomy, are heartily in favour of such a movement.'

The preservation of the 'position and autonomy' of the independent

club, as desired by Fr McGee, was not realised. The club ceased to function as a separate entity, and was absorbed into the land league movement. At least 60 per cent of the active lay members of the club became members of branches of the land league in Queen's County.¹

On 17 October 1880, Lalor chaired a public meeting in Maryborough, which served to quicken the organisation of branches of the land league in the county. On the platform, before an estimated ten thousand, along with prominent local figures were the M.P.s Arthur O'Connor, Edmund Leamy and Edward Mulhallen Marum. Also publicly demonstrating their solidarity with the land league were five parish priests and ten curates. Resolutions adopted at the meeting were, with negligible rewording, all adopted at subsequent public meetings to form branches of the land league. These resolutions were:

(1) That we regard the present land system of this country as the most odious, degrading and disastrous result of the foreign government of Ireland, and that we shall never cease to contend by every means in our power until the tenant farmers of Ireland shall be made the owners of the soil they cultivate.

(2) That until such time as the tenant farmers of Ireland shall become the owners of their land, they should not be required to pay a higher rent than Griffith's valuation.

(3) That we hereby renew the pledge already given by us not to take a farm from which a tenant had been unjustly evicted.²

There followed in Queen's County, especially in November, a plethora of Sunday and weekday meetings, which established branches, enrolled members, and adopted resolutions similar to those adopted at

1. This rough percentage was reached by comparing seventy-eight names listed in the *Leinster Express* as attending meetings of the independent club from January 1876 to April 1880 with the names of members of committees and delegations from branches of the land league in Queen's County listed in the *Leinster Express* and the *Leinster Leader*. The method is fraught with possible error. Nonetheless, one could state, with reasonable confidence, that forty-nine men simply exchanged organisation.

2. *L.E.*, 23 Oct, 80.

the Maryborough meeting on 17 October 1880. After 2 November 1880, increasing attention was also given at these meetings to stimulating support and subscriptions for the defence of Parnell and thirteen other land-leaguers who had been charged with conspiracy. Often held in chapel yards and chaired by local priests, the meetings were usually peaceable and orderly. Of course, the ubiquitous government note-takers and armed police were conducive to the preservation of law and order. Also, the restraining influence of the priests was probably considerable. Representative of the approach taken by the clerical chairmen at these early land league meetings was that of the Mountrath curate, Fr William Byrne. When chairing a meeting in Mountrath on 14 November 1880, Fr Byrne counselled the crowd to be guided by the 'spirit of fair play', and not to listen to anyone who would 'sanction the taking away of the life of a fellow man - whether landlord, agent or bailiff'; he hoped that there would be none of 'those foolish cries' such as 'Shoot him!', 'Rory of the hills' or 'lead', for 'to do so was to offer the greatest insult that man could offer the ministers of religion who were standing by their side.'

Speakers at meetings to form branches of the land league stressed the need for protestant and catholic tenants to be united. At a meeting in Rathdowney on 7 November 1880 Richard Lalor denounced unnamed mischief-making landlords who tried to 'create divisions between catholic and protestant tenants' by 'pretending to their protestant tenants' that the land league was 'trying to get rid of all protestant tenants in Ireland as well as landlords'.² At the same

1, L.E., 20 Nov, 80.

2, Ibid., 13 Nov, 80

meeting, Edward Mulhallen Marum spoke at length condemning the sectarian prejudice, which he asserted prevailed in Queen's County, and concluded by calling on catholics and protestants 'to band together in their country's cause'.¹ A week later, at a meeting in Mountrath, Fr James Connolly, the Mountmellick curate, said he could not understand why protestants who were 'going to be served by this land agitation as much as the catholics' did not join the land league': he suggested that it looked like 'cowardice' for protestants 'not to join with their fellow countrymen because they are catholics, and to refuse to take part in a cause which is for the common good'.² The Mountrath crowd laughingly approved of the responding quip from a 'voice' that the protestants were 'like the cats that would fish but don't like to wet their feet'.³

Public remarks critical of protestant unwillingness to participate in the land league did not emanate only from catholics. Alfred Salter, a young protestant tenant farmer who became vice-president of the Stradbally branch, won loud applause from the crowd attending a land league meeting in Stradbally on 21 November 1880. Speaking from the platform, he vaingloriously told the crowd that the reason the land question was not settled long ago was because 'a lot of petty landlord parties' did not come forward like himself, and 'work like men together'; 'they would come to them in the ditch and in the hedge, and run round the fields afraid of their landlords... They would not come fearlessly upon that public platform and pay one shilling to the

1, L.E., 13 Nov. 80.

2, Ibid., 20 Nov., 80.

3, Ibid.

cause that was serving them all.' (As Salter was in arrears to his landlord, Captain Cosby,² it is tempting to describe him as a self-serving opportunist who saw in the land league one means of solving his financial difficulties.)

Two branches made conspicuous attempts deliberately to enrol protestants who had not joined the land league. On 17 December 1880, Fr William Lynch, the parish priest of Rathdowney, chaired a meeting in his town's concert hall. Also present were three catholic curates and the committee of the local branch. The hall was 'filled with respectable protestants' who all joined the league, contributed to the Parnell defence fund, and apparently adopted two resolutions:

- (1) The principles of the land league, being perfectly free from all injustices and all sectarianism, deserve the support of all just-minded men of every denomination,
- (2) We pledge ourselves to observe most strictly the rules of the land league, especially that rule which directs that the tenants on each estate shall act together in paying their rents,

Too much weight ought not to be given to one remark, but suspicion about the motives of some protestants might be gleaned from the words of an Isaac Barton, who, after seconding a resolution, said he trusted sincerely that they were about to win all that they had a right to expect.³

A similar meeting was held four days later in Clough (almost two miles north-east of Rathdowney) under the auspices of the land league

1. *L.E.*, 27 Nov. 80. Speaking after Salter, William Fitzpatrick (a tenant farmer from Deerpark - near Mountrath - who became president of the Castletown branch of the land league), said that never was he placed in a higher or more gratifying position than the one he then occupied to be called upon to second a resolution 'proposed so ably by the independent, honourable, protestant gentleman' who was prepared to stand by them (*ibid.*).

2. Report on the trinity term quarter sessions in Queen's County (*ibid.*, 25 June 80).

3. *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 80; unfortunately, Barton's actual words were not reported in the newspaper.

branch in Aghaboe. Chaired by the local parish priest, Fr Matthew Keeffe, the meeting's proceedings echoed those at Rathdowney.¹ However, in early January 1881, when the same branch had a placard posted on the gate of the protestant church at Killermogh and elsewhere throughout the district of Clough, the results were not so positive. In south-west Queen's County, which was witnessing a perceptible increase in tension, the placard's wording was clumsy. Signed 'J. Cosgrave C.C. hon. sec.', and headed 'Irish National Land League. Aghaboe branch. Final Notice!', the placard stated:

A public meeting will be held at Clough on Tuesday next to enrol additional members and receive subscriptions for the Parnell fund from such as have not yet subscribed. The non-catholic gentlemen of the parish are respectfully invited to attend. Farmers, labourers, artisans, shopkeepers and all interested in the land question will attend this meeting as the last opportunity given them to become members of the league. All who are not with us in this great crisis will be set down as against us.²

The *Leinster Express*'s description of the placard as 'veiled threats and cajolery blended'³ drew a revealing response from an irate Fr Cosgrave writing from Ballacolla on 12 January 1881, the day after the meeting in Clough. After stating that the rector (Ernest A. Brandon) had seized the placard on Killermogh church gate, torn it up, and danced upon it, he described protestants, attending the meeting or writing to him, as offering a variety of reasons for not joining the land league. He then refuted the newspaper's allegation of intimidation, and demanded that it should investigate the laws supporting landlordism; it should:

1, *L.E.*, 25 Dec. 80.

2, *Ibid.*, 8 Jan. 81.

3, *Ibid.*

examine into the barbarous code of laws...as wicked and diabolical as the perverted ingenuity of man could devise for the enslavement of a people... Consider the elaborate machinery, the bailiffs, the process-servers, the attorneys, the agents, the police, the military, the notice to quit, the ejectment, the bankruptcy business etc. for the execution of those laws, and you will see the constituents of a real reign of terror.'

An unapologetic *Leinster Express* editorial on 15 January left no doubt about the newspaper's opinion of Fr Cosgrave. Reporting that it had omitted some passages from Fr Cosgrave's letter because they were 'virulent attacks on individuals' whose only offence was that they had the 'temerity to differ' from Fr Cosgrave on 'public questions', the editorial's conclusion was particularly caustic. It stated:

It is on record that some of the first apostles of Christianity followed the calling of fishermen. The specimen of polite letter-writing to which the Revd Mr Cosgrave treats us is calculated to create the impression that some of our modern apostles of Christianity graduated in another branch of piscatorial industry of which the female sex have hitherto been popularly supposed to have the monopoly.

The last branch of the land league to be established in Queen's County was in Portarlinton. The borough, which was only 65 per cent Roman catholic² (the rest of the county was almost 89 per cent)³ and staunchly conservative, offered much resistance. During the early part of the last week of December 1880, placards were posted in the area announcing a public meeting to form a branch of the land league. Then, on 28 December 1880, other cards, addressed to 'the loyal and honest inhabitants of Portarlinton and neighbourhood', appeared in the town. They all stated:

1. *L.E.*, 15 Jan. 81.

2. *The census of Ireland for the year 1881*, Pt I, vol.i, *Leinster*, H.C. 1881, xcvi, 850.

3. *Ibid.*

We are now threatened with the formation of a branch of the communistic society known as the land league, a society which is plunging the country into anarchy and confusion, and thereby injuring those whom it professes to benefit, namely the agriculturists of Ireland. Will you, whose forefathers bled and died for liberty, thus see the last embers of it expire before your eyes without striking a blow in its defence?

Fellow countrymen, show the world that your noble sires have not reared degenerate sons, and that you will secure for yourselves that liberty which an impotent government is unable to afford you, by assembling in your thousands on Wednesday 29 December in the market square.'

Thomas Hamilton R.M. had twenty extra police drafted into the town to keep the peace. The meeting did not take place. William H. Cobbe, the protestant² auctioneer and merchant, and leader of the 'local land-leaguers', said that there had been a 'printer's error', and that they had 'merely arranged to hold a meeting in a public house'.³

Three weeks later, placards were posted throughout the county announcing that another public meeting, under the auspices of the land league, would be held in Portarlinton on 19 January 1881. Immediately, other posters were circulated calling on the 'honest men of Portarlinton' to assemble in their 'thousands' to protest against the land league. On 18 January, proclamations from the government prohibiting both the land league meeting and the projected counter demonstration were posted in the town and its neighbourhood. No meetings took place, and the services of one hundred soldiers and a 'strong body of police' drafted into the town were not required.⁴

Not until 9 February 1881, at the third attempt, was a branch of the land league formally established in Portarlinton. On a day of incessant rain, a 'large number of persons' met in the store room of

1, L.E., 1 Jan. 81.

2. Most protestants in the county stayed aloof from all land league activity. For the sectarian aspect to the land war in the county see below, pp 270-4.

3, L.E., 1 Jan. 81.

4, Ibid., 22 Jan. 81.

Odlum's flour mill. The mill was stopped for the meeting. (Two members of the protestant Odlum family became presidents of branches of the land league in two Queen's County towns where they had flour mills - William Odlum Jr in Portarlinton and William P. Odlum in Maryborough.) After resolutions on the land system and landlordism were adopted, the branch was founded, and its committee and officers were elected.¹

By 9 February 1881, when the last branch was founded in Portarlinton - almost sixteen months after the foundation of the Irish National Land League in the Imperial Hotel, Dublin - there were twenty-four branches in Queen's County.² Four other branches - Knock, Clough, Galmoy and Athy - which were outside but near the county boundary, also must have had many members from the county.³

When Patrick A Meehan, the zealous secretary of the Maryborough branch of the land league, was giving evidence before the *Times-Parnell* commission on 10 July 1889 he was anxious to maintain that 'all the whole county were land-leaguers'; however, he soon admitted to the commission that 'every farmer and all the farmers' sons' in the county were not land-leaguers.⁴ Without the membership lists of each branch, it is obviously impossible to measure the accuracy of Meehan's statements. Nevertheless, reasonable deductions may be drawn from the November 1880 to October 1881 membership list of the Raheen branch of the land league⁵ (one of the few such lists which have survived in

1. *L.E.*, 12 Feb. 81.

2. Appendix 31, below, p.432.

3. Based on a note appended by William Whelan to his list of branches of the land league in Queen's County (*ibid.*).

4. *The Times-Parnell* commission, reprint of the shorthand notes, vol.x, p.50.

5. Appendices 33-7, below, pp 434-6.

the country), and a 'monthly report' to the central branch of the land league' which notes the numbers of members in the Clonaslee branch.

For the year November 1880 to October 1881, 427 men and 45 women are listed as subscribing members of the Raheen branch. The February 1881 'monthly report' on the Clonaslee branch stated it had 240 members. If it is assumed that the average of the two branches was about average for all the branches in the county, and that each of the Knock, Clough, Galmoy, and Athy branches had about one hundred members from the county,² then a simple calculation would suggest that about 8,944 people in the county were subscribing members of the land league.

According to the census returns, in 1881 a total of 17,545 persons (male and female) over twenty years of age in Queen's County were classed under the following headings: (1) farmer, grazier; (2) farmer's, grazier's - son, grandson, brother, nephew; (3) agricultural labourer, cottager; (4) shepherd, shepherdess; (5) farm servant (indoor); (6) general labourer - the majority of whom, according to the census, 'may be assumed to be agricultural labourers'.³ The 17,545 engaged in these occupations alone is almost double the suggested possible number of land league members in the county. Clearly, on these figures alone, it may be concluded that a large minority of the farming population in the county did not join the land

1. N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566.

2. An average based on Davitt's estimate of two hundred thousand members of one thousand branches in Ireland in February 1881 (Davitt, *Fall*, p.301).

3. *Census of Ireland, 1881*, Pt I, vol.i, *Leinster*, H.C. 1881, xcvi, 816-27.

league. The conclusion is justified further when it is noted that (1) the suggested average membership of the twenty-four branches in the county is probably generous because Clonaslee was 'a stronghold' of land-leaguers,¹ and the presence of Richard Lalor M.P. (he lived about three hundred yards from Raheen chapel), probably encouraged most farmers in the environs of Raheen to join the land league; (2) many protestants other than landlords (as suggested earlier in this chapter - at least those in the environs of Mountrath, Portarlinton, Stradbally and Rathdowney) were unwilling to join the land league; (3) as will be investigated in the following chapters, many farmers had 'outrages' perpetrated against them because they acted 'independently'; (4) some of the influential priests - certainly Frs Thomas Nolan, John Doyle and James Sinnott, the respective parish priests of Abbeyleix, Maryborough and Raheen - were disturbed by the dramatic success of Parnellism in the 1880 general election in Queen's County.² When Patrick A. Meehan admitted to the *Times*-Parnell commission that 'every farmer and all the farmers' sons' in the county were not land-leaguers, he was conceding a fact.³

Because the membership list of the Raheen branch of the land league is the only list to have survived in Queen's County one can describe confidently its leadership. The branch drew its members from an area,

1. In a letter to Richard Lalor on 10 Jan, 82, Patrick A. Meehan wrote, 'Clonaslee was always a stronghold for us' (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566).

2. For the advance of Parnellism in 'local politics, 1879-1881' in Ireland see William L. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry*, pp 91-122.

3. Above, p. 114.

inhabited by mainly small farmers,' which was separate from the towns: the small 202-acre Raheen townland, which in 1881 had a population of eight living in two houses near a large chapel,² is situated about four miles north of Abbeylisk, six miles south of Maryborough, and five miles east of Mountrath. The membership list records the size of holdings held by 317 members, the rents paid by 322, the valuation on the holdings of 275 members, and the subscriptions paid by 467 members. It is possible to identify confidently the holdings of fourteen committee members. Predictably, the leadership of the branch was weighted in favour of the larger farmers: eight or 57 per cent of the fourteen committee members in contrast to thirty-one or 10 per cent of the 317 members, whose holdings are specified, rented farms over 30 acres.³

From an investigation of the names of committee members in the other twenty-three branches in the county drawn from William Whelan's list of 'branches of the Irish National Land League established in the Queen's County previous to its late suppression', and from reports in the *Leinster Express* and the *Leinster Leader*, it is possible to identify with reasonable confidence 142 men. 69 were farmers. The other 73, who were not primarily farmers, consisted of 23 catholic priests, 15 'grocers and spirit dealers', 10 publicans, 15 retailers,

1. For example, more than 68 per cent of the members, who had holdings over one acre, farmed fifteen acres or less (Appendix 33, below, p.434); this contrasts with the almost 47 per cent of the farmers in the county as a whole whose holdings were fifteen acres or less (Appendix 10, below, p.417).

2. *Census of Ireland, 1881*, Pt I, vol.i, *Leinster*, H.C. 1881, xcvi, 798; there was one other house, which was uninhabited (*ibid.*).

3. Appendices 33-7, below, pp 434-6.

3 millers, 2 auctioneers, a carpenter, an ironmonger, a blacksmith, an agent for the Grand Canal company, and a loan fund office actuary.'

By the winter of 1880-81, a leadership, broadly reminiscent of the middle-class leadership of the independent club but inspired by the national leadership of Parnell and Davitt, and with a greater presence of vocal and active traders, had managed to organise the majority of farmers and labourers in Queen's County into branches of the land league. The threat of famine was gone, evictions and the threats of eviction were increasing, and landlord-tenant tension was perceptively mounting. The land war had effectively started.

1. William Whelan's list, Appendix 31, below, p.432; particularly useful newspaper reports were in *L.E.*, 20 Nov.80, 12 Feb.81, 19 Feb.81, 5 Mar.81, 23 Apr.81, 6 Aug.81, 1 Oct.81; along with newspaper references, *Slater's Directory* for 1881, and *Thom's* for 1881 listed the occupations of many.

III

THE LAND WAR IN QUEEN'S COUNTY, NOV. 1880 - MAY 1881

On 9 May 1881 Thomas H. Burke, the under-secretary for Ireland, sent a brief letter to Lord Castletown, the lieutenant of Queen's County, which read:

With reference to your letter on the 4th instant relative to the state of the Queen's County, I am directed by the lord lieutenant to acquaint your lordship that on the 6th instant an order was made by his excellency in council declaring that county to be a proscribed district within the meaning and provisions of the Act for the Better Protection of Person and Property in Ireland, 1881.¹

From 6 May 1881 until 30 September 1882, when the act expired, habeas corpus was suspended in the county: during that time anyone 'reasonably suspected' of incitement or participation in any act of violence or intimidation which might 'disturb the maintenance of law and order' could be arrested and gaoled without trial.²

What follows is an attempt to describe and explain, maintaining a narrative order where possible, the series of events in Queen's County which, springing from worsening landlord-tenant relations and perceived to have been directed by male and female land-leaguers, had in six months from November 1880 to May 1881 so created an atmosphere of anarchy that the executive felt compelled to suspend habeas corpus in the county.

Until November 1880, at least on the surface, the population in the county generally seemed law-abiding. Of course, noise, rhetoric and some incidents accompanied the election of Richard Lalor and Arthur

1. Burke to Castletown (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13752(8)).

2. 44 & 45 Vict., c.5 (21 Mar.).

O'Connor as the county's M.P.s, and the establishment of some branches of the land league, but agrarian crime was rare. For example, from 1 January 1872 to 1 November 1880 only thirty-three agrarian crimes were reported by the police in the county.¹ Though agrarian crimes were increasing in October and November 1880 (six reported agrarian crimes in the county)² it was with some justification that Fr John Carroll, the curate from Castletown, on 14 November 1880 railed against the perception in England of Ireland as crime-ridden. Speaking from the platform at a public meeting in Mountrath to establish a local branch of the land league, Fr Carroll proposed the resolution:

That we regard with abhorrence the deeds of violence and murder at present and for some time prevailing in England - the murder of women and children, the shooting of policemen and gamekeepers while engaged in the performance of their duties, the houghing and disembowelling of cattle and horses, the planting of dynamite for the destruction of life and property, together with the perpetration of nameless crimes. In defence of the morals of the Irish people, and in order to disconnect them from the scandals and odium attached to such depravity on the part of our fellow subjects in England, we call upon the government to use its utmost power for the repression of these abominable crimes.³

Supporting his resolution, Fr Carroll said that they were accustomed to receiving insulting lectures from Englishmen and the English press who, 'if they looked among themselves, would find more crime than enough to attract their attention and command their detestation;' 'wife-beating, infanticide, and the use of dynamite for the most diabolical purposes' were, he said, what 'presented themselves most to

1. *Return of [agrarian] outrages...from 1 January 1844 to 31 December 1880* [C2756], H.C. 1881, lxxvii, 887-914, (8 Jan, 81); *Return...for each month of...1879 and 1880...*, H.C. 1881 (5), lxxvii, 793-8, (6 Jan, 81).

2. *Return...for each month of...1879 and 1880...*, H.C. 1881 (5), lxxvii, 793-8, (6 Jan, 81).

3. *L.E.*, 20 Nov, 80.

people who turned towards England, and Irishmen were not going to receive any more lectures from such a nation'.¹

Yet it must be admitted that in 1880 there were incidents in Queen's County which presaged some of the more public features of the impending land war. For example, in May 1880, when Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes wished to build gate piers on the vacant farm at Bushfield from which he had evicted Malachy Kelly on 7 February 1880,² local boycotting ensured that he was unable to employ local labour: two drivers with horses and carts had to be sent from Kildare, and when they were procuring lime, sand and stones locally they had to have police protection; also, the two masons imported from outside the county to build the gate piers did so guarded by two armed policemen.³ Then, in the same month, twenty-nine miles east of Bushfield on the estate of William C. Cooper (whose 2,644 acres centred on Cooper Hill near Ballickmoyler),⁴ there was an example of the kind of treatment a 'land-grabber' might expect: in May 1879, Cooper evicted two tenants from their holdings in the Killeslin part of his estate for non-payment of rent; the farms remained vacant until May 1880 when Oliver T. Slocock, a veterinary surgeon practising from Burrin St., Carlow,⁵ took them over and left a caretaker in possession; within days, a dwelling house and outbuildings housing two brood mares and a foal were burned.⁶ At the presentment sessions in Ballickmoyler on 18

1. *L.E.*, 20 Nov. 80.

2. Above, pp 91-3.

3. Letter from Martin Delaney, a publican in Borris-in-Ossory, read to a public meeting in Maryborough on 27 May 1880 to establish a branch of the land league (*L.E.*, 29 May 80).

4. *Return of the owners of land*,...[C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 76. [20 Apr. 76].

5. *Slater's Directory*, 1881, p. 372.

6. S.P.O., C.S.O., Returns of outrages, vol. iv, p. 19; *L.E.*, 29 May 80.

November 1880 a Constable Kerr of Graigue swore that he believed the fire was malicious on the grounds that two men, living in a nearby house, after first denying that they had seen the fire, then 'admitted that they did see it burning, and did not alarm the neighbours'.¹ (The outrage apparently succeeded because Slocock soon gave up possession of the two farms.)²

Though the formal establishment of branches of the land league in Queen's County was spread over more than eight months - from 27 May 1880 to 9 February 1881 - and there was an hiatus during the summer of 1880, nevertheless, during that summer the land league was becoming increasingly active in its opposition to landlords in court. For instance, at the quarter sessions for the division of Maryborough on 5 January 1880 none of the twenty-four ejectment suits entered was defended;³ then, on 21 June 1880, at the quarter sessions for the same division, fifty of the sixty-three ejectment suits for non-payment of rent, which were entered, were defended - 'the majority at the instance of the land league'.⁴ The lawyers engaged by the land league to defend tenants' interests capitalised on legal technicalities - especially on the details of the procedure followed in serving processes - to defeat or delay ejectment proceedings. As a result, landlords and agents predictably were galvanised into a more vigilant handling of estate legal matters. For example, Thomas W. Webber, in his agent's report for 1880, believed then that it was

1. At the presentment sessions in Ballickmoyler on 18 Nov. 80 Cooper and Slocock were awarded £27 and £30 respectively (L.E., 20 Nov. 80).

2. Ibid., 5 June 80.

3. Ibid., 10 Jan. 80.

4. Ibid., 26 June 80.

impossible to manage efficiently the Cosby estate while there was a 'divided responsibility' for the 'legal arrangements' of the estate: complaining of 'legal cases' relating to Cosby and his tenants being postponed in court, Webber gave notice to the estate solicitor that it was to be 'clearly understood' that whenever legal cases relating to Cosby's tenants were undertaken they were the solicitor's responsibility, and that while Webber would 'act under the solicitor's instructions, and give him all assistance and information', he 'declined to be legal adviser as well as agent'.¹ It must be stated, however, that because most landlords were unwilling to evict,² and new tenants were difficult to get, it is likely that they were willing to accept tenants' promises to pay rent at the November 1880 gale. For example, in the much publicised case of the Pallas tenants who were championed by the land league³ an accommodation was reached in Maryborough court on 13 July 1880: when the cases were called by the registrar it was announced that a consent for judgement had been given with a 'stay of execution' until 1 November 1880 - the defendants on or before that date promising to pay William Clarke, their landlord, or his solicitors the sums claimed.⁴

Hopes for some tenants may have rested on the compensation for disturbance bill (on which Richard Lalor made his maiden speech) which passed the House of Commons on 26 July 1880. If enacted, the bill would compensate those tenants unable to pay their rents in November

1, Cosby papers; 1880 rental.

2, Above, pp 21-2.

3, Above, pp 95-100.

4, L.E., 17 July 80.

who were evicted, and leave them with something for the winter.¹ Though tenants in less than 1.3 per cent of Queen's County² might have been affected by the bill when it was defeated in the House of Lords on 4 August 1880, it is likely that landlord-tenant relations in the county as a whole became more strained as a result. Certainly, the authorities were fearful of responding demonstrations by tenants. This is illustrated by the security measures taken on 15 August 1880 at Ladywell near Ballinakill: though normally each year on 15 August large but orderly crowds attended patterns at the holy well at Ladywell,³ on 15 August 1880 two hundred extra police (one hundred from both Queen's County and County Kilkenny) were drafted in to the district to prevent possible disturbances.⁴

As the summer of 1880 closed and the autumn gale neared, and there was an upsurge in the formation of branches of the land league, there seemed to be an almost public girding of loins for battle. On 7 October 1880 a deputation of one hundred landlords - including the Queen's County landlords, Robert Staples, Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes, Robert Hamilton Stubber, Edward S.R. Smyth and Sir Anthony C. Weldon - waited on Earl Cowper, the lord lieutenant, and Forster, the chief secretary, to impress on them 'the urgent necessity of taking immediate steps for the protection of life and property in the

1. H.C. 1880 (232), i, 427-30.

2. The bill only applied to poor law unions in seventeen counties (ibid.). Kyle electoral division consisting of 5,389 acres in Queen's County was in Roscrea poor law union - one of the poor law unions specified in the bill.

3. The holy well at Ladywell is one of the few places where patterns still occurred in the 1980s, though here the old pagan 'rounds' were no longer part of the ceremonies (information supplied by Dr John Feehan, Syngefield, Birr, Offaly).

4. *L.E.*, 14 Aug. 80.

country'.¹ (Undoubtedly, the murder near Clonbur, County Galway of Viscount Mountmorres, a small local landowner and magistrate, which, according to Davitt, 'caused a great sensation',² fuelled the landlords' anxiety.) The landlords' action drew a prompt and furious response from Fr John McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally: in a letter read to a public meeting of a reported ten thousand³ in Maryborough on 17 October Fr McGee castigated the landlords and their appeal to the lord lieutenant for 'coercion and terror' which, he wrote, showed 'that the landlords as a class are resolved to yield nothing, compromise or abate nothing of the existing tyranny', and which left the tenants of Ireland 'no alternative but to seek the total uprooting of the system itself'. In the meantime, Fr McGee suggested, 'let the agitation pursue its course, gathering strength and sympathy from the ruin and despair of all classes.'⁴

Clearer lines of demarcation between landlords and tenants were set by tenant leaders on public platforms. Increasingly, all landlords were tarred with the same brush. For example, at that meeting in Maryborough on 17 October 1880 Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, said that 'even a good landlord would stand by his class.'⁵ Then, four weeks later in Mountrath at a meeting to form a branch of the land league, Fr James Connolly, the curate from Mountmellick, told the crowd that 'good and bad landlords sail in the same boat... They should all go down together.'⁶

1. *L.E.*, 9 Oct, 80.

2. Davitt, *Fall*, p. 270.

3. *L.E.*, 23 Oct, 80, 19 Mar, 81.

4. *Ibid.*, 23 Oct, 80.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 20 Nov, 80.

Increasingly, too, tenant leaders became more nationalist in their public pronouncements. The tenants were described with persistent and misleading over-simplification as 'the people of Ireland' who 'ought to be the rightful owners of the land of the country' while the landlords were, in effect, 'an English garrison' - aliens who had stolen their estates from the rightful owners and who now, with the help of the government, held them by force. For example, Fr McGee, the parish priest of Stradbally, (often greeted by crowds at public land league meetings as 'the star of Kildare & Leighlin') voiced the notion on 3 April 1881 at a large land league meeting in a field opposite Clough chapel when he described landlordism as 'a system that had robbed and plundered and beggared and murdered the natives of Ireland... A system that for three hundred years had plundered the nation...[and] is still plundering us.'²

Such portrayals upset, and did not reflect most landlords' perceptions of themselves. Probably all felt that their rents were moderate and, while depending on the government and the union to bolster their position, thought of themselves as Irishmen. In a long and sometimes humorous letter on 9 December 1880 addressed to the editor of the *Leinster Express*, Robert E. Reeves, the land agent who usually lived at Capard near Rosenallis, expressed views held by most landlords in Queen's County. Doubtless with some tongue-in-cheek, Reeves wrote:

1. Richard Lalor's speech at Knockaroe on 22 Feb, 80 (*L.E.*, 28 Feb, 80).
2. *Ibid.*, 9 Apr, 81; cf. above, p. 1.

Ireland for the Irish and the English garrison expelled. I cannot see where the difference lies. A Kavanagh is at least equal to a Kettle, a MacDermot Roe to a Sexton, an O'Connor Don to a Harris. I myself am a Celtic, Milesian, Norman, Anglo-Saxon, Dutch mongrel. My children have another cross, viz. Danish, being descendants of Bloker killed at the battle of Clontarf; I think they may be very fairly called 'old blokes'. I think myself quite as good an Irishman as Mr Redpath or Mr Davitt. I object, therefore to being called the English garrison... The fact is, all the blood of the country is so mixed up that the old Irish element must be very small. The Cromwellian settlers have become more Irish than the Irish themselves.'

With the worsening relations between landlords and tenants in mind, Reeves wrote that 'no legislative enactments' would ever further the interests of the tenants in the same way as a 'kind and attentive landlord', and that, while rack-rents were 'odious', there should be 'some respect' for landlords who had not raised their rents. It seemed to him that the land league had made 'a fatal mistake' by including 'all landlords and agents in the same category', and that the only motive behind the land league's strategy was 'to break down the good feelings that has always existed on some estates'.²

'Good feelings' were breaking down rapidly over the issue of rents on most estates in Queen's County from that autumn in 1880. But what made rents more problematic for landlords and tenants then? It has been established already that rents imposed by landlords in the county before the recession in the late 1870s were generally moderate³ - well below the 'potential rental capacity'⁴ of the land. Consequently, their net income narrowed the margin of their possible response to the flood of tenants' memorials requesting abatements of rents. Most

1. *L.E.*, 11 Dec. 80.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Above*, pp 12-15.

4. W. E. Vaughan, 'An assessment of the economic performance of Irish landlords, 1851-81' in F.S.L. Lyons and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds.), *Ireland under the Union*, p.181.

landlords in the county could not afford to grant sizable rent reductions to all their tenants. Ironically, had they been rack-renters the landlords could have afforded more generous concessions, and hence would have appeared in a better light before their tenants.

As it was, most landlords, especially between the harvests of 1879 and 1880, probably granted some small temporary reductions in rents. For example, in the six weeks between 1 November and 13 December 1879 the *Leinster Express* reported abatements granted by eight landlords whose estates in Queen's County totalled 19,663 acres.¹ While it is difficult to generalise, and certainly caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from reports in the *Leinster Express* about landlords (the newspaper, as a rule, opposed Parnell and the land league, and probably highlighted the most generous concessions by landlords), it is likely that most landlords were selective in the abatements they granted. For example, in November 1879 Robert Hamilton Stubber, who owned 7,389 acres near Durrow,² granted a 20 per cent temporary abatement of rent to all his tenants whose annual rent was under £50, and 10 per cent to all whose annual rent exceeded £50.³ Another example was Baron Digby, who was even more selective in the abatements he granted to the tenants on his 30,660 acres, which, though mainly in King's County, included 938 acres in the north-west of Queen's County:⁴ in November 1879, the rental abatements Digby

1. The estates of Baron Digby and John Roe (*L.E.*, 1 Nov.), Edmund Dease M.P., Robert Hamilton Stubber and Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes (*ibid.*, 15 Nov.), Otway Toler (*ibid.*, 22 Nov.), Revd George Ayres (*ibid.*, 29 Nov.), Robert A.R. Pigott (*ibid.*, 13 Dec.).

2. *Return of owners of land*, [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 April 1876].

3. *L.E.*, 15 Nov. 79.

4. *Return of owners of land*, (op.cit.), 45, 76.

granted were 20 per cent to tenants whose annual rent did not exceed £10, 15 per cent to tenants whose annual rent did not exceed £80, and 10 per cent to tenants whose rent exceeded £80.¹

Such temporary abatements probably cost landlords little, and made scant difference to their tenants. For example, on Captain Robert A.G. Cosby's estate the agent, Thomas W. Webber, 'considered it necessary to give an abatement on rents due November 1879 of 20 per cent on all holdings smaller than £20 yearly, and 10 per cent to those above £20'.² Perhaps because this 'temporary abatement' was dependant on the tenants paying punctually it cost Captain Cosby only £60³ - which was less than 1 per cent of the rent collected on the estate in 1879.⁴ How little relief such percentage abatements gave to tenants may be illustrated by taking the example of Luke Fitzpatrick, a farmer from Arles, who became the treasurer of the Raheen branch of the land league, and who rented 41 acres for £70 per annum from Richard Brooks⁵ (Brooks lived in Castle Howard, County Wicklow and owned 1,097 acres in Queen's County)⁶: if one accepts Professor L.M. Cullen's broad statement that 'rent can only have absorbed 30 per cent of post-Famine net farm income',⁷ then a 10 per cent abatement of Luke Fitzpatrick's rent would only have increased his disposable income (after his rent was paid) by about 4.3 per cent.

Not all landlords gave even the modest level of abatements indicated above. Though among a minority of landlords in Queen's

1. *L.E.*, 1 Nov. 79.

2. Cosby papers; Webber's report in 1879 rental.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Membership lists of the Raheen branch of the land league (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

6. *Return of owners of land*, *op.cit.*

7. L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*, p.138.

County, at least John George Adair and Viscount Ashbrook, who between them owned 14,171 acres in the county,' were uncompromising in their dealings with tenants. In October 1879, the tenants on the part of Adair's estate in Tinnahinch barony sent him a memorial requesting a reduction in rents. Adair's reply to the memorial is worth quoting at length because, while revealing his own intransigence, it probably also expressed views held by many landlords: in his reply, dated 25 October 1879, which he addressed to Fr Thomas Murphy (the parish priest of Mountmellick who rented a house and sixteen acres from Adair). Adair wrote:

The tenants are aware that my estates are subject to charges, taxes, rents, annuities, and incumbrances; these must be paid without reduction. Were I therefore to accede to their request I should be driven to abandon my property. This I am not prepared to do, and consequently cannot grant their request...

My tenants know that much larger rents could have been had, and that the larger holders have very valuable interests in their holdings - yourself, reverend sir, included. Had I raised rents according to the times and competition for land, as is generally done in Scotland and England, a fair claim might now be made for their reduction. My personal knowledge of all the signers of this address enables me to state...that where inability or difficulty to pay their rents exists, it has been produced by want of industry, bad habits, and the extravagance consequent on the facility of continuous borrowing at exorbitant rates of interest from banks and local usurers; the first charging 10 per cent or four times the market rates, the latter frequently twenty.

I trust for their own sake as well as mine that the tenantry will not be misled by the wicked and unfounded agitation so prevalent, and which lies at the bottom of this address. It can only end, if they do, in their certain ruin, for I will, at all costs, maintain my rights. For myself, if driven to part with my property...I can fortunately turn to America where the good sense and honesty of the people have taught the Irish race that a socialist revolution or the robbery of one class is impossible.²

When the tenants on Viscount Ashbrook's 4,516 acres³ (centred on Durrow) informed the agent, Arthur St George, that they could not pay their rents in November 1879 the response was as stern as Adair's: the

1. *Return of owners of land*,...op. cit.

2. *L.E.*, 1 Nov. 79.

3. *Return of owners of land*,...op. cit.

rental book for the estate was placed in the hands of the solicitors Messrs Adam Mitchell & Son of Parsonstown, King's County who, in late December 1879, issued a circular stating that if the rent was not paid within ten days they would serve ejectment processes on all the tenants.¹ (Apparently the threat succeeded. By 17 February 1880 the tenants had paid their rents, plus the costs, which 'in most cases' were refunded.)²

While, as stated, most landlords in Queen's County probably granted selective abatements of rents between the harvests of 1879 and 1880,³ which had little effect on either tenants' or landlords' incomes, landlords' incomes were drastically reduced by their allowing a steep increase in arrears of rent - which, of course, also gave temporary relief to tenants. For example, on Captain Cosby's estate, despite the agent Thomas W. Webber's willingness to use ejectment processes to help him to collect rent, tenants fell deeper into arrears: arrears increased annually from £434 in December 1876 to £4,524 in December 1880 - equivalent to about 54 per cent of the annual rent due to Cosby in 1880.⁴ 1879-80 was also a particularly difficult year for both Lord Castletown and his tenants. On 1 November 1879 Castletown's tenants were £3,529 in arrears: by 19 November 1880 this figure had increased 136 per cent to £8,314 - a sum equivalent to about 49 per cent of the annual rent due to Castletown in 1880.⁵

1. L.E., 3 Jan. 80.

2. Ibid., 17 Jan. 80.

3. Above, pp 128-9.

4. Cosby papers: rentals 1876-80.

5. Matthew Franks's calculations in his correspondence with Lord Castletown (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13752(10)),

Such levels of arrears exacerbated the acrimony which inevitably would have attended the autumn gale in 1880. Landlords, who believed they had been generous in permitting abatements and the growth of arrears, felt entitled after the harvest to at least the rent due. Also, landlords were showing a greater willingness to evict: the fifty-four families evicted in Queen's County from 1 January 1880 to 20 June 1880 exceeded the total evictions for any year since 1863.¹ On the other hand, the tenants viewed the autumn gale with predictable trepidation: though less likely to starve because of the bumper potato crop,² they were heavily in debt to a variety of pressing creditors including their landlords;³ also, since the total annual value of agricultural output in the county had increased by less than 3 per cent,⁴ their ability to pay their rents had improved negligibly.

Then, as demands for rent reductions to Griffith's valuation, accompanied by resolutions for tenant solidarity and against land-grabbers, multiplied, there was an enthusiastic response from most tenants. Since Griffith's valuation of holdings carried out between 1852 and 1865 for the purposes of local taxation was based on 1849-51 prices, and hence was much lower than the real value of land,⁵ it is

1. *Copy of return... of cases of eviction... in each county of Ireland in each of the four quarters of 1877, 1878, 1879, first quarter of 1880, and up to 20 June 1880*, H.C. 1880 (254 sess. 2), lx, 361-4, (1 July 80); Appendix 18, below, p. 422. More families were evicted in Queen's County in 1863 than in any of the other years 1854-81 (Appendix 18, below, p. 422).

2. Appendix 5, below, p. 414.

3. Above, pp 27-34.

4. Appendix 3, below, p. 413.

5. For article on Richard Griffith, see W.E. Vaughan, 'Richard Griffith and the tenement valuation', in Herries Davies and Mollen (eds.) *Papers presented at the Centenary Symposium organised by the Royal Dublin Society, 21 and 22 September 1978*.

easy to understand tenants clamouring for and landlords unwilling to accept Griffith's valuation as the value of rents. Three examples illustrate this. First, if each of the 271 members of the Raheen branch of the land league, whose holding's rent and valuation are recorded in the branch's membership lists, had had Griffith's valuation accepted by his landlord the total rent payable by the 271 in 1880 would have been £3,989 instead of £5,298 - a reduction of almost 25 per cent.¹ (Interestingly, Richard Lalor M.P., who was an ardent supporter of tenants' demands for Griffith's valuation,² paid a yearly £213.7s.7d. or £22.2s.5d. - 10.4 per cent - less than the valuation on the 219 acres he rented in Capinacclough townland.)³ Then, there are the examples of Lord Castletown and Captain Cosby whose high levels of arrears have been noted above:⁴ Griffith's valuation would have meant a loss of £3,001 to Castletown or about 17.5 per cent of his rent,⁵ while Cosby would have lost £1,572 or almost 19 per cent of his rent.⁶

On 27 November 1880, the *Leinster Express* noted that 'refusals to pay more than Griffith's valuation' were becoming 'daily more numerous'. Indeed, the newspaper itself, in the five weeks from 20 November to 25 December 1880, reported tenants demanding Griffith's

1. Membership lists of the Raheen branch of the land league (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

2. At a meeting of the independent club on 14 Jan. 80 Lalor described Griffith's valuation as 'a fair authority on large grazing farms, but on the great majority of farms the valuation was 25 per cent too high' (*L.E.*, 17 Jan. 80).

3. As in n.2 above.

4. Above, pp 131-2.

5. N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13752(10).

6. Cosby papers; rental 1880.

valuation on the estates of eleven landlords who, between them, owned 90,971 acres or over 21 per cent of the land in Queen's County.¹ While clearly such demands were supported by the vast majority of tenants, yet it would seem that on some estates local agitators had to resort to intimidation to create the impression of tenant-solidarity. For example, on 24 November 1880 on the estate of Lord Lansdowne in Luggacurren where misspelled notices in a disguised hand 'threatening anyone who would pay more than Griffith's valuation' were discovered,² or at Cushina, on the boundary between Queen's County and King's County, where on 14 December 1880 'a party of men' were reported to have visited several tenants, and discharged firearms warning them 'not to pay rent in excess of Griffith's valuation'.³

A more subtle form of intimidation was used on the tenants of Sir Charles Coote - the landlord most frequently commended on public platforms as a 'good' landlord.⁴ On 22 December 1880, about five hundred tenants met in the yard of Dunne's Hotel in Mountrath, where they drew up a memorial requesting Coote to accept Griffith's valuation for holdings held under him, which were above that level of rent; the memorial was signed by twelve representative tenants, but after the meeting all the tenants had to file through the hotel so that their names could be recorded.⁵ (Mark J. Codd, a merchant in

1. *L.E.*, 20 Nov. 80; Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes (2,467 acres), William Clarke (350 acres); *ibid.*, 4 Dec. 80; Lord Lansdowne (8,981 acres), John Roe (682 acres), Captain R.A.G. Cosby (10,110 acres); *ibid.*, 11 Dec. 80; Mrs Grattan Bellew (10,594 acres); *ibid.*, 18 Dec. 80; Richard Warburton (3,491 acres), E.H.P. Wetherall (614 acres), William Kemmis (4,706 acres); *ibid.*, 25 Dec. 80; Sir Charles Coote (47,452 acres), Eyre Coote (1,524 acres). The area of each estate is taken from the *Return of owners of land*,... [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 Apr. 1876].

2. *L.E.*, 27 Nov. 80.

3. *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 80.

4. Above, p. 13; below, p. 277.

5. *L.E.*, 25 Dec. 80

Mountrath,¹ and the secretary of the local branch of the land league, probably was the most aggressive member of meetings of Coote's tenants. Because of his public disclosure on 3 January 1881 when the tenants met again to consider Coote's reply to their memorial, it is tempting to suspect Codd of mercenary opportunism: Codd said, 'I lost £200 by manures supplied to Sir Charles Coote's tenantry to fertilise his soil, and to enable his tenantry to pay their rents, though they did not pay me.'²

While memorials requesting Griffith's valuation were being drawn up by tenants, and being considered by landlords, some attempts were also made to intimidate landlords and agents. The usual methods used at this stage were by threatening letters or notices. At least Sir Erasmus D. Borrowes³ and the land agent Robert Owen⁴ (who lived at Belmont, four miles south-east of Rathdowney) took such threats so seriously that they were given constant police protection. However, not all tenants condoned such intimidation, or by their silence seemed to be accessories. For example, in early November 1880, notices appeared in Ballylynan near Barrowhouse chapel and in the vicinity of Kilmoroney House, the home of Sir Anthony C. Weldon, which read:

Take notice Sir Anthony Weldon, I write these lines to make you look sharp and if you do not reduce the rents you may be shure [sic] you will get the contents ov [sic] Rory of the hills who warns before he kills.⁵

1. *Slater's Directory* for 1881, p.462.

2. *L.E.*, 8 Jan.81.

3. *Ibid.*, 27 Nov.80, 4 Dec.80.

4. 'Strictly confidential' report by Sub-Inspector James Somerville on 19 July 81 (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1881/27018); report by County Inspector Lucan Bingham on 30 July 1881 (*ibid.*).

5. S.P.O., C.S.O., Returns of outrages, vol.iv, p.11; *L.E.*, 6 Nov.80.

Doubtless encouraged by the local parish priest Fr Thomas Tynan who, at mass on 14 November, condemned the notices,¹ on 17 November a delegation presented Weldon with an address signed by seventy-nine tenants on his estate expressing their abhorrence of the notices, and repudiating any sympathy with the authors.²

Confronted with what appeared to be a united and determined tenantry exulting, as branches of the land league were being formed, in a sense of collective strength, how did the landlords in Queen's County respond to the demands for Griffith's valuation? There was some truth in Thomas W. Webber's agent's report for 1880 in which he wrote:

At the November collections a complete strike against the payment of rent higher than Griffith's valuation was universal... The government which had promised a land bill... was now unwilling to enforce the law, and the unwritten law of the land league became triumphant. In the face of the failure of the law the landlords agreed in many cases to accept Griffith's valuation, and it then became impossible for the remainder to stand by themselves.³

It would appear that most landlords made some, if different, concessions to their tenants. Webber skilfully persuaded Cosby's tenants to accept abatements about £1,000 less than what Griffith's valuation would have cost Cosby.⁴ Other landlords or agents on their behalf accepted Griffith's valuation, accepted on account, offered to accept if arrears were paid at the same time, or, like Webber for Cosby, came to various arrangements granting reductions to individual tenants. It is likely, if obvious, that most disturbances in the county during the land war related to estates where the landlords or

1. L.E., 20 Nov. 80.
3. Cosby papers.

2. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

the tenants were intransigent or difficult to bargain with, or where the landlords were using legal means to recover their rents or were in the process of evicting.

Newspaper reports from December 1880 show an appreciable increase in incidents, from which one might deduce that tenants and land-leaguers in Queen's County were growing more confidently and menacingly militant. For example, the *Leinster Express* on 11 December 1880 reported that on 6 December at Middlemount (two miles east of Rathdowney) where a tenant was threatened with the bankruptcy court by the agent Robert Owen, a tramp was accused of having a 'pross' in his pocket, stripped and eventually released; the same newspaper reported that three days later on 9 December in the neighbourhood of Galmoy (on the boundary between south-west Queen's County and Kilkenny) a bailiff was chased by a crowd of about five hundred who took writs out of his pockets and ducked him in a drain. (The bailiff had to go to the nearest police barracks where he was put up for the night.)

The following week, an almost farcical method of sustaining a boycott was demonstrated in Borris-in-Ossory. On 17 December, five labourers, one ringing a bell and another beating a drum, marched through the town shouting at the occupants of houses and shops that if anyone helped or supplied provisions to people at Bushfield (where Malachy Kelly had been evicted) 'they 'would be boycotted on the minute'.² In such a public place and with such noise, the men and their offence were so clearly identifiable that they could not escape

1. Above, pp 91-3.

2. *L.E.*, 25 Dec, 80.

being arrested. They were charged with having 'unlawfully assembled in the streets of Borris-in-Ossory, and by threats endeavoured to intimidate certain persons in their lawful work'.¹ Further disturbances ensued when the five - described by the *Leinster Express* as 'rough-looking men'² - appeared on 28 December 1880 in the local petty sessions court before Thomas Hamilton R.M. and the local magistrates, Thomas Walpole and Captain William Gibson. The result of the court proceedings was predictable: the five, who had no professional representation because they maintained that they had 'not committed any punishable offence', were found guilty as charged. Joseph Delaney,³ the bell ringer, and William Cassidy, the drummer, were each sentenced to one month hard labour while the other three were to be released and bound to the peace if they each deposited £20 and had two independent sureties of £10 each. The three refused to provide the security, and along with Delaney and Cassidy were sent to Maryborough gaol. Despite the presence of forty police, who were positioned inside and outside the court, there was uproar among the large crowd when the sentences were passed. Delaney's reaction was especially violent - he continued to shout support for Parnell, and abuse at the authorities, and in his struggles with the police even managed to break his handcuffs. When the five, Delaney still shouting, were marched under police escort to Ballybrophy railway station (three miles away) a noisy crowd trailed behind. Meanwhile in Maryborough, presumably in response to a message from Borris-in-Ossory, at about 4 p.m. a crowd led by a local band marched through

1, *L.E.*, 1 Jan. 81.

2, *Ibid.*

3, Delaney also used the name Bannon (*ibid.*).

the town to its railway station to greet the prisoners. Anticipating trouble, the police had the station doors closed, and because the top of the wall skirting the platform was (and still is) about twenty-seven feet above the approach roads - making it impossible for the people outside the station to see the trains arriving - the police were able to sneak the prisoners out of the station by a back way, and were almost at the gaol before the crowd realised what was happening. When someone on the platform shouted to the crowd what was being done, it was only by running that they arrived barely in time to cheer and play 'patriotic music' as the prisoners were admitted to gaol.¹ Within days, the three bound to the peace obtained the required security, and were released from gaol.² (On 8 January 1881, the *Leinster Express* reported that during the first week of January 'postcards' were received by land-leaguers in Queen's County warning them against resorting to the 'clumsy method of boycotting' such as resulted in the imprisonment of the five men from Borris-in-Ossory; the land-leaguers were 'to meet the smile of the boycotted with a smile but to have no dealings with him'.)

Such incidents greatly alarmed landlords in the county. Lacking confidence in Gladstone's government, and especially hostile towards Forster, the chief secretary, since his unsuccessful compensation for disturbance bill,³ which they saw as an attempted betrayal to the land league, the landlords perceived the county as increasingly in the grip of terror and outrage fermented by the spreading land league. The landlords' perception is expressed in a confidential letter, which Robert Staples (a local magistrate and landlord whose 1,425 acres in

1. *L.E.*, 1 Jan. 81.

2. *Ibid.*, 8 Jan. 81.

3. Above, pp 123-4.

the county centred on Dunmore House about one mile north of Durrow)' wrote on 23 December 1880 to Lord Castletown, lieutenant of the county. Staples wrote of his opinion that the time had come for the magistrates of the county:

to tell what is called the government how rapidly anarchy and lawlessness is spreading with the extension of the land league in Queen's County, and that the terrorism and fear of boycotting is so great that thousands of persons who abhor it are now joining it and paying blackmail to what has established itself as the chief power in Ireland...

Many [magistrates] have been threatened, and more are in danger. Some have left the country, and others their rents are refused, but legal process is at an end² and dare not be executed in some places, and all this has advanced and developed itself in the last three weeks in such a manner that I fully expect, if a stand is not made against its progress, this county will soon be as bad as Mayo³...

This is a gloomy and depressing time, and it is no use wishing a happy Xmas to any of our friends in this most accursed and distracted country, which I most heartily wish I had left for good many years ago, for its state is hopeless and cannot improve.⁴

Also, in his letter, Staples wrote that he did not believe the government intended to do anything 'to check the reign of terror', and gave 'them no credit for what they were compelled to do with regard to the Cullahill meeting'. He enclosed with his letter to Lord Castletown a copy of a letter (the copy, which Staples requested be returned to him, is missing) he had written to 'Mr Forster' when he heard of the 'infamous placards' calling the Cullahill meeting, and concluded that Forster 'had no alternative and deserves no credit' for his action.⁵

The meeting Staples was referring to was a public meeting under the auspices of the Cullahill & Durrow branch of the land league which was to have been held in Cullahill on Sunday 19 December 1880, and which

1. *Return of owners of land*,...[CI492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 Apr. 1876].

2. Of course, legal process was not at an end. For example, in 1881 104,566 suits were entered and lodged in the county courts in the country as a whole, while at the same time 1,316 suits were entered in the courts in Queen's County (judicial statistics for 1881 listed in the bibliography).

3. Staples also owned 1,385 acres in County Mayo (*Return of owners of land*, op.cit., 312).

4. Staples to Castletown (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13,752(8)).

5. Ibid.

was prohibited by a proclamation from Dublin Castle on the day before the meeting.' While it may be true that the Cullahill meeting was prohibited because of Staples's letter to Forster, and though the government had done nothing to prohibit or suppress land meetings till December 1880, from about mid-December meetings throughout the country began to be prohibited by proclamation from the lord lieutenant and by local magistrates if such meetings were likely to endanger the public peace or where they were called to threaten individuals.²

When the Cullahill meeting was prohibited, the local league committee hastily met and agreed to hold the meeting in opposition to the proclamation at Durrow (about four miles north-east of Cullahill) on the same Sunday 19 December 1880. As the crowds with bands, banners, cars and about one hundred 'land league cavalry' converged on the town, Thomas Hamilton R.M. had 60 of the 20th Hussars and 100 RIC under County Inspector Lucan Bingham take up positions around the town's large square. Hamilton then went to the house of Fr Edward Rowan, the local curate, to remonstrate with the meeting's main speakers there assembled. These speakers included Richard Lalor M.P., Edward Mulhallen Marum M.P., Fr Matthew Keeffe the parish priest of Aghaboe, and the respective treasurer and the secretary of the local branch of the league, Patrick F. Fletcher a Durrow merchant, and James Dooley a loan fund office actuary. Marum disingenuously insisted that the Durrow meeting had nothing to do with the Cullahill meeting, and maintained that it was an 'independent meeting'. Hamilton was unimpressed by such arguments, and persisted in saying

1. *L.E.*, 25 Dec. 80.

2. Moody, *Davitt*, p. 443.

that he would prevent any meeting being held - 'by force if necessary'. When Fr Rowan retorted 'Aye, by buckshot, I suppose', Hamilton made his stance clear: he said, 'I have never yet resorted to buckshot, but if it be necessary to do that I shall do it or anything else I think necessary when the occasion arises.'

While the heated discussion at Fr Rowan's house progressed, crowds continued to pour into the town, and when a detachment of over three hundred infantry with an ambulance and other carriages arrived, 'the excitement may be said to have reached its highest point' with the 'land league cavalry' racing through the streets 'at breakneck speed'.² To prevent possible bloodshed, Richard Lalor alone was eventually permitted to address the crowd. Protesting against what he said was unconstitutional action against 'free-born men', and asking them to go home quietly, Lalor was also uncharacteristically bellicose: he informed the crowd that they were 'men without arms in their hands' having 'to contend against buckshot', and suggested to loud cheers that 'whenever the people of this country have got a hundred thousand breech-loading rifles they might contend against them.'³ Though Robert Staples wrote at the time to a fellow magistrate, Edward S.R. Smyth of Mount Henry near Ballybrittas, that 'the meeting now prohibited at Cullahill is being held at this moment in Durrow to the terror of all here...we can hear the bands playing and the mob howling for them',⁴ no violent clashes occurred: the 'land league cavalry' galloped about, the bands played, and there was some

1, L.E., 25 Dec. 80.

2, Ibid.

3, Ibid.

4, Staples to Smyth (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13,752(8)).

banter between the crowds and the soldiers and police, but by evening the crowds had dispersed, the soldiers were on their special trains back to the Curragh and Newbridge, and the RIC had returned to their respective barracks.¹

But the Cullahill & Durrow league leaders were not to be so easily bested. The following week, by colluding mainly with the Borris-in-Ossory branch, they outmanoeuvred the authorities, and contrived to have their meeting. On 26 December 1880, a public land meeting was to be held in Borris-in-Ossory and, though posters proclaiming the meeting appeared throughout the district on 24 December, apparently arrangements for holding the meeting continued. As for the Cullahill meeting the previous week, special trains were laid on to carry military from Kildare: along with 60 RIC under Sub-Inspector Henry Knox of Mountrath, 100 of the 84th Infantry and 40 of the 19th Hussars were drafted into Borris-in-Ossory. Thomas Hamilton R.M., in command of the whole force, billeted the military in the court house, and had the police drawn up in front of the speakers platform which was erected in the town-square. Significantly, there were few prominent land-leaguers present: these included John Redington of Pallas and the respective presidents of the Mountrath and Castletown branches of the land league, Fr William Byrne and William Fitzpatrick.² Again, there was an argument between Hamilton and a priest - this time with Fr Joseph Dunphy, the parish priest of Castletown: Fr Dunphy argued that

1, L.E., 25 Dec. 80.

2, William Whelan's list of 'Branches of the Irish National Land League established in the Queen's County previous to its late suppression' (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(11)).

the proposed meeting was different in character from the proposed Cullahill meeting, and, because the proclamation related to a meeting in the town, it could be held outside the town: Hamilton would have none of it, and would not permit any meeting or anyone to speak. In the meantime, the crowds continued to pour into the town and, led by four bands, paraded the streets in a belligerent mood. The atmosphere changed to triumphant good humour when the rumour circulated among the crowd that the people of Cullahill were holding a meeting at the same time. The music continued with the Mountrath band, who were 'vocally as well as instrumentally famous', entertaining the crowd with a 'harmonised version of Griffith's valuation', the crowd cheered, and, perhaps because the public houses were closed, gradually dispersed without any serious disturbance.'

The Cullahill meeting held on that Sunday 26 December 1880 clearly was a successful stratagem for the local league leaders. The authorities were kept ignorant of what was being planned, and all except two of the local police were drafted to Borris-in-Ossory to assist the military enforce the proclamation prohibiting the meeting there. On the Sunday afternoon, after 'emissaries' on horseback were sent to neighbouring chapels and to the Kilkenny towns of Ballyragget, Freshford and Castlecomer informing the people of the impending meeting, about three thousand, including three hundred 'land league cavalry' and four bands, assembled at Cullahill. The *Leinster Express* also noted disparagingly that 'several exhibition specimens of the protestant land-leaguers who attended the meeting, and wore orange

shirt fronts and green neckties, presented a piebald appearance, and reminded the beholder of the gaudy-breasted toucans in the zoological gardens.' ' (As might be deduced from chapter II, such obvious and public display of protestant support for local branches of the land league quickly faded in the new year - particularly in south-west Queen's County where there was a perceptible increase in tension.² Indeed, as will be noted, the land war in the county took on a sectarian hue as 1881 progressed.³) Seated on the platform along with officers of the local branch of the league were Edward Mulhallen Marum J.P., M.P., and eight priests.⁴

The speeches were mainly predictable: the land system, the government, and Robert Owen, the local landlord and agent who 'had thought fit to recur to the court of bankruptcy as an unprecedented mode of recovering rents', were all castigated, while endorsement was given to boycotting, Griffith's valuation as the maximum level of rent to be paid, the 3Fs, and peasant proprietary.⁵ One point, however, was consistently underlined by most speakers, namely that the land league had stolen a march on the police. For example, Fr James Cosgrave, the curate from Aghaboe parish, describing the meeting, said that 'the flank movement they had made, scored a great victory for the popular cause...while the military and police were doing their dirty work watching the dead walls in Borris-in-Ossory.'⁶ Among the priests

1. *L.E.*, 1 Jan. 81.

2. Above, pp 108-12.

3. Below, pp 226-7, 270-4, 353, 356-7.

4. *L.E.*, 1 Jan. 81.

5. Cf. below, p. 262, n. 4.

6. *L.E.*, 1 Jan. 81.

present was the curate from Durrow, Fr Edward Rowan, possibly the most silver-tongued of all the speakers on land league platforms in the county. With little else to do on Sundays it is likely that the prospect of listening to entertaining speakers inveigled some farmers to attend land league demonstrations and meetings. Fr Rowan's speech at the meeting offered many examples of the rhetoric enjoyed by his audiences. First, when he was complimenting protestants for being on the meeting's platform, he said, 'We now stand as equals upon the same platform, not in sullen silence and at arms-length but hand-in-hand in fellowship to build one vast temple of concord, which shall overarch the whole land with smiling harvests and the happy homes of a contented people.' Then, considering the efforts being made by landlords to collect rents, and their unwillingness to make concessions, Fr Rowan said, 'The wealth of a country should be like water lying upon its surface which the gentle rays of the sun raise insensibly by evaporation into a higher sphere but only to descend again in refreshing and fertilising showers. The pence of the cottiers and the silver of the tenant farmers joined together are transformed into gold in the coffers of the landlord, and by him should be cast back upon the soil which produces it.'

On 16 January 1881, the example of Cullahill was imitated successfully in Castletown. Probably believing that if a public meeting to establish a branch of the land league in Castletown was announced in the ordinary way by extensively posting placards it would have been proclaimed, the meeting's promoters concealed their

intentions until 15 January when 'scouts' were sent out to advertise the meeting personally. Contingents attended from Maryborough, Mountrath, Rathdowney, Camross, Borris-in-Ossory, and Aghaboe; also, there was a large force from Cullahill & Durrow - including their cavalry which, followed by a two-horse wagonette, 'came tearing into Castletown shortly before the meeting commenced, and, sweeping round the far end of the green, drew up in front of the platform to tumultuous cheers.' After some uninspired speeches - perhaps because of the severe cold - from the platform which included eleven priests, the Castletown branch of the land league was formed.¹

Such defiance of the law was a challenge which the magistrates in Queen's County could not ignore. Certainly, Robert Staples picked up the gage. Writing on 19 December 1880 to his fellow magistrate Edward S.R. Smyth (who also was son-in-law to Lord Castletown, lieutenant of the county) and, as he stated, 'to a good many more on the subject', Staples urged a meeting of the magistrates in the county.² Four days later, Staples suggested to Lord Castletown that resolutions to be passed at his proposed meeting should be 'framed and agreed on some time before' by a few of the magistrates who could 'command the support of the great body of men who will attend'.³ A difficulty for Castletown, which Staples anticipated, was how to prevent the attendance of Edward Mulhallen Marum at such a meeting of magistrates: probably influenced by the fact that Marum was a notable presence at the prohibited Cullahill meeting, Staples, describing Marum as 'one of

1. L.E., 22 Jan, 81; L.L., 22 Jan, 81.

2. Staples to Smyth (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13752(8)).

3. Staples to Castletown (ibid.).

the worst agitators and land-leaguers in the county', stated that it would be 'absurd to require the attendance of a law-breaker, a known member of the league, at a meeting called to oppose its lawless proceedings'. Staples believed the presence of Marum would be a 'severe hindrance to real business' at a meeting of magistrates because he would 'obstruct the proceedings in every way', and would 'intimidate many magistrates from speaking their minds, and telling what they know' because he would not 'hesitate to relate all that passes', and would 'denounce all who take a leading part by name at the next land meeting'. (On 4 January 1881, Staples informed Castletown that he had 'called the attention of the thing called the government' to Marum's attendance at the prohibited meeting at Cullahill, and asked Castletown 'to report' Marum's 'example of disobedience to the proper authority'.)²

Whether Staples's proposed meetings took place or not cannot be ascertained. At a guess, it is likely that there was at least a private informal meeting of some magistrates, but a general meeting of the magistrates in the county probably would have received some attention from the press, and certainly to exclude Marum would have been a profitless affront to him and the land league. Undoubtedly, Castletown wrote to Dublin Castle about the disorder prevailing in the county because he received a brief letter dated 27 December 1880, marked private and signed by Forster, the chief secretary, which

1, Staples to Castletown, 23 Dec. 80 (N.L.I., Fitzpatrick papers, MS 13752(8)),
2, Staples to Castletown, 4 Jan. 81 (ibid.),

stated:

I will have immediate enquiries with regard to sending troops to your courts. The statements in your letter demand the most serious considerations, but I hope that when parliament meets we may do good by showing our determination to obtain fresh power.¹

'Fresh power' certainly was needed to help the police in Queen's County contain the spreading disorder. Stretched by their increasing peace-keeping duties, the police had the added strain of providing 'special' protection for sixteen persons: on 31 December 1880, two persons were under 'personal police protection', and fourteen required 'special' watching over 'to protect them from outrage'.² However, Forster was as good as his word: on 13 January 1881 a company of the 2nd battalion of the 20th Regiment under the command of Captain C.G. Collingwood arrived at Maryborough, and took up quarters in Maryborough barracks.³

Lord Castletown's son, the Portarlington M.P. Bernard E.B. Fitzpatrick, had hoped for a military presence in the disturbed south-west of the county. At a meeting of the poor law guardians of Donaghmore Union on 31 December 1880 he proposed a motion, which was carried, that the local government board be informed that there was accommodation available in the workhouse for 200 soldiers and 50 horses.⁴ (The workhouse, which was built to house 640, had only 134 inmates in January 1881.)⁵ The possibility of soldiers in the workhouse caused such outrage in the neighbourhood that on 7 January

1. Forster to Castletown, 27 Dec. 80 (Fitzpatrick papers, op.cit.).

2. *Return of the number of persons receiving special police protection in each county in Ireland on 31 December 1880*, H.C. 1880 (1), lxxvi, 641, (6 Jan. 81).

3. *L.E.*, 15 Jan. 81.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

1881, when the poor law guardians were meeting, about two hundred ratepayers led by five priests (Fr William Lynch the parish priest of Rathdowney, Fr James Cosgrave the curate from Aghaboe, Fr Michael Drea the parish priest of Borris-in-Ossory, and his two curates Frs John Henneberry and William Kerwick) collected outside the boardroom to protest. Their objection - in essence, that the presence of soldiers might pose a threat to the virtue of the female inmates in the workhouse - was expressed in a letter written by Fr Matthew Keeffe, the parish priest of Aghaboe, to the chairman of the board of guardians which was handed in by his curate Fr Cosgrave. Fr Keeffe's letter, which was read by the union clerk to the assembled guardians, described the army as 'recruited from the lowest stratum of the English towns, and the offspring of society who pollute the moral atmosphere of the place where they are quartered', and concluded by warning:

If the resolution sanctioning the conversion of the workhouse into a barrack be not rescinded I shall feel it my sacred duty to withdraw from the Donaghmore poor house all the female inmates from my parish. I see danger, and shall take all possible means to avoid it. Even should their virtue remain I cannot bear to see their prospects in life blasted by the impression that they were brought up in a barrack.¹

On 21 January 1881, on the proposal of Thomas Carroll (who was also vice-president of the Rathdowney branch of the land league), Fitzpatrick's resolution in favour of accommodating soldiers and horses in the workhouse was rescinded by eight votes to two.²

(It is interesting to note some repercussions the Donaghmore episode had for Thomas Carroll and some of his supporters. On 28 March 1881, Carroll was defeated in the poor law elections for

1, L.E., 15 Jan. 81. 2, Ibid., 22 Jan. 81.

Donaghmore Union. While Carroll was understandably vexed at losing the election, and the *Leinster Leader* reported on 2 April 1881 that the committee of the Aghaboe branch of the land league decided to strike off their roll of members those who voted against him or 'remained neutral', there may have been some truth in his allegation that the marshalling of proxy votes for his opponent Henry Lalor was because of the action he took in opposing the workhouse being turned into a military barrack.¹ Furthermore, if Fr Thomas Feehan, the curate from Rathdowney, was being truthful in his speech at the land meeting in Aghaboe on 24 April 1881, Fitzpatrick's pique was demonstrated by his refusal to set turf banks to Carroll or 'any of his supporters'.²)

During December 1880 and January 1881, while the land league was burgeoning in the rest of the county, the Maryborough branch was torn by serious internal dissension. Though the branch's leaders tried to put the best face on it, the dissension produced the first land league court in the county, and exposed such duplicity among its officers that confidence among its rank and file members must have been undermined seriously. At the same time, it is likely that members of other branches also were disquieted, because the Maryborough branch (established on 27 May 1880) was the first such branch in the county, and, centred on the county town, its officers had a high public profile, and were prominently present at demonstrations and meetings to found branches throughout the county. The 'court' sat in the rooms of the Catholic Young Men's Society in Maryborough on 10 December

1, Carroll's letter to the editor, *L.E.*, 16 Apr. 81; *ibid.*, 24 Apr. 81.

2, *Ibid.*, 30 Apr. 81.

1880. On 'trial' before sixteen members of the committee of the Maryborough branch was the branch's president, Michael Brady, whose offence was that on 4 December 1880 he had 'paid his rent in full, the same rent being over Griffith's valuation', to his landlord, Matthew S. Cassan.¹

From newspaper accounts and reported statements at meetings stemming from the 'trial', the circumstances of Michael Brady's offence would seem to have been as follows: on 28 November 1880, a group of men, who included Michael Brady's son Laurence, visited all the tenants on the estates of Matthew S. Cassan (1,979 acres)² and Major Thomas Des Voeux (1,037 acres)³ - both estates were close to Maryborough - and 'requested' them not to pay rents higher than Griffith's valuation.⁴ It was agreed that all the tenants on the Cassan estate should meet at Patrick Doran's public house (Doran was the vice-president of the Maryborough branch of the land league) in Maryborough on rent day, 4 December, to agree on a united course of action before they met William Phillips, the estate's agent.⁵ Laurence Brady and the three other tenants met as arranged, and for two hours waited in vain for the rest of the tenants: then they went to the agent's office and, on discovering that 'a number' of the tenants had been there already and 'had settled', Laurence Brady thought it was 'no harm for him to pay the rent'.⁶ In William Phillips's words, describing his meeting with the tenants of both the

1, *L.E.*, 18 Dec. 80.

2, *Return of owners of land*,...[C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 Apr. 1876].

3, *Ibid.*

4, *L.E.*, 4 Dec. 80.

5, *Ibid.*

6, *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 80.

Cassan and Des Voeux estates, 'We met and parted on our usual good terms. I received as much rent as on former occasions, and heard nothing from them of Griffith's valuation.'

The 'trial' was conducted in an atmosphere of almost judicial decorum. Opening the proceedings, John Redington, the chairman, told the assembled committee members that they had been called together to enquire into a question which concerned 'the entire life-being' of their organisation. Although, according to Redington, the offence - the payment of a rent higher than Griffith's valuation - was not actually forbidden by any special rules of the land league, the 'feelings' of land-leaguers were so strongly opposed to it that they could read in the 'public papers' that tenants were 'frequently brought forward by their fellow men to account for it'.² 'If one humble private member does what is wrong and is tried for it', continued Redington, 'it behoves us to see that when a president does the same thing he must be prepared for the consequences.' If the offence was ignored 'we would not be acting in concert with the other branches of the land league', and 'might as well at once dissolve this branch'.³

Then spoke Patrick A. Meehan, the branch's secretary who had organised the 'court'. He seemed anxious that Brady should clear himself, because Brady, he said, was 'one of the first land league men', and would be 'the last to injure it'. Admitting to a chorus of 'hear, hear' that it was a 'fundamental principle of the league, pending a final settlement of the land question, that no farmer should

1, L.E., 11 Dec. 80.

2, Ibid., 18 Dec. 80.

3, Ibid.

pay a higher rent than Griffith's valuation', and that there could be no question of the fact that a breach of the rules had been committed, Meehan maintained that the question the 'court' had to settle was whether there were 'any circumstances' in Brady's case which 'would palliate its gravity'.

When Brady appeared before the 'court' he was unapologetic. This is clear from his opening response to the charge that he had paid his rent, 'such rent being over Griffith's valuation'. He said:

I paid what I always paid, and I never said I would not, nor ever was asked whether I would or not. Parties did come to my house, and took some of my children along with them to go round through the tenants, and to arrange to meet at Mr Doran's that they might come to some agreements as to what they would do in regard to paying their rent. They never told me anything about it, and if they had I would not have let them act as they did. I don't think that rule [not paying more than Griffith's valuation in rent] could be carried out on our property at all.

After Laurence, his son, had described the events of 4 December 1880 Brady claimed that the land league had not laid down a general rule for all tenants forbidding their payment of a rent higher than Griffith's valuation. Instead, he declared, such a rule was left to the 'consideration' of local branches 'who would understand if the thing was justifiable'.²

Though one unnamed committee member told Brady that if he had been 'in earnest in the cause' he would have 'seen about the payment of rent' himself, it would appear that most present were anxious to deal leniently with Brady. Probably Patrick A. Meehan spoke for most present when he said that because Brady's sons 'sought to bring the farmers on the [Cassan] estate into harmony with each other as to how

1, L.E., 18 Dec. 80. 2, Ibid.

they should act', and that Laurence Brady 'very naturally thought it was not to be expected that he alone should hold out against paying his rent, and by that means leave himself open to have to stand the brunt of the landlord's power', it was the other tenants who had 'failed to keep their promise' who were 'most to blame'. Eventually the 'court' concluded with the adoption of two resolutions:

- (1) That having considered the question which has brought us together this evening, and having heard Mr Brady's explanation, we are unanimously of the opinion that he has not been guilty of any violation of the rules of the land league. At the same time, we take this opportunity of expressing our determination to accept no excuse on the part of any farmer who pays a rent higher than Griffith's valuation.
- (2) That our honorary secretary be directed to summon those tenants on the Cassan estate who, having promised to meet at Mr Doran's on the 4th instant, failed to fulfil their engagement, to attend a special committee meeting to be held here on the 12th instant immediately after mass.'

On 12 December 1880 Michael Brady chaired the meeting which was attended by almost all who had been present at the 'court' two days earlier and by a 'large number of farmers and others of the district'. Each of the four tenants of the Cassan estate, who were 'charged with having paid their rent', gave what was reportedly 'a satisfactory explanation'. (Given the outcome of Brady's own case their explanations could hardly have been deemed otherwise.) James Fitzpatrick said that he paid a half-year's rent at Griffith's valuation thinking the agent would accept that, but that he was only given a receipt on account. Joseph Fitzpatrick said that he told the agent that he would pay no rent except Griffith's valuation and only that when he had earned it. Edward Haslam paid his full rent which, he said, was 'only a couple of shillings over Griffith's valuation'. Hugh Nolan said that he had sent word by his son informing the agent

that he would pay no rent unless the landlord reduced it to Griffith's valuation.¹

Though there is no available concrete evidence it is likely that the proceedings of the land league 'court' in Maryborough on 10 December 1880, and its sequel two days later, were unpalatable to many members of the land league at least in the district of Maryborough. Within ten days, Michael Brady resigned his position as president of the branch.² Then, at a meeting on 22 December to consider Brady's letter of resignation, the committee of the branch suffered another rebuff: on a vote of confidence in the committee, eleven of the twenty-six voted against. After the committee resigned, 'a large attendance' in the town hall in Maryborough on 29 December elected new branch officers and a committee: the only significant changes were the election of the local protestant flour miller, William P. Odlum, as the new president, John Redington as the chairman of committees, and the enlargement of the committee to twenty to 'include at least one representative farmer from each of the surrounding districts'.³

The trials for the committee of the Maryborough branch did not end there. On 18 January 1881, six of the committee members - Patrick Doran, Nicholas Walsh, Patrick A. Meehan, Joseph Brennan, Michael Corcoran and Thomas Brennan - appeared in the petty sessions court in Maryborough before Colonel Henry D. Carden and Thomas Hamilton R.M. charged with intimidation. Apparently, on Monday evening 3 January 1881, the six, in a body, visited shops and houses in Maryborough recruiting members for the land league. Though witnesses insisted

1, L.E., 18 Dec. 80.

2, Ibid., 25 Dec. 80.

3, Ibid., 1 Jan. 81.

that they had not been compelled in any way to join the league, the two magistrates considered the charge proved, and fined the defendants £10 each or three months imprisonment.¹ Predictably, the outraged men appealed the verdict, and on 5 April 1881 in the Maryborough quarter sessions court Charles H. Teeling, *locum tenens* for the county court judge and chairman of the quarter sessions court, reversed the convictions: Teeling made the point of stating that his decision to reverse the convictions was not in any way to be taken as countenancing the compelling of persons to subscribe to the land league but that in 'this particular case' no evidence of intimidation had been offered. The defendants' defence was that they were no more guilty of intimidation than groups collecting funds for charitable organisations, and that the alleged victims of their intimidation (some of whom were witnesses on their behalf) had willingly joined the league.² (It must be stated that the *Leinster Express's* editorial comment on the appeal probably was apposite: it stated that 'no menace is necessary to induce a trader who lives by the people to accede to a request to contribute to the funds of an organisation of this sort [the land league]. He will subscribe to it as an insurance. He will give a contribution towards its funds on the same principle as the peasant pays the bandit to permit him to live in peace.'³)

By the end of January 1881, twenty-three of the twenty-four branches in the county were established, and, with only one person evicted in the first quarter of 1881,⁴ the landlords seemed to be

1, *L.E.*, 22 Jan, 81.

2, *Ibid.*, 9 Apr, 81.

3, *Ibid.*

4, *Return of cases of eviction...*, H.C., 1882(9), lv, 230-5, (7 Feb, 1882).

intimidated by the collective strength of an organised tenantry. The spirit of the league in the county, already running high, received a fillip on 25 January 1881 with the news of the acquittal of Parnell and thirteen other land-leaguers on a charge of conspiracy.¹ The failure of the government's case against Parnell and the others was celebrated throughout the county on the evening of 25 January and during the next day: windows were illuminated, bonfires were lit, and, notwithstanding the severe cold and snow, local bands followed by cheering crowds marched through streets playing national airs. Though the *Leinster Express* almost invariably was satirical in its descriptions of local bands, some sense of the rejoicing in the county may be derived from its description of Maryborough on Wednesday night 26 January 1881. The newspaper reported that by 8 p.m.:

almost every window in the main street, market square, Quality Row, the New Road etc., was raised up in all the revulgence of ignited tallow; most of them revealed likenesses of Mr Parnell or the traversers, while several were bedecked with patriotic mottoes. Shortly after the streets were thus illuminated, the local brass and fife and drum bands sallied forth from the rooms of the Catholic Young Men's Society. They bore aloft three flaming torchlights, and were surrounded by a cheering crowd. This unusual and imposing demonstration threw the admiring inhabitants into convulsions of enthusiasm; as it passed on the crowd became larger, the bands grew louder and louder; as each cheer rent the air the three torches swayed backward and forward in excited fashion at perilous attitude. The very tallow in the windows seemed to be infected, and stupidly tried to outshine the blazing torches, but two of these unfortunately had not the quality of endurance; they were bright and glaring one little while then no more. The procession had not proceeded far beyond the market square when they suddenly flickered big and then perished, leaving it literally a torchlight procession. With undiminished ardour, the processionists still plodded heroically around the town and through the snow until a reinforcement of two more torchlights gave them new vigour. There can hardly be a doubt that violent patriotism like most dangerous diseases is at certain periods infectious.²

The newspaper continued to describe how the bands and the crowd stopped outside houses, played 'stirring' national tunes, and cheered

1. Lyons, *Parnell*, p. 139.

2. *L.E.*, 29 Jan. 81.

the inhabitants. They were addressed briefly by William P. Odlum, president of the Maryborough branch of the land league, and later by Fr Joseph McCrea, the vice-president of the Kill, County Kildare, branch of the league, who was staying with his father in Maryborough. (His father, James McCrea, was a local grocer and spirit dealer.)' After some further parading, the crowd and the bands dispersed quietly.²

'At this time, the league had become the most formidable movement that had confronted the English rulers of Ireland in the century.' This was Davitt's estimate of the land league in February 1881 when he was writing in 1903. About one thousand branches in Ireland had a total membership of two hundred thousand. 'In the United States and Canada ...as many as in Ireland, while away in Australasia branches had sprung up in all the principal cities and in several mining centres.' According to Davitt: 'It would be underrating the total membership of the whole league to put it down at five hundred thousand strong in February 1881.'³ At the same time, Parnell and his supporters were fiercely obstructing coercive legislation - the protection of person and property bill - which Forster had introduced in the House of Commons on 24 January 1881. Faced with imminent coercion, Parnell, Davitt and other league leaders met in the House of Commons and afterwards in Westminster Palace Hotel, London on 27 and 28 January where they considered but rejected a plan to withdraw the parliamentary party from the House of Commons, set up a national

1. *Slater's Directory 1881*, p.453.

2. *L.E.*, 29 Jan.81.

3. *Davitt, Fall*, p.301.

convention in Dublin, and launch a no-rent campaign.' On 2 February, the first reading of the coercion bill was carried when the Speaker assumed powers of closing the debate. Then, the party marched out of the Common's chamber in protest, and once again considered and rejected proposals to withdraw from parliament.² Davitt, in 1903, believed that a 'great opportunity' had been lost by the land league leaders by not launching a no-rent strike that spring in 1881. He wrote:

opportunity means almost everything in the fortunes of war, and the one great chance of the no-rent campaign arrived when Mr Parnell and his men were ignominiously ejected from the British parliament and a despotic law was about to be enforced in Ireland... Irish landlordism would have been easily smashed in the spring of 1881 disciplined and prepared as the country was then, and on its ruins a better and more lasting treaty of peace between the two countries would have eventuated than any since proposed.³

The day after the first reading of the coercion bill was carried in the House of Commons, Davitt was arrested in Dublin and taken to London where his ticket-of-leave was withdrawn. He was to remain in Portland prison from 5 February 1881 until 6 May 1882.⁴

The arrest of Davitt (described in the minutes of the Raheen branch of the league as an example of 'the outrageous tyranny of a so-called liberal government'),⁵ the Protection of Person and Property Act on 2 March 1881 (according to the committee of the Borris-in-Ossory branch of the league, a 'nefarious coercion act'),⁶ and the Peace Preservation Act on 21 March 1881 (known as the arms act which

1. Moody, *Davitt*, pp 457-60.

2. *Ibid.*, 461-2.

3. Davitt, *Fall*, pp 309-10.

4. Moody, *Davitt*, pp 466-533.

5. Minute for 6 Feb. 81 in Raheen minute book (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

6. *L.E.*, 5 Mar. 81.

prohibited the possession of arms in proclaimed districts, restricted the sale of arms, and empowered the government to search persons and houses)' predictably incensed land-leaguers in Queen's County. Speakers on public platforms at land meetings became more violent in their language, and tenants were incited to defy the law. A good example of such a speaker was Fr Daniel O'Halloran, the curate in Clough. In a field opposite Clough chapel on Sunday afternoon 3 April 1881, Fr O'Halloran spoke to a 'very large enthusiastic' meeting, which was held to 'espouse the cause' of the tenantry of Mrs Grattan Bellew. (Apparently, Mrs Grattan Bellew, who lived in Mount Bellew, Galway and owned 10,594 acres in Queen's County,² through her agent had threatened 'most stringent measures' if her tenants did not accept a 20 per cent reduction in rents instead of Griffith's valuation,³ which they had offered.) Speaking on the resolution 'that we protest against the coercive policy of the Gladstone government, and we pledge ourselves to use every means in our power to frustrate its object by strenuously supporting the Irish National Land League at which coercion is aimed', Fr O'Halloran said that the 'coercive policy of Her Majesty's government...had so incensed, and so irritated the Irish people that they would, if they could, rise to arms as one man.' Clearly implying that such an armed response to coercion would be supported by the 'Irish priesthood', he said that the 'most rigid theologian - the greatest stickler for civil authority - must admit that nearly all the conditions that make rebellion lawful' were

1. 44 & 45 Vict., c. 5 (21 Mar.).

2. *Return of owners of land*,...[C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 April 1876].

3. Cf. above, pp 132-3 for how landlords' income from rents might have been affected by their accepting Griffith's valuation.

present then. 'In order to justify a rebellion in catholic theology, there must be five conditions', which were that 'the tyranny of the government to be destroyed must be intolerable, must be general, must be manifest, the government to be substituted must not be worse', and the condition, which he said was not present, 'there must be a reasonable prospect of success.' To loud cheers, he concluded by saying that Irish people's 'sighs and prayers are that the day may come when England's difficulties may thicken, and Ireland's opportunity may arise, and that they may destroy British tyranny in Ireland. Hence it is that our people exult over the defeat of the British arms..., and receive with shouts of triumph the success of the Afghans, the Zulus and the Boers.'

Notwithstanding such platform bluster as Fr O'Halloran's, the continued existence of the land league obviously was put at risk by the coercion act. Prepared to step into the breach was the ladies' land league. In their refutation of the male perspective on the land war, feminist historiographers have claimed a pivotal role for the ladies' league.² Rightly asserting the paucity of information they, nevertheless, have focused their attention on the activities of the Dublin leadership of Anna Parnell and the Central Ladies' Land League - on what Andrew J. Kettle described as 'a surprising number of really talented women'.³ A study of the genesis, structure and work of the ladies' league in Queen's County provides some of the necessary rural perspective.

1. *L.E.*, 9 Apr. 81.

2. Notably Margaret Ward in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, and Dana Hearne in her introduction to *The Tale of a Great Shaw* by Anna Parnell.

3. Andrew J. Kettle, *Material for Victory*, p.48.

With the return to office of the liberals under Gladstone in April 1880, and their anxiety to restore order, it became increasingly likely that the leaders of the land league might be imprisoned. The failure of the prosecution of Parnell and other leaders for conspiracy (December 1880 - January 1881) did not reassure Davitt, and he was anxious about what would happen to the work of the league in their absence. Adopting the idea of Fanny Parnell in America, he founded the ladies' land league in Dublin on 31 January 1881. He saw it as a medium for all kinds of charity, that it would support the evicted tenants, relieve all cases of distress, and that it would keep up a semblance of organisation during the repression which he saw coming.' On 4 February 1881, the ladies' executive council issued an address 'To our countrywomen' stating:

The time is now at hand when all law will be suspended in Ireland, when in all probability, the trusted energetic leaders and organisers of the Irish National Land League will be imprisoned in order to prevent them from carrying out their intention by relieving and assisting evicted tenants,...

Women of Ireland, you must do your duty whilst your countrymen do theirs. Be ready, at least, to help the evicted sufferers in every part of Ireland. You cannot prevent the evictions, but you can prevent them from becoming massacres. Form yourselves into branches of the Ladies' and Irish National Land League. Be ready to give information of evictions in your districts, to give advice and encouragement to the unhappy victims, to collect funds, and to apply those which may be entrusted to you as emergencies arise.²

In Queen's County there was a ready response to this appeal. Within three weeks, women's branches were formed in Rathdowney, Stradbally and Maryborough. The first noted intrusion into the accustomed male preserve of a land league meeting was in a crowded concert hall in

1. D.B. Cashman, *The life of Michael Davitt and the Secret History of the Land League*, p.231.

2. *Flag of Ireland*, 12 Feb. 81.

Rathdowney on 14 February 1881. The meeting, chaired by the local curate Fr Thomas Feehan, was to express continued fidelity to the principles of the land league, and to denounce the recent arrest of Davitt. The women were the first to enter, occupied the front seats, listened with rapt attention to each of the speakers, and were the last to leave. The *Leinster Express* described their presence as 'a novel and interesting feature in the proceedings but one which may for the future be regarded as a *sine qua non* at land league meetings.'

Until the proclamation of the Irish National Land League as an unlawful criminal association by Forster on 20 October 1881, the women, in numbers, were to be a noted part of public meetings. Invariably, they took over the seats at the front of indoor meetings, and fringed open-air assemblies in cars. While rarely they took seats on public platforms at meetings of the land league, clearly they discomfited the men by their presence. Certainly William Fitzpatrick, president of the Castletown branch of the land league, lacked confidence in the abilities of the women, and displayed male chauvinism when speaking from the platform at a large, cheering and laughing demonstration in Maryborough on 13 March 1881. He proposed a resolution which he hoped all women would carry out rigorously in future, and if done would be a most effective instrument in preserving the organisation: 'That we, the ladies of Ireland, pledge ourselves never to marry nor let our sisters, daughters or friends marry any man who will not become a land-leaguer and who will not oppose land grabbing.'²

1. *L.E.*, 19 Feb, 81.

2. *Ibid.*, 19 Mar, 81; *L.L.*, 19 Mar, 81.

Soon, the ladies' league provoked clerical criticism. Dr McCabe, the archbishop of Dublin, issued a pastoral letter, published on 12 March 1881 and read at mass the following day in all the churches of the Dublin archdiocese, which included part of Queen's County, condemning the ladies' league. It stated:

Not at the call of charity are the women of Ireland united to come before the world. They are asked to forget the modesty of their sex and the high dignity of their womanhood by leaders who seem reckless of consequences, and who by that recklessness have brought misery on many families.... The daughters of our catholic people, be they matrons or virgins, are called forth under the flimsy pretext of charity, to take their stand in the noisy arena of public life. The pretext of charity is merely assumed, for already we have holy associations of men and women who, with the full blessing of religion, do the works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, for the poor and afflicted....

Reverend Fathers, set your faces against this dishonouring attempt. Do not tolerate in your sodalities the woman who so far disavows her birthright of modesty as to parade herself before the public gaze in a character so unworthy a child of Mary.'

In Queen's County, the letter caused outrage and public approbation of the defence of the ladies' league by Alexander M. Sullivan, M.P. for Meath, and Dr Croke, archbishop of Cashel. Richard Lalor M.P., (two of his daughters were officers on the committee of the branch in Maryborough) when speaking from the platform in the concert hall in Rathdowney on 20 March 1881, after Anna Parnell's address, voiced his hurt over the archbishop accusing the women 'of acting hypocritically', and attributing to them 'motives for which, I am sure, they don't deserve credit.' As a ruler of the church, he said, he had great respect for the archbishop, but 'as an Irish politician I have no respect for Dr McCabe.' Later, after the meeting, speaking from a wall outside the concert hall, he advised the crowd to get all their female friends to join.²

1, *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Mar. 81; *L.L.*, 19 Mar. 81; Tierney, *Croke*, p.113.

2 *L.E.*, 26 Mar. 81.

The women sprung to their own defence. The Stradbally women, in a letter to the *Leinster Leader* on 2 April 1881, citing the example of the women of Limerick, the maid of Saragossa and Joan of Arc, expressed regret that 'anyone should think it unladylike or unfeminine for us to take a woman's part in public affairs'. They asked, 'Who was it that tended the wounded soldiers of ungrateful England, or who nursed both northerners and confederates during the American civil war?' and answered, 'the poor Irish nuns'. The letter went on to express pride in the formation of the Stradbally branch of the 'Irish Ladies' National League' under the 'patronage of one of the greatest orators and theologians that Ireland can boast of - the reverend Dr McGee' who had 'educated some of the most learned and best loved clergy in the United States'.

The visit of Anna Parnell to speak at a public meeting of the Rathdowney branch of the ladies' league on 20 March 1881 was an occasion of public endorsement of the movement, and gave impetus to its advancement in the county. Regarded in the context of her brother Charles Stewart, Anna was, nonetheless, the dominating personality of the ladies' league and, in Moody's words, possessed of 'no less strength of will, power of concentration and gift of command than her brother, and with a revolutionary spirit all her own'. Her reception in the county was as one given to a royal personage in a loyal district. Travelling by train from Dublin she was acclaimed at several stations including Maryborough and Kilbricken. A large crowd, headed by the executive of the Rathdowney branch of the ladies' league accompanied by the two local curates, Frs Thomas Feehan and John

Doyle, met her at a congested Ballybrophy railway station. Outside, an imposing procession for the four miles journey to Rathdowney was formed: in front a brake drew the Ballyroan brass band; the executive of the ladies' league in Rathdowney followed in a carriage driven by Fr Doyle; next was a croydon in which were seated Anna Parnell, Nora Campion, president of the Rathdowney women's branch, and Fr Feehan, president of the Rathdowney men's branch; the Knockaroe fife and drum band succeeded, and, alternately with the brass band in front, played patriotic airs; behind were several carriages and private cars, and a long line of outriders brought up the rear. The road to Rathdowney was spanned with arches of green decorated with flowers, and the town itself was quite *en fête* thronging with people who greeted Anna Parnell with repeated bursts of cheering.'

The meeting took place in an elaborately decorated concert hall. The audience was composed almost entirely of women with only a few men being admitted, and several succeeding in getting in only at the end of the meeting. A government note-taker was refused admission on Miss Parnell's instructions. She entered the hall on the arm of Richard Lalor M.P., was received with silent curiosity, and on being presented with an address of gratitude from the Rathdowney women for her visit she simply bowed her acknowledgement. The proceedings seemed to have been accomplished in almost rigid stillness. Fr Feehan took the chair. Only during an impassioned speech by the Durrow curate, Fr Edward Rowan, in which he referred to 'the pure and spotless womanhood

1, L.E., 26 Mar. 81.

of our glorious race and land taking part in the fight...as in the days of old when the maiden daughters were the chief instruments of heaven to liberate our soil from the iron despotism of the Dane', was anything like the usual cheers at public land meetings heard. While Richard Lalor M.P., the women's vice-president and president delivered speeches, all attention focused on Anna Parnell.'

Before speaking, she remained standing for several minutes looking fixedly at the audience. In a tightly constructed speech, alluding to the ladies' land league as 'an institution which had acquired a very bad character with some people', she declared its objects were 'to attend to the task of assisting in every possible way those people who may fall victim to the steps which the landlords are now about to take to reassert the supremacy which they have always enjoyed until the last twelve months...; to prevent any undue suffering resulting from the removal of those whose duty it is to attend to the wants of evicted tenants...; to report their cases to headquarters' - providing information 'accurate and as complete as possible'. Describing the telephone as 'an instrument which can communicate information at the rate of a thousand miles instantly', she hoped they might deserve the epithet telephone. Her speech included an incitement to, what the ladies' league considered, positive action: she felt it 'not at all creditable to the Queen's County that it has not yet been proclaimed...perhaps by the time next rent day comes round it will be.' She concluded by calling on the people to join the league, but warned them not to do so unless they were prepared to carry out the

work they would pledge themselves to perform 'in the face of much greater difficulties than any which we have yet experienced'. It would be selfish and unpatriotic to refuse to undertake the work, but it would be much worse, if having undertaken it, to cast it off: it would incur a moral guilt far greater than that of the government and landlords since they would know what is right in the question, and she did not think that 'Mr Gladstone or Mr Forster or Mr Bright or Mr Chamberlain or any of the whole group or any of the landlords, who are urging the government on, know the difference between right or wrong for a moment.'

By the time of the formal dissolution of the central branch of the ladies' league on 10 August 1882,² from references in the newspapers, sixteen branches of the ladies' league may be said to have been instituted in Queen's County.³ Only one children's branch - the Michael Davitt Graigue & Killeslin Children's League⁴ - was formed in the county: the Maryborough branch discussed the idea,⁵ and the *Leinster Express* on 30 July 1881 reported that the 'screaming sisterhood' of Athy, who would have included some women from Queen's County, voted eight against and three for the formation of a children's branch.

Evidence on the character of the leadership of the ladies' land league outside that of the central branch, in one branch at least, may

1. *L.E.*, 26 Mar. 81.

2. Below, pp 395-6.

3. Appendix 32, below, p. 433.

4. According to the *Leinster Leader* on 17 Dec. 81, there were over one hundred children in the branch, and it was the children's 'wish' to have their branch 'named after the illustrious Davitt'.

5. Maryborough branch minute book (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 2070).

be deduced from an analysis of the members and their subscriptions for 1881 as recorded in the Maryborough branch minute book for 16 February 1881 - 30 June 1882,¹ and a separate list of the Maryborough ladies' branch members and their subscriptions for 1882.² Table 6, following (below, p.171) represents a summary of the subscriptions for the period 16 February 1881 to 30 June 1882.

From 16 February 1881 to the end of January 1882, 434 members enrolled. 373 (including the 46 who subscribed nothing) paid 1s. or less, while 61 paid sums in excess of 1s. - totalling £12.10s.9d. Significantly, the 23 committee women - only 5.3 per cent of the total membership - subscribed £5.7s.6d. or almost 22 per cent of the total subscription: their subscriptions consisted of 1 of £1, 21 of 5s., and 1 of 2s.6d.

The figures for February to June 1882, while less impressive, serve to underline the class of the leadership of the branch. There were 286 fewer members - a drop of almost 66 per cent. The greatest reduction was among the subscribers of 1s. or less: their numbers dropped more than 76 per cent - from 373 to 88. Those who subscribed sums in excess of 1s. remained virtually unchanged - a drop from 61 to 60. Of the 18 committee members whose subscriptions are entered for 1882, 2 paid £1, 4 paid 10s., 2 paid 7s.6d., 5 paid 5s., 4 paid 2s.6d., and 1 paid 2s.: they paid a total of £6.12s.0d. or almost 42 per cent of the total subscription.

1, N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 2070,

2, Ibid., MS 9221,

Table 6 Subscriptions by members of the Maryborough branch of the ladies' land league, 16 February 1881 to 30 June 1882

period	total	sums subscribed		total	no. who did not pay
	number	3d, to	1s, 6d,	paid	
	enrolled	1s,	to £1	£ s d	
16 Feb, 81 to 31 Jan, 82	434	327	61	24 11 10	46
1 Feb 82 to 30 June 82	148	88	60	15 15 7	0

It would be unsound to deduce too much from the set of figures above. It is reasonable to assume that the great proportion of subscribers did not wish to become active members of the ladies' league. Many probably contributed from motives of simple charity. Other women, faced with the all-absorbing difficulty of trying to manage a household on meagre substance, and in the future might need help from the ladies' league, probably joined or contributed their mite from motives of self-interest. The committee members paid, in the life of the Maryborough branch, a disproportionate share of the total sum paid by all the members. Had they paid the average subscription, they would have paid 1s.1½d. in 1881 instead of an average 4s.7½d., and in 1882 2s.1½d. instead of an average 7s.4d. From the statistics, it is reasonable to conclude, in agreement with Samuel Clark,¹ that in Maryborough and probably elsewhere, as the more active branches were similarly based in the towns, that the ladies' land league drew its active support and leadership from middle-class and urban groups.

While the ladies' league was largely an independent body, given the very masculine public face of Victorian society, predictably there

1, Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, p.339.

were tangible links with the men's association. From a careful reading of newspaper reports on the branches of the league in Queen's County, and a familiarisation with the names of the various branch committee members and, where indicated, places of residence, it is possible to identify with reasonable confidence seventy-three members of the ladies' league, and to establish a direct family link between thirty-four or almost 47 per cent of them and members of the men's branches. Though this method is prone to error, and inexact, nonetheless, one is left with an impression that the composition of the leadership of the women's branches, at least in Queen's County, reflected that of the men's branches. A resolution in the minute book of the Maryborough women's branch for 2 March 1882 tendered 'sincere thanks to the gentlemen of Maryborough for the assistance they have rendered us in forming this branch of the ladies' land league, and their extreme kindness in allowing us the use of their reading room for meeting in'.¹ Their gratitude must have waned the following April when the Young Men's Association sent them a letter enquiring the amount of rent they would be satisfied to pay for the use of the reading room.² Less candid, but amusing links between the women's and the men's associations might be deduced from the presentation of a 'magnificent davenport fully furnished' to James Carey, secretary of the Graigue & Killeslin branch of the land league who was in Naas gaol, by the women's organisation in the same area under its president Miss Carey:³ also, that John Redington became 'the noblest of all

1. Maryborough ladies' minute book (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 2070),

2. Ibid,

3. L.L., 1 Apr. 82.

Queen's County suspects' to the Maryborough women under their new president, his wife Mary Redington, and that they hoped 'his long imprisonment' had 'not told on his health or spirits'.¹

The ladies' league attempted to confine their relief expenditure on tenants to what Clare Stritch, of the central executive, described in a letter to the Rathdowney branch as 'evicted tenants who have acted up to the principles of the Irish National Land League'.² She concluded her letter by stating that the women of the branch would 'have to be guided by the rules of the league, however hard it may appear to turn a deaf ear to the many cases of distress that may be brought under their notice.'³ Where possible, a wooden house was erected for the evicted family, usually under the supervision of a member of the local branch of the ladies' league. (The men's league had built some at the beginning of the land war, but did not continue the practice.) Two hundred and ten wooden huts were built throughout the country, but in many cases erection was prevented by the police.⁴ (Even those huts which were built, proved unfit to live in.)⁵ Railway fare, car and cart hire, and the hire of lodgings were to be paid out of the funds of the ladies' league. 'The strictest economy, consistent with efficiency, was to be observed, and all who had it in their power, were to do what they could without remuneration to assist evicted families.'⁶ Money paid in relief invariably was paid in small

1. Maryborough ladies' minute book (op.cit).

2. *L.E.*, 14 May 81.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Davitt's evidence to the *Times* - Parnell commission on 30 Oct. 89, (vol.x, p.608).

5. R. F. Foster, *Charles Stewart Parnell: the man and his family*, p.267.

6. *United Ireland*, 29 Oct. 81.

instalments, often to the wife of the evicted tenant, sometimes to a shopkeeper, but always attempting to ensure that, while sustenance was provided, the money was not paid in rent or to meet creditors.

Because of the insufficient available financial records, it is impossible to prove or refute the charge of extravagance, which the men levelled at the ladies' league when they disbanded.¹ For any investigation, the destruction of the 'Book of Kells' - a register containing information about all parts of Ireland as collected by the ladies' branches and collated in the central office - is a serious loss. The six pages of accounts at the back of the Maryborough ladies' league minute book - the only such book in an Irish public repository - disappoint: the spelling of relief as 'releif' in bold script across five of the six pages may undermine one's confidence in the figures, but more significantly there is the suggestion of at least one other account book in the entries 'carried to pass book no.1' and 'carried to labourers acct. pass book no.1'.²

The women of Stradbally did not see themselves just in terms of charity and succour for the evicted. At their meeting on 31 January 1881 their president, Miss Doyle, observed that 'it was well known that ladies have tongues and the use of the pen', and if there was in the district any 'cruel or unfeeling landlord, any grabber or oppressor of the poor...woe be to him...he will feel the weight of indignation and censure, and will wither under it.' In this way they 'could shame the government and landlord cruelty into a sense of justice and humanity'.³ The same Stradbally branch gained some

1. For the expenditure of the women during the year after 26 Dec. 81 see below, p. 388, n. 3.

2. Maryborough ladies' minute book (op. cit.).

3. L.E., 5 Mar. 81.

short-lived national notoriety when, in April 1881, they sent a memorial directly to Queen Victoria. They did not delude themselves about its possible results: Miss Doyle thought that Her Majesty cared little for her Irish subjects whether they starved or not, and another woman observed that were it only to give 'Her Majesty the trouble of reading the recital of the miseries of this portion of her great kingdom', she would be in favour of sending the address. The circumlocutionary memorial painted a picture of 'the depressed and starving tenantry of Ireland' as 'men who, unlike the barbarous nihilists of Russia, would shed their blood in your majesty's cause'. It stated that 'six or eight thousand landlords, many of whom never reside in the country, carry away almost all the fruits of the soil, leaving nothing but death, rags and starvation for the tillers thereof.' (In May 1881, the branch received a deflationary reply from A.F.O. Liddell, Whitehall, stating that 'the secretary of state had had the honour to lay the memorial, duly corrected, before the queen.')²

Even in those days of 'opportunity' in the spring of 1881 when the land league was 'formidable', there is clear evidence that tenant-solidarity was an illusion - despite all the bombast from league platforms. There may have been a broad coalition of male and female land-leaguers, M.P.s and accommodating priests, but tenants continued to act independently. Of course, as has been suggested, a large minority of the tenants in Queen's County were not land-leaguers,³ but

1, *Flag of Ireland*, 14 May 81; *L.L.*, 2 Apr. 81; cf. Fr McGee's letter, above, p.1.

2, *L.E.*, 14 May 81.

3, Above, pp 114-16.

even many of those tenants who were members of the land league ignored the expressed directions of their branches. Two examples illustrate this. First, disunity among the rate-paying members of the Borris-in-Ossory branch is revealed by their voting pattern in the election of poor law guardians for the electoral division of Moneenalassa in Donaghmore poor law union in March 1881. (The poor law voting system in 1881 permitted ample opportunities for would-be intimidators: on a poor law union election day - as near as possible to 25 March each year - a returning officer toured each electoral division delivering to each eligible voter voting papers which contained the names of the election candidates for the division; then the electors marked the papers, signed their names, and returned the papers to the returning officer who collected them the following day. Finally, in his office, the returning officer counted the votes - a procedure which, by law, any enfranchised rate payer was entitled to witness.) As the voting papers were left open at the count for anyone to take note of the candidates selected by each voter, the *Leinster Leader*, on 2 April 1881, could report that twenty-one rate paying members of the Borris-in-Ossory branch voted for Patrick Breen - described as the 'land league candidate' - while seventeen voted for the 'landlord candidate': maliciously, the newspaper printed a list of the names of those who voted for Patrick Breen and, describing the list as a roll of honour, identified by omission those members of the branch who might be branded as renegades. Second, and also substantiating Davitt's statement that 'the mass of small tenants, who were the main support of the movement, understood very little of the land problem beyond the

question of rent and the dread reality of eviction', 'disunity among tenants in the county is revealed by resolutions reported in the *Leinster Leader* on 30 April 1881 which were adopted by a 'recent' meeting of the committee of the Ballyadams & Wolfhill branch: the committee, promising to 'sustain' members of the branch who, endeavouring to get 'reasonable reductions' in their rents, were 'threatened with law proceedings', regretted that:

some members of this branch of the I.N.L.L. acted individually...paid their rents in full having previously agreed to act collectively with their fellow tenants who, considering themselves rack-rented, sought reasonable abatement. If such conduct became general it would be impossible to abolish rack-renting - one of the great objects of the league - [therefore] this committee are of the opinion that such members should be expelled, and we direct our honorary secretary to remove their names from the land league books.

From about March 1881, the determination of the landlords in Queen's County to collect their rents was steeled by the activities of the Orange Emergency Committee and the Property Defence Association. The Orange Emergency Committee was established in December 1880 by the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland to combat the land league, which it saw as aiming 'to subvert the authority of Her Majesty the queen'.² The Property Defence Association, the more efficient and better financed of the two organisations, was formed, also in December 1880, by a group of landowners and agents: it called for public support, 'to uphold the rights of property against organised combination to defraud'.³ The two organisations sent men, commonly called emergency men, to service writs and other legal processes where local officers

1. Davitt, *Fall*, p.164.

2. E.H.P. Wetherall's answer to a memorial from his tenants (*L.E.*, 5 Mar. 81).

3. Moody, *Davitt*, p.434.

were intimidated from doing so; they sent agents to attend sheriffs' auctions of tenants' stock and interests in their farms where they either bought the properties or bid up prices; they found tenants for evicted farms; they protected and provided labourers for ostracised employers; they helped supply goods to persons whom local traders refused to supply. '

The first noted appearance by agents of the Property Defence Association in the county was on 15 March 1881 in Maryborough at a sheriff's auction of the stock of five tenants of Richard Warburton. (Warburton lived in Garryhinch near Portarlington and owned 3,491 acres in the county.² He and his agent, William Phillips J.P., were subjected to much vitriolic attention from the land league throughout 1881.³) The background to the sheriff's auction was as follows: On 13 December 1880 about two hundred tenants from the estates of Warburton, E.H.P. Wetherall (who lived in London, and owned 614 acres in Queen's county)⁴ and William Kemmis (who lived in Rathdrum, Dublin, and owned 4,706 acres in Queen's County)⁵ met on the bridge in Mountmellick, and in military order marched to the office of William Phillips, the agent for the three estates. Two of the tenants entered the office, offered Griffith's valuation as the maximum rent they would pay Phillips, and, when it was refused, all the tenants returned home without paying anything.⁶ On 26 January 1881, Phillips received

1. Moody, *Davitt*, pp 434-5. For the establishment of three branches of the Property Defence Association in Queen's County, see below, pp 289-92.

2. *Return of owners of land...* [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 Apr. 1876].

3. Below, pp 281-3.

4. *Return of owners of land...* (op.cit.),

5. *Ibid.*

6. *L.E.*, 18 Dec. 80.

authorisation from the land court in Maryborough to take bankruptcy proceedings against some of Warburton's tenants.¹ Subsequently, the bankruptcy proceedings were abandoned, and writs for the seizure for £230 rent owed by five tenants in Tinnakill townland were obtained in the common pleas division of the high court of judicature.² Then, on 11 March 1881, the deputy sub-sheriff, Thomas Miller, and his bailiffs, protected by 32 soldiers of the 20th Regiment stationed at Maryborough and 50 RIC, seized stock belonging to the five tenants. Though no serious disturbances occurred, a large and unruly crowd watched the seizures and the lodging of the animals in the auctioneer's yard in Maryborough. There was much bitterness among the tenants and their neighbours as the seizures were progressing, and in Maryborough one cow, somehow isolated from the other animals by the crowd, was only with 'considerable trouble and all the appearance of a riot' lodged in the auctioneer's yard with the other animals.³

The sheriff's auction on 15 March 1881 was converted into a land league demonstration. Attempts were made by personal contact and by posters to induce people 'to attend in their thousands'. Then, shortly before noon - the appointed time of the auction - the two Maryborough bands appeared and, leading a large crowd, marched up a laneway which led into Gaze's Hotel yard where the auction was to take place. The yard gate was guarded by five police under the local head constable, James Walsh, who informed the bands and the crowd that they would not be admitted. Retracing their steps, the crowd and the bands made a circuit by the barrack's road, and entered a field from which

1, L.E., 29 Jan, 81.

2, Ibid., 12 Mar, 81.

3, Ibid.

there was another gateway leading to the hotel yard. At this gate, when they found a larger force of police under Sub-Inspector William Grene, a mêlée ensued as they tried unsuccessfully to force a passage into the yard. Encouraged by the crowd, and probably in some frustration, the bands played 'national airs' in the field outside the yard while the auction proceeded within.'

Meanwhile, as a 'considerable number' of police assembled in the yard, Norris Goddard and three other employees of the Property Defence Association made their appearance. Goddard, a thirty year-old solicitor from Dublin, was to become a noted representative of the Property Defence Association throughout Ireland. Easily recognised because of his powerful physique, red hair, habit of smoking a pipe and wielding a blackthorn stick like a cudgel, Goddard was, in the words of Clifford D.C. Lloyd, the resident magistrate in Limerick, 'one of the chief workers in this movement' (the Property Defence Association) who 'accompanied his agents wherever they were likely to undergo hardships or be in personal danger', and 'like the little petrel' was 'to be found wherever the storm raged most furiously'.²

When the auction was about to start, John Conroy, one of the tenants whose cattle were to be sold, requested the deputy sub-sheriff to adjourn the auction to the town's market square. Predictably, the request was denied. During the auction there was pandemonium emanating mainly from the field outside the yard: the band played, the crowd groaned for Warburton, Phillips, and the Property Defence

1, L.E., 19 Mar, 81.

2, Clifford Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League: a narrative of personal experiences*, pp 119-20.

Association men, and, in keeping the crowd out of the yard, one of the bailiffs was beaten up. All the animals - seventeen cattle and eight horses - were bought for the tenants by land-leaguers bidding against Goddard and his men. However, while the auction probably would have proved abortive without the presence of the Property Defence Association men, the amount realised by the auction was only £160 - £70 less than the amount of the writs.¹

At the conclusion of the auction, the people adjourned to the field adjoining the yard where they were addressed from a cart by three priests, Fr John Phelan, the parish priest of Emo, and Frs Edward Walsh and James Connolly, two curates from Mountmellick. The day was considered a success because the tenants had taken a 'bold and decided stand' against rack-rents, and the landlord had failed to realise his rents;² however, it was noted with loud complaints that the cattle were in poor shape, and they had been ill-treated by the sheriff's men.³ (It is likely that there was some truth in the complaints, because the seventeen cattle had been housed in a shed measuring 21 feet by 14½ feet, and probably as a result one lost an eye, and a cow slipped a calf soon after it reached home.)⁴ After the speechifying, a triumphal procession was formed, and marched through Maryborough to its outskirts: the procession was headed by the Maryborough brass band, behind which came boys mounted on the horses which had been seized under the writs, next came the cattle, and the rear was brought

1, L.E., 19 Mar. 81. For the attempt by the deputy sub-sheriff the following week to raise the £70 still due on the writs, see below, p. 182. Of course, as noted (above, p. 99), there were other legal ways Warburton could coerce solvent tenants into paying their rents.

2, L.E., 19 Mar. 81.

3, Ibid.

4, Ibid., 26 Mar. 81.

up by the tenants wearing the writs in their hat bands and seated on an outside car drawn by their supporters.¹

The following week on 22 March, Thomas Miller, the deputy sub-sheriff, protected by a formidable force of forty soldiers and forty RIC commanded by Thomas Hamilton R.M., set out to raise the £70 balance remaining due on the writs against Warburton's five tenants by seizing their stock. However, evidently the tenants were prepared: though Miller's expedition was supposed to have been a secret, no stock except a flock of sheep belonging to John Conroy, a defendant in one of the writs, were to be seen in Tinnakill townland. Observed by a small hostile crowd - which included Fr James Connolly and other members of the Mountmellick branch of the land league - twenty-eight of Conroy's sheep were seized by Miller and his bailiffs, and lodged in Gaze's yard in Maryborough. Two days later the sheep were sold - with less disturbance than on 15 March (probably because on this occasion forty RIC were drawn up in the yard) and again with Norris Goddard and three other employees of the Property Defence Association present: the sheep were knocked down to Conroy for £1.2s.7d. per head which, when totalled, still left the proceeds of both auctions £38.7s.8d. short of the total amount of Warburton's writs.²

Such clear evidence of landlords' resilience and of a more determined government undermined Richard Lalor's confidence that the league would win the war. In a letter addressed to the secretary of the Irish National Land League on 4 April 1881, and which was

1, *L.E.*, 19 Mar, 81,

2, *Ibid.*, 26 Mar, 81,

published in the *Freeman's Journal* on 7 April 1881, Lalor expressed his anxiety and belief that the land league would have to alter its 'line of agitation'. Drawing conclusions, as he stated, from 'the press of every shade of public opinion', Lalor believed that the land bill about to be introduced by Gladstone in the House of Commons would not be 'such a radical reform as ought to satisfy the Irish people': the bill would only be 'a new plaster on an old sore'.¹ Lalor's letter continued:

Up to the present, the league has only recommended the tenant farmers to look for a reduction of rent. But if the ministry are not prepared to act according to the requirements of the country it will become the duty of the land league to recommend a still greater pressure to be brought to bear on the land monopolists, namely a strike against the payment of all rent.²

Up to the present time, the tenant farmers have been supplying the landlords with the sinews of war - supplying them with a whip to scourge themselves in the shape of rent. But stop the rent and you take the whip out of the landlords' hands - you will deprive them of the sinews of war which many of them are making use of so unmercifully at present.

Of course, this will be met with a shout from the land monopolists that we are robbers. But we must not heed this sort of talk, let it come from whom it may. This is a national question, and individuals count for nothing. Good landlords must suffer; but up to the present they have been aiding the bad ones, and the government is aiding both. It is now life or death for the people - life or death for the Irish nation. I say the nation must live, and perish class monopoly.³

There is no evidence of any widespread enthusiastic response in land league branches in Queen's County to Lalor's proposed 'line of agitation'. In the central office of the land league in 39 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin the only concurring voice was Anna Parnell's. On the same day Lalor's letter appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* she wrote him a short private letter, which stated:

1. N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566<10>.

2. Lalor underlined these words.

3. Lalor papers, MS 8566<10>, op.cit.

I was very glad to see your letter in the Freeman today. It is terrible to me to see the league folding its hands and standing by while the people are being butchered. There is as yet plenty of money, and there is no reason why even the people who are being evicted should be desperate if they knew that the landlords all over the country were being punished for evictions.

I would like you to see my brother when he is over. If I telegraphed you when and where you could meet him do you think you could come? He is to visit Cork next Sunday. None of the men here seem to have any policy at all except John Dillon who confesses he doesn't know what is the best advice to give the people, but still has one opinion that to proclaim a strike against rents would be a mistake. They are all blaming my brother, but I really don't see what he can do unless they are prepared to venture on a bold policy.'

Parnell did visit Cork on 10 April 1881, but while there was cautious, and 'not overtly hostile' to Gladstone's land bill.² If the meeting between Lalor and Parnell did take place then clearly Lalor would not have had Parnell's support for his proposed 'strike against the payment of all rent'.

John Dillon was in a quandary. He was Davitt's successor as the land league's head of organisation, and 'of all the league chiefs was closest to Davitt in spirit',³ and more likely than Parnell 'to venture on a bold policy' of a rent strike. He had attended a land meeting in Clough, Queen's County on 3 April 1881, but his advice had no suggestion of a general strike against all rents. He told the crowd that up to then the land league had spread so rapidly they had not the time to get it 'into thorough working order'; it was of the utmost importance that every branch should reorganise, and discover who had not joined; every 'case of oppression should be watched', and 'help brought to the man who was in dire difficulty'; committees should meet every fortnight, but if committees were negligent in meeting the whole branch should elect a new committee that would

1. N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 8566(10), op.cit.

2. Lyons, *Parnell*, p.158.

3. Moody, *Davitt*, p.480.

'watch the traitors, and maintain the laws and rules of the land league'.¹ Referring to Gladstone's land bill, he was disparagingly hostile:

The Irish have not risen to their feet and raised and started twelve hundred branches of the land league...to win for the people of this country some paltry and contemptible concession. The people in America would give you no help except to destroy landlordism altogether. If you show the white feather now, if you turn your back, if you give up the fight before you pull down the whole institution of landlordism you need never look to America for help again.²

Dillon's hostility to Gladstone's land bill was understandable. If the land league was threatened by coercion and internal weakness, a riven land league was the menace of the land bill introduced in the House of Commons on 7 April 1881. The land bill proposed the granting of the 3Fs, which were of immediate interest to most tenants, but did not abolish landlordism - the basic demand made by league leaders at meetings throughout the country.³ The bill provided for the setting up of a commission of three and sub-commissions to determine the fair rent of holdings for periods of fifteen years; tenants whose rents were so fixed were to have security of tenure so long as they paid their rent; tenants were to be entitled to sell their interest in their holdings for the highest price they could get; the land purchase provisions of the land act of 1870 were to be improved - the repayment terms on state advanced sums were, as in the act of 1870, in annuities of 5 per cent for 35 years but the proportion of the land purchase price to be advanced increased from two-thirds to three-quarters. In effect, Gladstone's land bill of 1881 provided for a system of dual

1. *L.E.*, 9 Apr. 81.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Cf. below, p. 262 n. 4.

ownership by landlords and tenants in place of the existing landlord system.

Early detectable reaction of land-leaguers in Queen's County to the land bill was predictable: the moderate elements probably welcomed most of the bill but were discreetly silent, while the die-hards were ungrateful and publicly critical. Such die-hard attitudes were publicly aired at the land meeting at Aghaboe on 24 April 1881. The meeting, apparently convened by the local parish priest, Fr Matthew Keeffe, was attended by seventeen priests, deputations from the league branches in Durrow & Cullahill, Maryborough, Borris-in-Ossory, Rathdowney, Ballyroan, Mountrath and Castletown, and a 'good representation from the surrounding branches of the ladies' land league'. Resolutions protesting against coercion, and expressing confidence in Parnell and the Irish parliamentary party were passed, while the land bill, about to have its second reading in the House of Commons, was publicly discussed. The two M.P.s for the county, who were attending parliament, offered direct and simple advice to the meeting through the medium of a letter and a telegram, which were read aloud from the platform. Richard Lalor's letter - containing no reference to a rent strike - stated: 'I don't like the land bill. In its present shape it is no good. My advice to the people would be to stand firmly by the land league and one another, and continue to agitate as if there was no land bill before the country.' Arthur O'Connor's telegram, more direct than Lalor's letter, stated: 'Second reading land bill Monday. That bill completely vindicates league. Its defects prove necessity of continued organisation and sustained determination of parliamentary party and people.' The chairman of the

meeting, Fr John Fitzpatrick, the parish priest of Galmoy, was worried about the 'obscure language' in the land bill and, dismissing its main terms, expressed views which were reflected by subsequent speakers: he approved of taking 'the fixing of fair rent' out of landlords' hands, but he believed there would be no change if the responsibility for fixing fair rent was to be given to county court judges or quarter sessions chairmen - the 'friends of the landlords' who 'sat with the landlord and danced with his daughter'; stating that the bill purported to give tenants fixity of tenure, he rhetorically asked what sort of fixity of tenure it gave when the 'entire tenantry of Ireland' were in arrears; the excluding clause in the land bill, he said, 'was of no value' because 'by it no protection at all was given to those who held leases, and by that one clause one-third of the tenantry' were excluded.' Fr Fitzpatrick concluded his criticism of the land bill by stating that because landlords would still be able to evict for non-payment of rent 'all of Ireland would shortly be evicted.'²

If the leaders of the land league in the county were reacting critically to Gladstone's land bill, then by May 1881 they also seemed to be attempting a more co-ordinated direct challenge to the rule of law. At the same time, landlords were becoming more ruthless in their dealings with tenants: for example, though only one person was evicted in the county in the three months from 1 January to 31 March 1881, during the following three months (until 30 June) 18 families consisting of 78 persons were evicted - 2 families consisting of 11 persons were readmitted as tenants, and 7 families consisting of 35

1. The fraction was closer to one-fifth (Appendix II, below, p.418).

2. L.L., 30 Apr.81.

persons were readmitted as caretakers.' By May 1881, such was the apparent pitch of violent confrontation in the county² that the authorities were compelled to suspend habeas corpus.

While it is tempting to describe each land meeting and sheriff's auction in the county, to do so would be unnecessarily confusing and would have the effect of obscuring the crucial landmarks of the land war. However, the sheriff's auction of five cattle in Maryborough on 3 May 1881 requires examination because the auction, which was made the occasion of a series of demonstrations, probably prompted the authorities to take draconian measures to restore law and order in the county. In order to view objectively the sheriff's auction it is necessary to relate the circumstances which brought it about.

The five cattle in question belonged to two tenants, and were auctioned in Maryborough at the instigation of Dr David Jacob, a medical practitioner who owned 748 acres in the county.³ Part of Jacob's estate was in the townland of Cool (about six miles south-west of Maryborough) where he rented 149 acres to ten tenants for £196.17s.8d.⁴ Table 7, following, shows the size, rent, and valuation of the holdings of eight of Jacob's tenants in Cool who played a significant role in the events leading to the auction on

1. *Return of cases of eviction*, ... H.C. 1882(9), lv, 230-5, (7 February 1882).

2. Admittedly, there were usually more evictions during the six months from 31 Mar. to 30 Sept. than during the six months from 30 Sept to 31 Mar. Nevertheless, a contrast with the figures for the three months to 30 June 1880 confirms the points that landlords were becoming 'more ruthless', and the 'pitch of violent confrontation' was increasing in the county by May 1881; in the three months to 30 June 1880, of the 17 families consisting of 76 persons who were evicted in the county 11 families consisting of 56 were readmitted to their holdings as either tenants or caretakers - clearly a higher proportion than those readmitted during the same three month period in 1881 (eviction statistics listed in the bibliography).

3. *Return of owners of land*, ... [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 April 1876].

4. Accounts of the Raheen branch of the land league (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

3 May in Maryborough.¹

Table 7 Size, annual rent and valuation of the holdings of eight tenants on Dr David Jacob's estate in Cool, Queen's County, May 1881.

tenant's name	size of holding			annual rent			valuation			rent as % of valuation
	a	r	p	£	s	d	£	s	d	
Michael Delaney	26	2	0	38	17	5	20	15	0	187
Pat Kelly	7	0	0	9	3	0	6	5	0	145
Thomas Phelan	13	0	18	17	12	3	12	0	0	147
John Finlay	20	0	0	27	0	0	23	0	0	117
Fintan Phelan ('hill')	14	2	0	19	5	0	14	10	0	133
James Phelan	13	3	0	14	7	6	12	0	0	120
Fintan Phelan ('Pat')	19	3	20	26	2	6	16	5	0	161
James Lalor	15	0	0	18	5	0	15	5	0	123

In January 1881 Dr Jacob's ten tenants in Cool were variously in arrears in their rents. On 24 February, as pre-arranged, they met at the fair in Maryborough, and went to Jacob's residence to offer him Griffith's valuation - which would have been about 30 per cent less than their usual rent.² Jacob refused their offer, and they left without paying anything. On 21 March Michael Delaney, Pat Kelly and Thomas Phelan returned to Maryborough and paid Jacob their full rent.³ From that day the three were boycotted, and on 27 March the committee of the Raheen branch of the land league ordered their names to be erased from its lists of members.⁴ Michael Delaney, in particular, was made to pay materially for his independence: on Friday night, 25 March 1881, a rick and cock of hay and outhouses (one containing two cows) were destroyed by fire;⁵ a short time later when Delaney sent

1. Accounts of the Raheen branch of the land league (op. cit.).

2. Ibid.

3. Report on the presentment sessions in Mountrath (L.E., 14 May 81).

4. Minute book of Raheen branch of the land league (N.L.I., Lalor papers, MS 9219).

5. Arrests under Protection of Person and Property Act, 1881-2 (S.P.O., C.S.O., vol. i, pp 68-9).

his servant girl to a quarry at Ballyroan for lime to rebuild an outhouse she was refused, and when she went to the next quarry she was followed by the people from the first quarry who, by their shouting, probably intimidated the owner of the second quarry from selling her any lime either; Delaney's buildings remained derelict, and the servant girl left his service.' (Delaney's unpopularity probably increased after he successfully claimed for 'malicious damage' at the presentment sessions in Mountrath on 12 May 1881,² and local cess payers had to pay him £160:³ certainly, in early July 1881 farriers and blacksmiths in Maryborough would not work for him, and on 8 July he had to go to the RIC farriers in Maryborough to have a horse shod.⁴)

Dr Jacob, determined to collect his rents, instituted legal proceedings against five tenants: John Finlay, Fintan Phelan (known locally as 'Pat'), James Phelan and Fintan Phelan (identified as from the 'hill') were served with civil-bill processes for half a year's rent due on 1 November 1880, and James Lalor (who was suspected of having committed the arson on Michael Delaney's property)⁵ was served with a civil-bill ejectment for one year's rent also due on 1 November 1880.⁶ On 29 April, with Jacob in attendance, Lalor, his wife and four children were evicted, and five cattle (three belonging to Fintan Phelan - whether 'Pat' or Fintan from the 'hill' is not known - and

1. *L.E.*, 14 May 81.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 9 July 81.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Arrests under Protection of Person and Property Act, 1881-2 (S.P.O., C.S.O., vol. i, 'short precis' in arrest form on James Lalor, pp.68-9).

6. Raheen branch minute book (op. cit.), minute for 27 Mar. 81.

two belonging to John Finlay) were seized by the deputy sub-sheriff and his bailiffs.' (It is possible that the way tenants were treated by their landlord on a neighbouring estate encouraged defiance in Jacob's tenants.² If a letter from an unidentified tenant published in the *Leinster Express* on 23 April 1881 is to be believed, then Captain Howard Brooks - whose 1,097-acre estate³ in Ardlea and Rosskelton townlands was close to Jacob's property in Cool - granted his tenants a reduction of 25 per cent on their rents. This, according to the tenant, gave 'several' of Brooks's tenants a level of rent below Griffith's valuation.)

The sheriff's auction of the five cattle in Maryborough on 3 May 1881 was, as already stated, made the occasion of a series of demonstrations. On 30 April 'notices were posted by Mr John Gaze, the local auctioneer, to the effect that he would sell these cattle by auction on 3 May.' The next day (1 May) a meeting of the committee of the Maryborough branch of the league, chaired by John Redington, discussed expelling Gaze from the branch, and instructed Patrick A. Meehan, the branch secretary, to send him a letter 'calling on him to resign': in Sub-Inspector William D. Grene's words, Gaze was 'intimidated and prevented from carrying out the sale, and next day declined to have anything more to say to it, and the deputy sub-sheriff himself had to act as auctioneer.' On the same day (1 May) notices - believed by the police to have been written by Patrick

1, Raheen branch minute book (op.cit.), minute for 1 May 81. On 8 May 1881 Sub-Inspector William D. Grene reported that six cattle were seized (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1882/29627); however, as the members of the Raheen league had a vested interest in the cattle *per se*, the minute is more likely to be correct.

2, Cf. below, pp 279-83.

3, *Return of owners of land...* [C1492], H.C. 1876, lxxx, 75-81, [20 April 1876].

Doran, the vice-president of the Maryborough branch - were posted 'partly over the auction notices': the notices included the directives: 'Remember and beware of Doctor Davy... Beware of pills and prescriptions!' and 'Remember,...John Gaze, the emergency auctioneer... God save Ireland! Remember such vermin!'

A 'circular' was sent from Maryborough 'to every land league branch in the county requesting them with their bands to attend', and from 'answers received, an enormous attendance' was 'expected'. However, on the evening of 2 May, when it was known in Maryborough that Dillon had been arrested that day and lodged in Kilmainham gaol, the 'programme' for the auction was 'altered by telegram and otherwise': in the words of Sub-Inspector Grene, 'a stop was put to several of the branches who were to have attended, as the people took it as a sign that they would not be allowed to trifle with the law.' Nevertheless, four bands, deputations from Maryborough, Abbeyleix, Ballyroan, Mountmellick, Castletown and Mountrath branches of the land league, and a crowd of about two thousand attended the auction.²

The authorities had taken precautions. An order signed by Thomas Hamilton R.M. and Matthew S. Cassan J.P. was given to every publican in Maryborough directing the closure of their licenced premises to all except inmates between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. on the day of the auction. Then when 100 extra RIC along with 2 companies of the 20th Regiment and a 60 strong troop of Scots Greys were drafted in to keep the peace Maryborough had all the appearance of a town bordering on a state of

1, Report by Sub-Inspector Grene on 3 May 81 (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1882/29627); L.L., 7 May 81.
2, Ibid.

siege.¹

The auction took place in the corner of a field on the main Dublin road which belonged to Dr Jacob. Even before the actual auction, the scene at the field was lively: the five cattle were chased round and round the field by a crowd of hooting and screaming men and girls until the deputy sub-sheriff and his bailiffs managed to recapture them. Then the attention of the crowd was distracted by the arrival of six men from the Property Defence Association who were greeted by a 'storm of yells': apparently, Norris Goddard was singled out for special attention by the crowd. A crowd following was halted temporarily at the entrance to the field by the local RIC sub-inspector, William D. Grene, who told them, 'the passage would not be closed to anyone interested in the sale': the response of the crowd, directed by Patrick A. Meehan's 'Come on then, land-leaguers!', was to barge in to the field.²

Surrounded by an 'unruly mob', the military and police, commanded by Thomas Hamilton R.M., formed a rectangle in the field, and in the centre of this the auction was conducted. The auction was a short affair. The cattle were put up singly, with the bidding between two members of the committee of the Raheen branch of the league, Luke Fitzpatrick, its treasurer, and William Goss on behalf of the tenants, and Norris Goddard of the Property Defence Association. When the first animal, a white cow, was knocked down to Fitzpatrick for £8.5s.0d. the tenant John Finlay stepped forward, and said he would pay his rent, and was satisfied with what he had done. After two of

1, L.E., 7 May 81,

2, Ibid.

Fintan Phelan's cattle were knocked to the Raheen league committee men, he imitated Finlay and paid his rent. When the auction concluded, Goddard and his colleagues were escorted by the police back to their hotel amid loud jeers and 'inverted expressions of hope for their future welfare'.

When the military left the field, a procession headed by the Maryborough brass band was formed: the five cattle - their horns decorated with green leaves and ribbons - were placed in the centre, and followed by the crowd were prodded through Maryborough to its market square where an indignation meeting was held. The speakers were William Fitzpatrick, the president of the Castletown branch of the league, Patrick A. Meehan and John Redington of the committee of the Maryborough branch, and the meeting's chairman, John W. Mulhall, president of the Raheen branch. The tenants were thanked for having 'suitably vindicated the league and its principles'; the land bill, going through the House of Commons, was criticised as 'not worthy of being accepted'; protests were expressed against coercion and the arrest of Dillon; encouraging references were made to £6,000 per week being sent from America to enable the tenants to sustain their agitation; Dr Jacob was criticised scathingly for 'looking on and gloating over the misery and sufferings that he himself had caused'.²

After the meeting Maryborough continued in a very excited state as bands followed by unruly crowds paraded through the streets. Then at about 4.30 p.m. Dr Jacob left his house, which was guarded by ten

1, Sub-Inspector Grene's report on 8 May 81 (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1882/29627); L.E., 7 May 81.
2, Ibid.

police, and set out to visit a patient in Maryborough's Church Street. Imprudently taking the shortest route through the town, he was confronted at the court house by a crowd of men and boys who were listening to a band performing: jeering, groaning and standing doggedly in the way, the crowd prevented an easy passage and, as the servant drove through the crowd, hands were laid on the croydon's shafts, and 'several sticks' and 'other missiles' were thrown at Jacob. The timely arrival of the police prevented further incident. The tension in the town continued throughout the following day, and on that Wednesday evening, probably fuelled by alcohol, there were several disorderly scenes. For instance, one soldier of the 20th Regiment - then stationed in the town - was set upon by a group of men whom, apparently, he had insulted, and later a piquet sent out from the barrack was surrounded so menacingly by a mob that they were forced to draw their bayonets. It was only by heavily patrolling the streets that the police maintained a semblance of law and order in the town. '

A scene similar to that enacted at Maryborough on 3 May 1881 took place in Portarlinton on the following 6 May with the auction of four horses and a cart - the property of Andrew Gallagher and Edward Dunne, which had been seized at the suit of Richard Warburton for rent due. Thomas Hamilton R.M. repeated his tactics in Maryborough: as a precautionary measure, the public houses in the town were ordered to close for the duration of the auction, and in the market square the police and military formed three sides and with the end of the market

1. Sub-Inspector Grene's reports on 3, 7, and 8 May 81 (S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1882/29627); L.E., 7 May 81.

house as one side made a square into which only those judged to have a responsible interest in the auction were admitted. Again, a heckling crowd of local land league supporters augmented by bands and deputations from Maryborough and Mountmellick surrounded the auction square where three employees of the Property Defence Association (Norris Goddard was elsewhere, though he had been expected) bid up the prices. After the horses and cart were bought for their owners, both Gallagher and Dunne - like the tenants in Maryborough - came forward and paid the rent due with costs. A brief meeting was held after the auction at which speakers including Fr James Connolly, the curate from Mountmellick, and William H. Cobbe, the treasurer of the local league branch, encouraged the crowd to sustain their fidelity to the principles of the land league.¹

On the same day, 6 May 1881, an order was made by Earl Cowper, the lord lieutenant, proclaiming Queen's County, King's County and County Kilkenny to be proscribed districts 'within the meaning and provisions of the Act for the Better Protection of Person and Property in Ireland, 1881'.² Though the 'opportunity' had passed when Davitt reckoned 'Irish landlordism would have been easily smashed' by a 'no-rent strike' masterminded by the land league, the spring gale had come, and increasing disorder was attending the actions of landlords who, bolstered by the coercion act, the arms act, the Orange Emergency Committee and the Property Defence Association, were insisting on their rents. Faced with an apparently powerful and united land

1, L.E., 7 May 81.

2, L.L., 14 May 81; cf. above, p. 119.

league undermining the rule of law in the county, and undoubtedly encouraged by Lord Castletown at the instigation of his local magistrates, the executive had taken dramatic and assertive action. With this action on 6 May 1881 a new chapter of violent confrontation in the county was opened.