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GLADSTONE, IRISH NATIONALISM AND THE HOME RULE QUESTION,
1882-93, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ULSTER PROBLEM

by
J. P. LOUGHLIN

This thesis attempts to explain the ideas and policies associated with the home rule campaign in the period 1882-93. It is concerned mainly with evaluating Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality; his home rule proposals and the Irish reaction to them; the home rule debate in the period 1886-93 and the attitudes of both Gladstone and nationalists to the Ulster problem. Most studies of the home rule question, in concentrating excessively on party conflict, have failed to deal adequately with these aspects of it. Based on an extensive examination of political literature, national and local newspapers and private papers, the main conclusions of this study are as follows.

(i) The widely accepted view that Parnellite electoral successes reflected an intense Irish desire for home rule is highly questionable. (ii) Gladstone's public conversion to home rule in 1886 was determined primarily by a consistent stream of disturbing reports on the state of Ireland from influential sources. (iii) The home rule and land bills of 1886 were not unconnected proposals, but two related elements of one massive, costly and quite sophisticated project aimed at solving the Irish question. However, the fiscal provisions of both the home rule schemes of 1886 and 1893 were such as to cast serious doubts upon their workability. (iv) Irish nationalist opinion did not accept uncritically Gladstone's scheme of 1886, as historians have argued. (v) Gladstone did not have a profound insight into Irish nationalist sentiment: his concept of Irish nationality was based on a defective interpretation of Irish history, which sustained unrealistic expectations of political developments in Ireland when home rule was established. (vi) The unionist case against home rule was not based solely on anti-Irish prejudice or imperialist sentiment, as often assumed, but also on a critical appreciation of Gladstone's schemes, especially their financial weaknesses. This last, in conjunction with imperialist sentiment, was also influential with Ulster unionists, who devised a significantly different method of opposing the imposition of home rule than the armed rebellion usually assumed. (vii) Both Gladstone and nationalists greatly misunderstood the nature and seriousness of the Ulster problem and pursued unrealistic policies to deal with it. (viii) Protestant home rulers were more important politically than historians have often assumed. However their influence was mainly negative: they not only failed to convert the Irish protestant community to home rule, but their very existence encouraged liberals and nationalists to believe complacently that Irish protestants would accept home rule eventually.

GLADSTONE, IRISH NATIONALISM AND THE
HOME RULE QUESTION, 1882-93, WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ULSTER PROBLEM

by

J. P. LOUGHLIN

IN TWO VOLUMES

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>B.N.L.</u>	<u>Belfast News-Letter</u>
<u>C.R.</u>	<u>Contemporary Review</u>
C.S.O., R.P.	Chief Secretary's Office (papers at S.P.O.), registered papers
<u>D.U.R.</u>	<u>Dublin University Review</u>
<u>F.J.</u>	<u>Freeman's Journal</u>
<u>F.R.</u>	<u>Fortnightly Review</u>
I.L.P.U.	Irish loyal and Patriotic Union
I.P.H.R.A.	Irish Protestant Home Rule Association
<u>J.H.R.U.</u>	<u>Journal of the Home Rule Union</u>
<u>L.S.</u>	<u>Londonderry Sentinel</u>
L.U.A.	Liberal Unionist Association
<u>N.C.</u>	<u>Nineteenth Century</u>
<u>N.&S.</u>	<u>North and South</u>
<u>P.M.G.</u>	<u>Pall Mall Gazette</u>
R.I.C.	Royal Irish Constabulary
<u>U.I.</u>	<u>United Ireland</u>
U.L.U.A.	Ulster Liberal Unionist Association
<u>W.N.W.</u>	<u>Weekly Northern Whig</u>

Other abbreviations are in accordance with T. W. Moody, Rules for contributors to Irish Historical Studies (Rev. ed., Dublin, 1968).

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Finally, there is the enormous debt I owe to my wife, who typed this work through the several stages of its development and who performed this task in addition to many other pressing demands on her time.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university and that it is entirely my own work.

J. P. Loughlin

J. P. Loughlin

SUMMARY

This thesis attempts to explain the ideas and policies associated with the home rule campaign in the period 1882-93. Most works on the home rule question, in concentrating excessively on party conflict and divisions, have failed to deal adequately with these aspects of it. This study is concerned mainly with evaluating Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality and his home rule proposals; the Irish attitude to home rule in general and the reaction of both unionists and nationalists to his plans; the home rule debate in the period 1886-93, especially the significance of the Ulster problem. Based on an extensive examination of political literature, national and local newspapers and private papers, the main conclusions of this study are as follows.

(i) The widely accepted view that Parnellite electoral successes reflected an intense Irish desire for home rule is highly questionable. (ii) Gladstone's public conversion to home rule in 1886 was determined primarily by a consistent stream of disturbing reports on the state of Ireland from influential sources. (iii) The home rule and land bills of 1886 were not unconnected proposals, but two related elements of one massive, costly and quite sophisticated project aimed at solving the Irish question. However, the fiscal provisions of both the home rule schemes of 1886 and 1893 were such as to cast serious doubts upon their workability. (iv) Irish nationalist opinion

did not accept uncritically Gladstone's scheme of 1886, as historians have argued: joy at its introduction was tempered by severe criticisms of its details. (v) Gladstone did not have a profound insight into Irish nationalist sentiment: his concept of Irish nationality was based on a defective interpretation of Irish history, which sustained unrealistic expectations of political developments in Ireland when home rule was established.

(vi) The unionist case against home rule was not based solely on anti-Irish prejudice or imperialist sentiment, as often assumed, but also on a critical appreciation of Gladstone's schemes, especially their financial weaknesses. This last, in conjunction with imperialist sentiment, was also influential with Ulster unionists, who devised a significantly different method of opposing the imposition of home rule than the armed rebellion usually assumed. (vii) Both Gladstone and nationalists greatly misunderstood the nature and seriousness of the Ulster problem and pursued unrealistic policies to deal with it. (viii) Protestant home rulers were more important politically than historians have often assumed. However their influence was mainly negative: they not only failed to convert the Irish protestant community to home rule, but their very existence encouraged liberals and nationalists to believe complacently that Irish protestants would accept home rule eventually.

INTRODUCTION

The judgment on the home rule struggle of the 1880s and 1890s, traditionally accepted, is one that assesses it, essentially, as a contest between the forces of enlightenment and reaction. In its broad outlines the picture painted depicts the Irish nation earnestly desiring home rule, being responded to by Gladstone, influenced by his 'European sense' and sympathy with struggling nationalities. His home rule proposals, however, eagerly accepted by the Irish and promising to put an end to the strife of centuries are defeated by unionists, incapable of understanding Irish problems and motivated by aggressive imperialism and/or anti-Irish prejudice.

Paradoxically, this view of the struggle for home rule has been established by an historiography not primarily concerned with testing its validity. For instance, it is remarkable that in his massive tribute to Gladstone's attempts at solving the Irish question, Gladstone and the Irish nation, J. L. Hammond provides no analysis of Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality and how it influenced his expectations for Irish political developments. Similarly, his treatment of Gladstone's home rule schemes fails to examine their all-important and contentious fiscal provisions. The central weakness of Hammond's approach to his subject was his tendency to assume that the fact of Gladstone's sympathy with struggling

nationalities was itself a vindication, both of his insight into Irish nationalism and of the home rule schemes he devised. Nor has Hammond been alone in this assumption; a succession of historians have endorsed, substantially, his approach, including Nicholas Mansergh,¹ Philip Magnus² and E. D. Steele.³ Even those who have distanced themselves from the Hammond tradition and sought to explain Gladstone's involvement with home rule primarily in terms of a power struggle within the liberal party,⁴ have also failed to examine critically his ideas on Irish nationality or provide a detailed examination of his home rule plans.

As for the nationalist dimension to the home rule issue, a similar historiographical weakness is observable. As exemplified by the work of Conor Cruise O'Brien in Parnell and his party and F. S. L. Lyons in Charles Stewart Parnell,⁵ respectively, the main trends of analysis on the Parnell movement have been either organisational or biographical, and these have led, not only to inadequate assessments of Gladstone's Irish plan, but also to assumptions about the Irish desire for home rule and the extent to which the Parnellite leadership represented Irish acceptance of Gladstone's scheme, that are open to question.

Many of the inadequacies of home rule historiography would appear to stem from an excessive concentration on party conflict, with the result that the ideas and proposals which

provoked it have become subsidiary concerns. This study is intended as a contribution towards redressing that imbalance. Chapter one begins with an account of the developments in historical literature that provided - especially for Gladstone - material for nationalist and home rule arguments. It also examines how nationalist propaganda changed with the demotion of agrarian struggle in favour of constitutional agitation for home rule from 1882, and the extent to which the new policy found support. Consequently, the traditional view of Irish support for home rule is significantly modified.

In dealing with Gladstone's public conversion to home rule, in the winter of 1885-6, this study has departed from the practice of accounting for his actions in terms either of a reaction to Parnellite electoral successes or the exigencies of a liberal party power struggle. Instead, in chapter two, Gladstone's ignorance of Ireland is emphasised and the extent to which he was influenced by disturbing information on the state of Ireland from apparently reliable sources. The main burden of this chapter, however, is devoted to a detailed examination of the home rule and land bills of 1886. It is important to see these proposals, not as unconnected projects, but as two closely related elements of one quite sophisticated and massive operation aimed at solving the Irish question. It was intended that the land bill would not only remove the land issue as a source of social tension in

Ireland but through the method of its operation contribute substantially to the finances of an Irish government. Particular attention is paid to the financial clauses of the home rule plan and how far they would have determined its viability.

The failure of historians generally to deal adequately with this aspect of Gladstone's scheme has, moreover, led to quite distorted views of unionist objections to home rule. Notwithstanding the often racist sentiments of many unionists, it is shown, in chapter three, that their objections to Gladstone's proposals were more solidly based. Unionists made a detailed critique of the home rule bill, emphasising especially its financial limitations. This chapter, moreover, also greatly modifies the accepted view of Irish nationalist reaction to the home rule and land bills. Following Conor Cruise O'Brien, it has been widely believed that the Parnellite leadership constituted an accurate barometer of local nationalist feeling in Ireland on the home rule plan. This view is shown to be erroneous: a critical examination of local nationalist opinion reveals the extent to which Parnellite leaders were seriously out of touch with Irish opinion.

The central figure of this study, of course, is Gladstone and chapter six provides a critical examination of his concept of Irish nationality; in particular, it assesses the extent to which insights drawn from European nationalism

could be applied to the Irish situation; the chief sources on which Gladstone's ideas on Irish nationalism depended and how far his perception of it reflected an enlightened understanding of Irish problems or provided a realistic guide to political developments in Ireland. One of the most important issues which tested the strengths and weaknesses of Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality was the Ulster problem.

This issue, in the period 1886-93, has usually been regarded by historians as a mere prelude to the dramatic events of 1911-14. For instance, both Patrick Buckland and Patricia Jalland in their respective studies⁶ have taken this approach. The treatment presented in this study is very different. It examines in detail the attitudes and policies of both Gladstone and nationalists on Ulster, and the Ulster unionist reaction to Gladstone's home rule plans. In particular, it demonstrates that contrary to popular belief, unionists devised a significantly different strategy for meeting the implementation of home rule in the period 1886-93 than the armed rebellion planned in 1911-14.

Both liberals and nationalists argued that despite their initial rejection of home rule, the Irish protestant community would eventually come to accept it. To support this claim they had to have some concrete evidence, however small, and this was supplied in large part by the protestant home rule movement. Protestant home rulers have been largely ignored by historians,

or dismissed as 'a few cranks and politicians'.⁷ This study rejects that view. The I.P.H.R.A. drew support from two important constituencies; first, a not inconsiderable body of support among presbyterian tenant-farmers in Ulster; secondly, a smaller but still important group in Dublin and the south of Ireland. Indeed, far from being 'cranks', many of those in the second group were distinguished men in professions such as the law and medicine, as well as writers who would be prominent in the Irish cultural revival of the early 1900s. Although the I.P.H.R.A. was a relatively small body, compared to leading nationalist and unionist organisations, many members had influential political contacts. An assessment is made both of the association's policies and its influence on nationalists and liberals in the period 1886-93.

In sum, then, this study, by examining the home rule campaign in its Gladstonian phase from a wider perspective than has usually been the case, hopefully contributes both to a clearer estimate of its dimensions and a better appreciation of the factors preventing its successful conclusion.

CHAPTER I

NATIONALISM AND THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT 1882-6

With the end of the land war in 1882 the primacy of agrarian agitation in nationalist politics was replaced by a constitutional programme directed towards the restitution of an Irish parliament, a change of direction marked by the establishment of the National League in that year. The new policy required a significantly different method of operation than hitherto, emphasising political propaganda rather than action. It was also a more difficult task, for while the degree of popular support for agrarian agitation, with its promise of tangible benefits to be gained, could be easily estimated, the success of a programme that, in practice, divorced the land from the national question and relied instead on establishing the psychological reality of the national idea, was of its nature less easy to assess. The difficulties of this task were compounded by the reluctance or inability of Parnellites to define specifically what home rule meant.

The nature of nationalist thinking in this respect will be more fully examined below,¹ but at this time the public attitude taken by leading nationalists was that the term 'home rule' was virtually self-explanatory. While on a fund-raising tour of Australia in 1883 John Redmond gave a speech at Melbourne entitled 'Home rule - its real meaning'. He declared,

however, that home rule simply meant Irish self-government and that its specific content could safely be left to 'the collective wisdom of Englishmen, Irishmen and Scotchmen in the imperial parliament'.² Similarly, and perhaps more surprisingly given his strong social-reforming outlook, Michael Davitt, in a speech at Draperstown, defined home rule as 'simple self-government'.³ When Parnell was asked by John Redmond at this time how he would make Ireland prosper under home rule, he merely replied that English government was excessive and that 'an Irish government could keep down expenses'; it would 'save a million' on the police alone.⁴

Instead of defining practically what home rule would entail, nationalists sought generally to establish the psychological reality of the nationalist idea by identifying the home rule campaign with the centuries old struggle for Irish freedom; a policy usually promoted by focusing the indignation at past English 'atrocities' in Ireland on contemporary political issues. Simultaneously, a campaign of militant propaganda by United Ireland sought to sustain a high level of popular indignation towards England, while efforts were made both to widen the social basis of support for the National League and to increase local branch formation. By examining these aspects of nationalist politics, this chapter will attempt to assess the progress of the home rule movement in the period 1882-6.

NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY: THE HISTORICIST BACKGROUND

In his almanac of nationalist arguments, The home ruler's manual, R. B. O'Brien asked: 'What is a nation?' The answer he supplied was a 'people bound together by historical associations'. There were, of course, other factors to consider, such as race, religion, language, geography and population; nevertheless, 'history is the determining factor'.⁵ That he should emphasise history is not surprising. The process of national emancipation, a dominant feature of nineteenth century European history, was accompanied and stimulated by a great upsurge in historical studies.⁶ More specifically, the relationship between history and nationalism lay in the material historical studies provided for the construction of legends of ethnic or racial struggle—essential elements in most movements for national emancipation.⁷ The historical legend consisted of a record of grievances to be either avenged or removed, and, as will be seen in Ireland's case, often included an ideal vision of 'national' society before the oppression of the invader.

The developments on which such constructions were based affected several disciplines and were felt as much in Great Britain as elsewhere.⁸ The influence of Leopold von Ranke and later German scholars produced a significant shift away from the 'whig religion of progress' represented by Macaulay to an empirical analysis of facts;⁹ a development which harmonised easily with the empiricist tradition that was the dominant

strain in British philosophy.¹⁰ Germany was also an important centre for the study of racial origins,¹¹ which, as the century progressed, widened in meaning from the general study of classical literature to include ethnology, history and geography.¹²

J. W. Burrow has written of this aspect of Victorian thought:

Comparative philology, as the maturest and apparently most precise of the disciplines by which in the nineteenth century men were attempting to trace modern phenomena in an unbroken line to a remote or prehistoric past, naturally appealed as an example to scholars working along these lines in biology, in legal and social history, and in folklore. 13

Certainly historical inquiry at Oxford under Dr Arnold followed this approach. E. A. Freeman learned there 'the unity of European history'; the importance of geography, language, and geology to an understanding of that history; but most important, he learned from Arnold to 'regard the essence of history as consisting in the record of man's political being'.¹⁴ But how did these developments affect Ireland?

Their influence being generally most considerable in the study of law, it was perhaps natural that this would be reflected in Irish land legislation;¹⁵ however, they also had an important influence on popular religious attitudes, which in their protestant aspect had tended to view catholic persecution of protestants during the reformation as events occurring but a few days previously.¹⁶ For example, the noted protestant

theologian, George Salmon, attributed to the influence of the new historical inquiry the decline among his students of interest in the 'controversy' with Rome:

Modern conceptions of the proper attitude of mind of an historian require him to enter impartially into the feelings of his characters. We can now find apologies even for the magistrates who shed the blood of the first Christians, and whom their victims regarded in no other light than as the instruments of Satan....No wonder, then, that we can find apologies, too, for Roman Catholic persecutors, and believe that many a judge who sent a heretic to the stake may have been a conscientious good man, fulfilling what he regarded as an unpleasant duty.¹⁷

Salmon's comments on the change in popular religious attitudes provides a succinct indication of the gradual demise of the general tradition of anti-catholic prejudice prevalent in Victorian Britain. This tradition combined grotesque notions about the dominating temporal designs of the papacy, with equally grotesque beliefs as to the evil influence of catholicism in Ireland's history. One commentator, struck by the prevalence of these views, considered that a large part of the blame for this state of affairs rested with influential writers who had embodied such prejudices in their work. Singling out Macaulay's treatment of the 'aboriginal' catholics involved in the 1798 rebellion for its gross generalisations and racial slurs, he concluded that the ignorance of the general public was 'less surprising when even learned historians write about it [1798 rebellion] without sufficient authority for the

conclusions they both form for themselves and convey to others'. Canning's criticism is very much to the point, for this tradition, emphasising Irish racial and religious backwardness, and endorsed by Carlyle, J. A. Froude and even at an early stage of his career, Lord Acton,¹⁹ was to produce an Irish historiographical reaction that would supply home rule propagandists with an 'authentic' historical basis for their arguments. Indeed the development of an historical approach denying the view that Irish grievances arose from a congenital racial and religious backwardness in the face of progress could not but have this effect.

Perhaps most symptomatic of the new objectivity being brought to bear on historical inquiry is the fact that two of the most talented critics of the ethnocentric view against the Irish were both protestants and unionists; J. P. Prendergast²⁰ and W. E. H. Lecky. In particular, the Irish historiographical battle of the 1870s and 1880s, when J. A. Froude's anti-Celtic and anti-catholic work, The English in Ireland,²¹ was answered by Lecky's historicist History of Ireland in the eighteenth century,²² created a great public controversy in Ireland, Britain and America. Both writers cited English misgovernment as being responsible for Irish troubles. It was, however, Froude's claims of Irish religious and racial backwardness that contributed most to the emotional atmosphere of the controversy. Lecky's refutation of Froude's prejudiced treatment of Irish

history was forceful and penetrating:

By selecting simply such facts as are useful for the purpose of blackening a national character; by omitting all palliating circumstances; by suppressing large classes of facts...by keeping out of sight the existence of corresponding evils in other countries; by painting crimes that were peculiar to the wildest districts and the most lawless class as if they were common to the whole country and to all classes; by employing the artifices of a dramatic writer to heighten, in long, detailed, and elaborate pictures, the effects of the crimes committed on one side, while those committed on the other are either wholly suppressed or...dismissed...by these methods...it is possible... to carry the art of historical misrepresentation to a high degree of perfection. 23

Lecky denounced also the racial theories which characterised Froude's work: 'Without denying that there are some innate distinctions of character between the subdivisions of the great Aryan race, there is...abundant evidence that they have been enormously exaggerated.' It was to be hoped that contemporary thought would make an effort to emancipate itself from the habit of 'adopting theories of race'.²⁴ More importantly, though, in his Irish history Lecky focused attention on the period of Grattan's parliament, 1782-1800, a subject he had earlier publicised in volume one of his Leaders of public opinion in Ireland - consisting of biographies of Henry Flood and Henry Grattan. The latter work, published during a youthful 'nationalist' phase in 1861, associated Irish problems with English interference and portrayed Grattan's parliament as a model of Irish self-government, concomitant with economic

prosperity, increasing religious tolerance and a keen sense of nationality on the part of Ireland's protestant leaders. Such a vision of Ireland under self-government was ideally suited to the purposes of nationalist propagandists during the home rule struggles of the 1880s and 1890s.

Lecky's views on nationalism, however, began to change with the advent of fenianism and by the early 1880s he lost his desire to see the return of an Irish parliament. Being a landlord himself, his desire was for a parliament controlled by the aristocracy and landlords. He had no wish to encourage Parnellite 'Jacobins' who associated home rule with an agrarian campaign to remove that very class of Irish society. Consequently he not only refused permission for a cheap edition of the book, but also toned down much of its 'nationalist' emphasis in later editions:

I carefully revised these biographies, adding a good deal of new information, excising some manifest exaggeration, and toning down a rhetoric which savoured too much of a debating society....some of the worst specimens of its [the first edition's] boyish rhetoric were, indeed, frequently quoted - usually without the smallest intimation that they had been suppressed by the author in his later edition.... conditions in Ireland had profoundly changed since it was [first] written, and...some portions of its introduction were no longer applicable....

These modifications were necessary, he argued, because the book was originally written without an examination of the great

manuscript collections of confidential government correspondence that exist in London and Dublin: 'This exploration had now begun....It was impossible that such an investigation should not in some respects modify earlier judgments.'²⁵

Lecky's priorities as a historian, however, were not synonymous with those of nationalist propagandists, and both his Leaders and History of Ireland were used extensively to validate their arguments. Indeed, so important did they rate Lecky's contributions to their cause that even his strenuously unionist politics were, as the home rule propagandist J. A. Fox informed him, never alluded to by nationalists except in the 'kindest and most respectful terms'. He continued: 'you have certainly done more than any living man to keep alive the spirit of nationality amongst Irish catholics...and your name is never, so far as I know, mentioned amongst home rulers but with respect if not affection'.²⁶ While Fox's claim is certainly exaggerated, it nevertheless confirms the fact that Lecky's work provided some of the most influential texts for Irish nationalists in this period.

Of the Irish historiographical debate, generally, it is a reasonable assumption that most rank-and-file nationalists were ignorant of its detailed nature. Nevertheless, there were many able propagandists willing to illustrate the essential political point of the issue; as, for example, the following verse by T. D. Sullivan, celebrating J. P. Prendergast's

condemnation of Froude, illustrates:

When Froude with bigot fury blind,
To strike at Ireland felt inclined,
He wrote a book to ease his mind,
Crammed full of lies of every kind -

But though his venom thus was cast,
Old Ireland's answer followed fast,
Rung out as if with trumpet blast,
By gallant John P. Prendergast. 27

In reality, however, given the intensity of Froude's unionist views, the criticisms he did make of English government in Ireland provided excellent propaganda for nationalists, and were especially used by extreme Irish-Americans,²⁸ while Prendergast and other writers of the new historical school were, like Lecky, unhappy with the political uses nationalists made of their work. Nothing illustrates better the political relevance of Irish history in this period than Prendergast's reaction to this practice. He wrote to Lecky: 'The organisation of the English has always been superior to the Irish: so that the Irish could not meet them without defeat. I see all this clearly now, and regret my essay on the Cromwellian settlement.'²⁹ A. G. Richey warned against the 'half-knowledge of history which enables political intriguers to influence the passions of their dupes by misleading them with garbled accounts of the past'.³⁰ Nevertheless, once published, their work was largely out of their control. But though Lecky himself came to

take a more sympathetic view of Froude's work during the political battles of the 1880s and 1890s,³¹ his correspondence with T. H. Huxley at this time shows³² that his attitude to historical inquiry in general was not materially affected; and in any event, the fact remains that arguments made by home rulers in this period could draw on the work of both writers. Indeed, L. M. Cullen has shown how considerably the nationalist economic critique of English government in Ireland depended on the resuscitation by Lecky and Froude of the work of eighteenth century writers such as John Hely-Hutchinson.³³ More specifically, it will be seen that Lecky's work had an important influence on Gladstone's outlook as to what home rule could be expected to achieve in Ireland.³⁴

Irish nationalist ideology, however, needed to appeal to several constituencies, and while Lecky's work had an obvious appeal for the 'constitutional' agitation for home rule in Ireland and Britain, a less compromising version was needed for those of a more militant frame of mind. Here again Froude's work was important. While in the United States in 1872 on a lecture tour designed to counter the damage done to England's good name by the recently released fenian, O'Donovan Rossa, his book and lectures created an enormous stir, not only there, but in Britain and Ireland. Moreover, the controversy was maintained because Ireland's foremost controversialist, Father Tom Burke, also happened to be there, and was persuaded to

reply formally to Froude.³⁵ But unlike Lecky, whose work was inspired by a contemporary historicism and regard for accuracy, Burke simply moved to the other end of the spectrum occupied by Froude, and where the latter sought to locate the source of Ireland's ills in a congenital racial and religious backwardness, Burke drew a picture of a people formed in the likeness of Gods, whose shortcomings could be traced to the evil policy of an oppressing neighbour. In fact stereotype was fought with stereotype, and the history of Anglo-Irish relations reduced to a series of black and white images, manipulated to suit the needs of their particular audiences. By investing nations with personal characteristics and reducing the complexity of the issues involved, Burke elucidated the moral rather than historical issues at the heart of Anglo-Irish relations.

History so represented³⁶ was a moral tale of a catholic nation united as one man, always at the mercy of English tyranny. Not less important was the timing of the controversy: publicly conducted and extensively reported, it helped to crystallise the idea of catholic nationalism in the Irish American mind at the very time when the forces of Irish nationalism and catholicism there - mutually antagonistic since the late 1840s - were coming together in support of home rule.³⁷ In Ireland, moreover, the historiographical background against which the Froude controversy took place was one of a steadily increasing growth of nationalist literature. This process had

begun with the Young Ireland movement, whose task, notwithstanding some element of exaggeration on the part of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, must indeed have been formidable:

Irish history was rather less known than Chinese....One man out of ten thousand could not tell whether Owen Roe followed or preceded Brian Boru; in which hemisphere the victory of Benburb was achieved; or whether the O'Neill who held Ireland for eight years in the puritan wars was a naked savage armed with a stake, or an accomplished soldier bred in the most adventurous and punctilious service in Europe. 38

In much the same manner as contemporary movements in Europe, Young Ireland promoted a romantic concept of nationalism, invoking the spirit and memories of Celtic militarism as well as that of more recent revolutionaries like Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet,³⁹ and presented a vision of Ireland that nationalists would appeal to in the succeeding struggles of later decades.⁴⁰ Moreover, the visual symbols of ancient 'national' Ireland - the harp, round tower, shamrock and wolfhound - became well established in these years, while Young Irelanders also designed membership cards for the Repeal Association, illustrating a succession of Irish leaders from Brian Boru to Grattan and O'Connell.⁴¹

The contribution of Young Irelandersto nationalist literature can be gauged by the abundance of such material-largely written by them and cheaply produced by nationalist firms-in the 1880s. Cameron and Ferguson of Glasgow had a list of at

least fifty-seven Irish publications: biographies of Wolfe-
Tone, John Mitchel's history of Ireland, accounts of the
1798 rebellion, Thomas Luby's biography of O'Connell and
many others, as well as historical romances, songs and ballads.⁴²
A similar service was provided by T. D. Sullivan's publishing
firm in Dublin. The debt that nationalists in the 1880s owed
to Young Ireland in this respect was well explained by William
O'Brien when he lamented the lack of knowledge of the Irish
language among the country's youth, noting that because of
this, Irish nationality was an affair of 'the day before yes-
terday' and the stock of Irish literature 'the songs and essays
of Young Ireland'.⁴³ The steady growth of this literature and
its political implications were described by the Irishman in
1868, in the course of reviewing an addition to the list:⁴⁴

Twenty-five years ago Ireland had no history. There were scanty records....They were dull and little interesting. It required the fire of patriotism to undertake the task of studying their details, for no glow of genius had illumined the archives of a generous, a brave, and indomitable race....

But the fervid enthusiasm of an ardent nationality kindled by a holy fire ... was destined to light up all the dark passages, all the glorious reminiscences of the transit of Ireland through the ages....Irishmen with their heart and soul in their work arose to do justice to their native land.

By their efforts and their genius Ireland grows into history. ⁴⁵

The significance of the phrase 'Ireland grows into history' lay in the extent to which the historiographical basis of

Irish nationalism was being established in these years. Indeed, in 1870, John Denvir, a fenian agent living in Liverpool, established a printing and publishing business and proceeded to issue a series of Irish histories, biographies, stories and songs, which ultimately sold over a million copies.⁴⁶ Two of the most important publications at this time arose out of the researches of John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry into the laws and social life of ancient Ireland.⁴⁷ On the basis of their work, Irish-Americans were to construct a Celticist myth extolling the spiritualist nature of the Celt against the materialist greed of the Saxon.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the steady growth of nationalist literature in these years was stimulated by the increasing development of Irish education. Between 1850 and 1900 the number of national schools rose from 4,500 to 9,000, while between 1851 and 1911 the proportion of the population unable to read and write fell from 47 per cent to 12 per cent.⁴⁹ At the same time, government policy in regard to the teaching of Irish history also assisted the popularity of nationalist literature.

Government policy forbade the study of Irish history in national schools, and the following verse composed by Archbishop Whately was used by generations of nationalists to show that government policy in this respect aimed at nothing less than the destruction of Irish nationality:

I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,
And made me in these Christian days
A happy English child. 50

But like so much English policy in Ireland, if the intention was to eliminate Irish nationalist consciousness, it was a policy only partly pursued. Both the schools under the control of Christian Brothers and sermons in catholic chapels provided a highly charged version of the catholic view of their country's history.⁵¹ A perceptive contemporary critic in the conservative Graphic explained the adverse political consequences of government policy: it was one of the many 'blunders' of English policy in Ireland. The mere fact of the exclusion of Irish history created in the minds of a fretted and suspicious people

a conviction that the government did not do so without good reason, that Irish history must tell a tale of unrelenting cruelty and oppression on the part of the conquerors, of an ancient civilisation ruthlessly trampled under foot, and of the most heroic virtues of courage and race-faithfulness to the cause of Ireland on the part of the conquered. The mere fact...of the exclusion of Irish history from Irish schools was in itself enough to excite such a conviction, and did excite it. Nor did a class of writers fail to arise, capable of giving full and ardent expression to the conviction generally entertained. 52

NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY: IDEOLOGUES AND THE HISTORICAL LEGEND

In his essay on nationalism Isaiah Berlin argues that essential to the progress of any nationalist movement is the lack of

opportunity for the use of the skills of a group of men 'psychologically unfit' to enter the established bureaucracy; 'artists, thinkers, whatever their professions - without an established position'. There is then an effort to create 'a new synthesis, a new ideology, both to explain and justify resistance to the forces working against their convictions...and to point in a new direction and offer them a new centre for self-identification'.⁵³ As a general description, this passage might well apply to the leading propagandists of home rule nationalism in the 1880s;⁵⁴ Justin McCarthy, J. H. McCarthy, Michael Davitt, T. P. O'Connor, T. M. Healy, William O'Brien, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy and, occasionally, Parnell.

Almost without exception these were men who had engrossed themselves in Irish history, and also in many cases were motivated by a sense of personal or family grievance. Justin McCarthy had the experience of a father preoccupied with Irish history and personal knowledge of the famine and Young Ireland movement.⁵⁵ Michael Davitt had bitter experiences of his own family's eviction as a child, which he described in his evidence before the special commission in 1889:

I remember distinctly the eviction - the cottage being set fire to and we having to go to a workhouse, from the doors of which establishment we were turned because my mother refused to part with me for the purpose of proselytism.

This experience was much dwelt on by Davitt's parents during his childhood.⁵⁶ T. P. O'Connor, hypersensitive and prone to fits of depression, was converted to nationalism on hearing his father's account of the famine and subsequent 1848 rebellion; his nationalist conviction being reinforced through his personal sense of 'shock' at the execution of the fenians, Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, in 1867.⁵⁷ William O'Brien had an intense sense of his family's lineage and wrote that when, as a schoolboy, he was compelled to read Hume's history of England, with its glorification of English military successes, the experience merely drove him to 'find out for myself all about...our Benburbs, and Yellow Fords, and races of Castlebar'.⁵⁸

Similarly, T. M. Healy's daughter wrote of him: 'He was born on the 17 May 1855, and almost from his cradle he was conscious of that sense of past greatness and present oppression, and of that dim expectation of future resurrection.' According to her the family kept a record of how their forebears had lost their lands through the confiscations of succeeding centuries. More recent and lasting impressions were created by tales of the famine, and of proselytisers refusing food to those who would not listen to them.⁵⁹ John Dillon had his own family experience of the Young Ireland movement, of which his father was a leading figure, while a similar connection with that movement inspired T. D. Sullivan, and Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, another of its leaders.⁶⁰ As for Parnell, his personal

experience of rejection and alienation as a Cambridge undergraduate, manifesting itself in the belief that 'These English despise us because we are Irish', is well known.⁶¹ He, too, was 'extremely conscious of the historical dimension of the Irish question'.⁶² These men, then, were well placed to propagate an ideology based on a tradition of historic struggle.⁶³

A classic example of the kind of militaristic vision nationalists would employ was contained in the leading article of the first issue of United Ireland: it sought to establish firmly the Parnellite movement as the legitimate inheritor of the ancient struggle for Irish freedom:

We are the inheritors of all the ages that have fought the fight after their several ways. We are proud of the Volunteers of 1782 though they were a caste; we do not fear to speak of '98, though in those days they did not fear to wave some bloody pikeheads in the sun. We stand under Robert Emmet's scaffold; we see O'Connell's giant figure looming over the monster meetings far and wide; we read Davis's kindling pages; we behold Mitchel rising up like a titan to cross the path of tyranny; we see fenianism as it springs from what seems the ashes of national spirit, and girds up our youth to a pitch of heroism that did not blanch upon the scaffold nor on the threshold of the more dreadful penal hell. We listen to the shout of the Manchester rabble when three Irishmen lay dead before them; we hear the hardly more decent yell of exultation that went up in the English commons house when it was announced that the great British government had succeeded in waylaying, gagging, and kidnapping and consigning to prison again, Michael Davitt, the man who taught Mr Gladstone there was a land question to be settled.

We remember them all and see in each of them the workings of the self-same sacred, self-sustaining, unquenchable spirit - only that each cycle of persecutions and hangings brought us nearer to the vantage-ground on which we stand today. 64

More generally, though, in the form in which it was usually presented to Irish and Irish-American audiences, the historical vision in home rule propaganda entailed the view of the Irish people on a great circular march: the ideal image of Irish society before 1169 was both a starting point and the eventual goal of the historical march of the Irish people. The golden age of Irish history had been destroyed by rapacious English invaders, who had brought untold suffering to the native population, robbed them of their lands and persecuted their religion. The message of nationalist propaganda was that this, or a similar golden age, would return when home rule was enacted. Implicit also in this message was the notion of catholicity and Celtic ethnicity as essential ingredients of Irish nationality. This vision was explicitly stated by the Parnellite party's leading propagandist, William O'Brien, in his presidential lecture, 'The Irish national idea', to the Cork Young Ireland Society in January 1886:

I do not envy the mental structure of the man who could read a page of Irish history, or even cast his eye over an Irish landscape, without understanding that the Irish cause is not a mere affair of vulgar parish interests, but is woven so inextricably around the Irish heart as the network of arteries through which it draws its blood and the delicate machinery of nerves by which it receives and communicates its impulses... It is invested with something of the mysterious sanctity of religion...The passion of Irish patriotism is blent with whatever is ennobling and divine in our being...It is the weird voice we hear from every graveyard where our fathers are sleeping, for every Irish graveyard contains the bones of uncanonised saints and martyrs. When the framers of the penal

laws deprived us of our books, and drew their thick black veil over Irish history, they forgot the ruins they themselves made were the most eloquent schoolmasters, the most stupendous memorials of a history and a race that were destined not to die.

Having established the emotional, historical and spiritual bases of Irish nationality, O'Brien went on to urge that it was the small nations that contributed most to the moral worth of civilisation, in opposition to the selfishness and greed of empires like the ancient Roman and contemporary English empires. Furthering this line of argument, he continued by making a strong claim for the racial equality of Celt and Teuton:

The Celtic race today is, in fact, as conspicuous a factor in human society as the Teutonic. It is little less in numbers; it is as distinct in type; it has as rich a range of capacities, sympathies, and ideals of its own; its fine susceptibilities and ariel genius are capable of exerting a potent influence upon an age which seems only too ready to accept this world as a gross feeding-trough at which happiness consists in greedy gorging.

Making reference to the movement in England towards home rule for Ireland, O'Brien exclaimed: 'There are signs that the genius of the Celtic race is about to be restored to its natural throne, and to receive its natural development. God grant it!' But the real question was, was Ireland ready to take her place among the nations? Despite 'seven centuries of wasting bondage' that had 'mutilated' the growth of the nation, the

.... Irish ... today...take...up the mission (to advance national greatness) just where the English aggression cut it short seven centuries ago, and leap to their feet as buoyantly as though the hideous tragedy of the intervening ages were but the nightmare of an uneasy sleeper. (Applause). The same sanguine blood flows in their veins; the same hopes, here and hereafter inspire them...The same faith that once inhabited the ruined shrines is rebuilding them. 65

O'Brien's speech is an example of nationalist propaganda at its most effective. Attention was focused on the idea of a chosen people, in a historic struggle for freedom, which, it was suggested, was soon to end in victory; a militaristic rhetoric enjoined a spiritual imagery of the morality of their cause and endorsement of their racial characteristics. In short, it was an ideological view pitched at a sufficiently high level of abstraction to be capable of satisfying any element in the heterogeneous consciousness of the home rule movement. Indeed this was a very necessary consideration given the several ingredients which made up the movement. Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien has succinctly described it thus: the home rule movement was 'the association in one great national movement of an agrarian agitation, the progressive (or opportunist) elements in fenianism both in England and in Ireland, a strong Irish-American section led by Devoy, in association with a determined and aggressive parliamentary party'.⁶⁶ It is worth pointing out, though, that the balance of forces within the parliamentary party and the movement in Ireland moved consider-

ably to the right in the years 1882-6. A police report on 83 Parnellite M.P.s in 1887 listed 20 members as believed to be fenians or of fenian sympathies, 8 as being 'advanced nationalists' or strong and 'violent' speakers, while 53 belonged to the 'moderate' or right-wing of the party.⁶⁷ Moreover, following the alliance of the catholic church with the party in 1884 the movement in Ireland came more and more under clerical influence. The number of local league meetings presided over by priests rose from 13.5 per cent in 1883 to 50 per cent in 1886.⁶⁸ On the other hand, though, the clergy were 'fellow-travellers' rather than 'coachmen': 'The churchmen left political initiatives to the laity, confining themselves to encouraging political activities which they believed to be commendable and to discouraging excesses (notably the agrarian outrages and dangerous defiances of authority) which they took to be lacking in prudence or even morality.'⁶⁹

Nevertheless the drift to the right in the Irish movement contrasted sharply with the militancy of the Irish-American section: both were held together ideologically by a rhetoric that conceptualised in militaristic terms the constitutional tactics of the parliamentary party. This was an essential part of the task of establishing the psychological reality of the nationalist idea; and it was all the more necessary given the subordinate role agrarian struggle played to constitutional agitation in nationalist politics from the formation of the

National League in 1882.⁷⁰ The tactics employed were of two broad types. First, there were efforts to identify contemporary political manoeuvres and issues with specific historical events, in order to enhance the legitimacy of the Parnellite movement as the inheritor of the ancient struggle for Irish freedom, to illustrate the long ancestry of English oppression in Ireland, or to show how a central historical grievance had been remedied by action in the present. Secondly, a nationalist consciousness and code of conduct encouraged through the medium of serialised historical tales and political verse.

For instance, following the enactment of the 1881 land act Parnell referred to the disbandment of the Volunteers in 1783 as an example of what could happen were the act accepted uncritically by the Irish people. He had advised that the act be tested rather than used, and consequently incurred the condemnation of Gladstone who compared him disparagingly with O'Connell for wanting to create hatred and discord between England and Ireland. Parnell, however, when replying in a speech at Cork, was careful to conceptualise his action in historicist terms and declared that the bill was only a little of what Irish farmers were due, and "the Irishman who thinks he can now throw away his arms, just as Grattan disbanded the Volunteers in 1783, will find to his sorrow and destruction when too late that he has placed himself in the haven of the perfidious and cruel and relentless English enemy".⁷¹

Again, at the general election of 1885 several Parnellite M.P.s appealed in similar terms to the voters. Matthew Harris, in a speech at Athenry on 26 October 1885, declared that going into parliament was going into the citadel of the enemy:

I shall always keep in my mind first the independence of my country....Keep a strong determined animus against England in your hearts and do not mind Englishmen for they are your enemies. They have destroyed and are everyday endeavouring to destroy you, so . . . it behoves you as Irishmen, to keep a firm front against these men, and join together in an organisation throughout the country (the National League) in every possible way;...as long as it is against England it has good in it. 72

At the same meeting John Dillon declared: 'We are not electing ordinary members of parliament, we are electing members of an army, who are to go under a special discipline to carry out the work under enormous difficulty.'⁷³ In reality this kind of rhetoric masked the fact that many party members were closely involved in English life; indeed, not a few supported British imperialism.⁷⁴ Yet this should not underestimate the importance of the ideology the party propounded in Ireland. For the great mass of nationalist supporters who would never see the inside of parliament, or know anything of the inner workings of nationalist politics at the higher levels, nationalism existed entirely in the state of consciousness that the party's rhetoric was designed to inculcate; and this was especially the case once agrarian agitation was dropped in favour of

constitutional propaganda. Given that this consciousness depended on a sense of historic grievance, it is hardly surprising to find Parnellites attempting to reinforce it through what was often a simple appeal to national hatred. As William O'Brien informed his audience during a speech in the Phoenix Park in 1885: 'They [the English] hate us and we hate them in return.'⁷⁵ Nor is it surprising to find an ambivalent attitude being taken to physical force: it was praised as a morally legitimate means of achieving Irish freedom, though given the balance of forces between England and Ireland, practically impossible.⁷⁶

Apart from the speeches of party leaders, the work of sustaining the building a nationalist consciousness was carried on chiefly in serialised historical tales; a good example of which genre was one on historic Dublin buildings in the Nation. Describing the history of Dublin City Hall it was noted that during the 1798 rebellion this building was turned into a 'torture chamber' where 'poor innocent people were taken in ...tortured and violated'. Their screams caused 'many a passerby to shudder, and in the Castle of Dublin...they caused many a smile of satisfaction'. The same 'smile of satisfaction is still to be seen in the Castle of Dublin when sorrow and suffering are scourging the Irish people'.⁷⁷ Similar stories, seeking to concentrate the indignation felt at past English 'atrocities' on contemporary institutions, groups, or aspects

of the political struggle, can be found in virtually all nationalist papers in this period.⁷⁸ But such tactics, though, were perhaps best employed in relation to the question of landlordism and nationality. The centrality of the land question to nationalist politics in general, and Parnellite commitment to the tenants' cause, necessitated an unambiguous statement of the position of landlords in Ireland and their relation to the Irish nation.

Unlike the Young Ireland movement which always hoped to attract the landlords' support, nationalists in the 1880s, - with the exception of Parnell and protestant home rulers - generally had no such desire. Moreover, they made it explicitly obvious, well before 1886, that neither was there any place in the culture of home rule nationalism for the Irish gentry. This attitude was strongly expressed during the re-drawing of the Irish constituency boundaries in 1884-5. F. H. O'Donnell had received the sanction of both liberal and tory parties to revive in the new constituencies some of the most famous of Gaelic place-names. He proposed several changes:

West Galway or the Connemara Division, South Cork or the Carbery Division...North Antrim or the Dunluce Division....I sought to revive Thomond, and Desmond, and Ossory, Oriel and Masserene, Clondeboy and Oneilland. The united mass of the Parnellites rejected the ancient place-names. The nearest to an intelligent explanation which I could obtain for this ostracism of the Irish past was that many of the ancient place-names had become the titles of Irish peers. 79

Thus, essential to the exclusion of the gentry from membership of the nation was their discrediting in the nationalist historical legend. This process was carried a step further by United Ireland in a review of Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland: critical and philisophical.⁸⁰ O'Grady, influenced by reading ancient Gaelic narratives, was infused with a belief in the destiny of the landlords, and in the qualities of moral leadership he believed they could give the Irish people. However, the experience of the land war and the failure of Irish landlords to secure their position in Irish life by making reasonable settlements with their tenants, infuriated him. Yet he still hoped for their salvation, and, in a manner not unlike nationalists, he looked to history for an ideal society as a model for the future. In particular, he looked for ways in which Irish landlords could reinstate themselves in the life of the nation.⁸¹

United Ireland condemned his concern for the aristocracy and some criticisms he had made of ancient Irish legends. It concluded: 'A man with a mind so constituted is not, in the present circumstances of Ireland, fitted to undertake the task of writing a history, critical or otherwise, of the country.'⁸² It had already warned Irish landlords that they could not 'run with the anti-home rule hare while the question remains in the balance and hunt with the nationalist hounds' when home rule was achieved: 'He that is not with us is against us.'⁸³

The cultural exclusion of landlords was also taken up in the massive propaganda work, Gladstone-Parnell: the great Irish struggle, written for the Irish-American market in 1886. T. P. O'Connor, in a passage that succinctly connected the contemporary land struggle with the historical vision of 700 years of oppression while simultaneously pointing out the racial and political antagonism of landlords to the native population, declared that in Ireland all the conditions which made the landowner fierce and relentless co-existed:

The ownership of the land was transferred from the catholic and the Celt to a protestant and a Saxon...The struggle between the native race of Ireland and the intrusive landlord class for the possession of the soil of that oppressed country may be said to date from 1169, when Richard Fitzstephen landed near Wexford with the advance party of Strongbow's famous bands. 84

Similarly, T. M. Healy in his contribution to the home rule campaign, A Word for Ireland, presented the same story of centuries of oppression and exploitation of the 'Celts' by the landlords. Something of a propaganda classic, Healy's book ranged over 250 years of English rule in Ireland, and cited an extensive range of British, Irish and European sources, to illustrate the suffering inflicted on the native population and the economic malaise brought to Ireland by a class of heartless, rack-renting landlords.⁸⁵ This message was reinforced the following year in an article which concluded by stating

that the contemporary struggle in Ireland was 'a continuance of the old warfare of the clansmen for a foothold on the soil of their fathers. The descendants of the confiscators now, as of yore, have on their side foreign laws and foreign bayonets... the centuries have taught the landlord planters no lesson'.⁸⁶

This message was also emphasised in the historical serial, 'O'Connell and his times by Croagh Patrick'. It pointed out how O'Connell's determination to secure catholic emancipation had scared off his landlord supporters and concluded that nothing was 'ever achieved for the people by the landlord class, whose object is to occupy a haughty and commanding position'.⁸⁷ Another excellent medium for the propagating of stereotyped views of nationalist opponents was political verse. Pre-eminent among nationalist verse writers was T. D. Sullivan, whose ballad "God save Ireland", composed to commemorate the Manchester martyrs, Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, quickly became a badge of national identification for exiles in the United States. Specialising in putting party propaganda into verse, other party leaders credited his writings with great influence among the peasantry.⁸⁸ His poem, 'The rack-renting landlord', presented for popular consumption the same views expressed by party leaders in the weightier political journals:

Theres a mischievous monster that lives in our isle-
He came o'er with the Saxon invasion-
In his heart there is greed, in his mind there is guile,

And his ways are a scourge to the nation;
He thrives on the bog, on the brake, on the mireland,
And his name is the rack-renting landlord of Ireland—
The heart-breaking landlord,
The grief-making landlord,
The brain-crazing, rent-raising landlord of Ireland.⁸⁹

But while much of the nationalists' historically infused rhetoric was given over to heightening indignation and diverting animus towards England and the landlord class, it could also be employed to more peaceful ends. The parish priest of Firies, in County Mayo, informed the special commission that he cautioned against 'moonlighting' by urging his congregation: 'Look at what happened in '48... '67... '98. Spies and traitors and informers rose from ... [secret societies] and brought destruction on the people'. This, he argued, was 'the most forcible means there was' for deterring such activities.⁹⁰ Moreover, it should also be remembered that the policy which nationalist propaganda sought to legitimise was one that urged the people to rely on their parliamentary leaders to obtain benefits from parliament - a fact attested to by police witnesses during the special commission proceedings.⁹¹ Indeed, William O'Brien was to argue at the special commission that the function of 'strong language' by United Ireland was simply to 'give vent' to the people's feelings— a 'lightening conductor' to give the people confidence in themselves and in their representatives.⁹² But notwithstanding the efforts party

propagandists put into establishing the psychological reality of the nationalist idea, what degree of success did they achieve?

CONSCIOUSNESS AND COMMITMENT: THE NATURE OF NATIONALIST SUPPORT
Certainly leading nationalists at the special commission sought to show that their movement was not manufactured by agitators, as critics argued, but rested on enduring ideas and anxieties of the people; but the evidence either way tended to vary with the nature of the witness under examination. Davitt's attempt to establish—from the testimony of Garrett Tyrrell, a land agent from King's county—that uppermost in the minds of the peasantry in his district during the crop failure of 1878-9, were fears of a repeat of the famine and the disturbances which followed it, was unsatisfactory. Tyrrell claimed never to have heard such fears expressed and was ignorant of whether or not they were held.⁹³

Sir Charles Russell, however, did have some success in this respect when Head Constable William Irwin, who had been stationed in County Galway during the Land League agitation, substantially agreed that such fears loomed large in the peasants' thinking.⁹⁴ Timothy Harrington, examining John Kean, a seventy-year old peasant, obtained the most explicit confirmation that memories drawn from the famine period heightened anxieties in 1879 when the crop failed;⁹⁵ while John Loudon, a

land leaguer of the period, had no hesitation in going much further: 'The people of Ireland always looked upon the land as their own, and as long as I remember they looked upon the landlords as robbers. They remember that the land of Ireland belonged to the Celts, and not the adventurers that came in with different parties.'⁹⁶

The question of the role of the peasants' historic memory of persecution and plantations during the land war and after has been a subject of dispute among historians. T. N. Brown has argued that it was not the folk memory of a collectivist golden age but 'fears inherited from the past mixed with hopes for better days that seem to have motivated Irish tenant farmers'.⁹⁷ This view is substantially supported by J. J. Lee, who argues that the Land League not merely articulated, but largely created the aspiration for tenant proprietorship, legitimising it with an 'immaculate' pedigree 'by which tenants acquired retrospective shares in a mythical Gaelic garden of Eden'.⁹⁸ E. D. Steele, however, has based his argument on the 'enduring animosity' between landlords and peasants arising from the plantations and religious persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹⁹ The evidence given at the special commission was not such as to endorse specifically any one view. The most reasonable conclusion seems to be: the peasants were afraid of famine, but agitators relied on rhetoric appealing to historicist ideology. On the nature of peasants' conscious-

ness during the land war, it is worth bearing in mind Davitt's opinion:

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 of eviction. There could be no ignorance upon these powers of landlordism in Ireland, but otherwise the people generally were the enemies of the system by force of Celtic instinct more than by any process of independent thought or conviction. 100

It is, however, important to make a distinction between the period before and after the establishment of the National League in 1882. During the land war, historicist arguments, while propagated by nationalist agitators, were subordinate to specific agrarian grievances and demands.¹⁰¹ The dropping of agrarian agitation in 1882 and the subsequent concentration on parliamentary activities produced a reversal of this position. The question was, would peasants adequately support a purely constitutional movement? The great attraction of agrarian agitation was that the objectives aimed for were tangible and could be expected to entail concrete benefits; what specific benefits home rule would entail were far less clear. The fact was, as has been seen,¹⁰² little thought had been given to what this specific demand would entail. Party leaders neither defined what it meant, or what it could be expected to achieve for Ireland. Probably the best example of general party propaganda on this subject is provided in the popular verse of

T. D. Sullivan:

The laws conceived in days of shame,
That closed, as with a sword of flame,
The paths to knowledge, wealth and fame,
 Are torn to shreds and cast aside;
The road is free to one and all,
Where'er they start from, hut or hall;
To work and worth henceforth shall fall
The bright rewards so long denied. 103

Or, as F. H. O'Donnell put it, in his highly coloured prose:

'The cheap pages of United Ireland under the influential proprietorship of Messrs Parnell, Justin McCarthy, and company, descended upon every rural household; and the peasantry learned ...that "Home rule would abolish everything and give everybody five shillings a day".'¹⁰⁴

The real significance of the change from agrarian to constitutional agitation was to shift the basis of nationalist propaganda from the economic grievances of the people to their sentimental aspirations. Moreover, where the tendency of agrarian agitation was essentially forward looking—directed towards concrete benefits to be obtained—that of home rule was retrospective: home rule was an abstract concept, portrayed as the fulfilment of centuries of struggle. Of course, at one level this was an advantage. A heterogeneous movement will always fight better for an undefined ideal, than for a specific set of proposals on which all might not be agreed. Indeed,

the very term 'home rule', the master-symbol of the movement, was adopted purely because of its abstract nature: it could be invested with whatever meaning, by extremist and moderate alike.

Michael McDonagh has aptly described thus:

There was a transfiguring vagueness about the phrase which enabled the most extreme nationalists, as well as the most moderate, to accept it. To moderate men "home rule" meant nothing more than an Irish parliament for the management of Irish affairs in subordination to England. Fenians...saw in home rule the beginning of a movement which might possibly end in the establishment of an Irish republic. 105

The ambiguity inherent in the term 'home rule' provides an important key to the general nature of nationalist ideology, but its strength lay not just in the fact that this term could appeal simultaneously, and with apparently equal intensity, to both militants and moderates, but in how the historical legend at the centre of nationalist ideology integrated the revolutionary and constitutional images with which both extremes invested it.¹⁰⁶ Yet notwithstanding the importance of ambiguity to the home rule campaign, Parnellite unwillingness, or inability, to define specifically what home rule was intended to achieve, was a decided handicap: there was certainly nothing to show how, for example, it could satisfy a frustrated 'revolution in rising expectations', such as has been argued was the mainspring of the land war in 1879.¹⁰⁷ Nor was the fact that their agitation now rested on a more tenuous basis than

hitherto, lost on Parnellite leaders. M. J. F. McCarthy, then on the staff of the Freeman's Journal, argued that in founding the National League Parnell aimed at bringing professional men, traders, artisans and labourers into the movement, fearing that rent reductions made by the land courts would constantly tend to make the farmers indifferent.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Matthew Harris testified before the special commission that he believed farmers cared little about Irish independence; that if they were to get their lands they would look on the boundary of their property as the boundary of their country.¹⁰⁹ This view was supported by Joseph Tully, editor of the Roscommon Herald, one of the most radical journals in Ireland. He informed Wilfrid Blunt that the people in his area did not care much for home rule apart from the land question.¹¹⁰ Michael Davitt at this time expressed the fear that if the liberals were defeated on home rule, and the tories were elected pledged to establish a peasant proprietary, they could well succeed and the home rule demand disappear;¹¹¹ a view also shared by E. D. Gray.¹¹²

John Dillon, indeed, had retired from politics in 1882 because the party had refused to reject totally the land act of 1881, which he believed would effectively kill the nationalist agitation.¹¹³ It is against this background of fear for the success of the agitation that the highly inflammatory journalism of United Ireland, in the period 1882-5, has to be seen;

as an attempt to sustain a high level of popular indignation or sense of grievance - the elementary basis of nationalism - against the 'English oppressor'. In this respect it is worth describing the experience of J. H. Tuke, whose activities in relieving Irish economic distress went back to the famine. Engaged in relieving distress caused by crop failure in the west of Ireland in 1886, he inquired of a prominent nationalist: "Why is it you political home rulers never once lifted a finger to help us when we were working in a purely philanthropic spirit to help those people in the west?" The reply was: "Well, you see Mr Tuke, the fact is, these districts and people furnish us with a very good raison d' etre."¹¹⁴

An important factor in sustaining Parnell's popularity in Ireland in this period was the attempts of the government in 1883 to connect him with the Phoenix Park murders, and the Roman letter of that year urging bishops and priests to refrain from supporting the nationalist movement.¹¹⁵ Again, William O'Brien kept United Ireland the focus of attention by an extremity of language that incurred several libel writs: 'It mattered little that literary grace had to be sacrificed to the exigencies of fighting journalism, to the temptation to that picture-writing which is best understood (sic) by the multitude, to the tendency towards an excess of emphasis...which is all but inevitable in a country where strong language is the only weapon available.'¹¹⁶

An ideal occasion for this type of propaganda was the visit of the prince of Wales to Ireland in 1885, which was boycotted by the nationalist population under United Ireland's leadership.¹¹⁷ Moreover, O'Brien also sought to retain the support of extreme nationalist opinion by keeping in circulation the Irishman, a fenian paper acquired from Richard Pigott in conjunction with two others in 1881.¹¹⁸ At a more general level, the number of papers supporting home rule greatly increased in these years, as the following table shows.

TABLE 1

Number and decade of origin, of Irish newspapers supporting home rule in 1886 ¹¹⁹

1770s	1
1810s	1
1820s	2
1830s	7
1840s	4
1850s	11
1860s	8
1870s	7
1880-86	14
total	55

Thus a quarter of the Irish home rule press came into existence in the first half of the 1880s, which must have added significantly to the influence of the National League. To consolidate

the nationalist consciousness of the people in these years, an attempt was made to persuade Irish children to read Irish, and not English, boys' newspapers,¹²¹ while a 'home manufacture' movement inspired by the national exhibition of 1882 in Dublin - directing the Irish public towards buying Irish made goods - was also made part of the propaganda of the National League.¹²² On a more subtle and coercive note, the national press worked to enforce obedience and membership of the league by publishing the names of those who had joined its local branches; a policy which William O'Brien admitted could be 'objectionable' as it tended to highlight, with the obvious implications, those who had not.¹²³ A similar criticism could be made of the 'courts' held under the auspices of the National League, in which offenders of league rules were subjected to fines or 'worse'.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, the progress of the nationalist movement in the years between the formation of the National League and the liberal conversion to home rule in 1886 was far from being one of unalloyed success. It is true that in these years the movement succeeded in one of its foremost aims - widening the basis of its support among the population. The national organiser, Timothy Harrington, argued that the executive of the National League contained only eight people who were on, or had anything
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to do with, the executive of the Land League, and there was no shortage of witnesses willing to testify to the 'respectable'

nature of the movement. T. J. Condon, M.P. and mayor of Clonmel, declared of the league in his area: 'Every class of the Clonmel community is represented in the Clonmel branch... priests, professional men, merchants, traders, artisans, farmers, labourers, all classes are included.'¹²⁶ At a more local level 'anti-landlord forces' had, by 1886, succeeded in obtaining control of 50 per cent of the poor law boards in Ireland.¹²⁷ But perhaps the most significant achievement of the movement was to maintain the revolution in national consciousness among the people. There are several indications of this, from the demise of deferential attitudes towards landlords, to the changing of street names commemorating English sovereigns to 'Brian Boru, Wolfe Tone, or Parnell streets'.¹²⁸ In the north, protestant liberals, anxious to retain the support of catholics, complained: 'all the popular histories read by the Irish catholic peasantry at the present hour are from the pens of Young Irelanders'.¹²⁹ F. S. L. Lyons has probably best described this 'consciousness' phenomenon in his succinct assessment of Parnell's achievement: 'He gave his people back their self-respect.'¹³⁰

On the other hand, though, 'consciousness' can be a rather nebulous commodity and is not necessarily synonymous with political commitment. For example, despite the fact that in the period 1882-5 the number of nationalist meetings held was greater than during the land war,¹³¹ there was no corresponding

progress in local branch formation. Timothy Harrington admitted that up to 1885 there were 'very few' branches of the National League. In 1883-4 they were not a third of the number they eventually reached in 1886, which he put at 1,700. Significantly, Harrington declared that a massive increase took place in 1885, though not, apparently, because of any great sudden upsurge in political commitment, but 'in consequence of every county desiring to qualify for its [parliamentary] representation' in the months preceding the general election of that year.¹³²

As to the number of branches existing in the period 1882-5 and their distribution, Patrick Egan claimed at a meeting in Buffalo, New York, on 8 April 1883, that 371 existed; 119 in Leinster, 96 in Munster, 86 in Connaught and 70 in Ulster.¹³³ Another index of the progress of the movement in the period up to 1886 is the circulation statistics of United Ireland, the movement's chief press organ. In the period 1886-90 it was to increase its sales to 90,000 per week. However O'Brien informed the commission that its circulation was very small in 1882: 'something under 30,000'. In 1883 it was still under 50,000. No profits were made until 1884 and, in addition, O'Brien claimed that since 1883 he had received only £200 per year, half his agreed salary as editor.¹³⁴ The sales of United Ireland and the slow progress of local branch formation suggests that, notwithstanding the changed consciousness of the people

and the exhortations of platform rhetoric, widespread active participation in nationalist politics was only forthcoming when substantial issues were at stake; parliamentary representation in 1885, home rule—briefly—in 1886, and the plan of campaign thereafter. Moreover, the effect of maintaining the extreme tone of nationalist politics in the period 1882-5 was to alienate much moderate nationalist and uncommitted opinion.

The establishment of United Ireland itself and the means by which control of the leading nationalist press organs was obtained are examples. Parnell was inspired to start United Ireland as a party organ after T. D. Sullivan's Nation dissented from his approach to the land act of 1881. Sullivan was naturally concerned; his paper was for a long time the only leading journal consistently supporting Parnellite policies - as he forcefully informed Parnell: 'I said it was absolute treachery towards myself, ungrateful towards a national journal which had stood by the cause in all weathers, and which had helped to make the Land League, and to defend it and its leaders when they needed help very much.'¹³⁵ His criticisms, however, went further and were more substantial: 'Newspaper journalism is a fair and open field for all who wish to embark their money and their talent in it, but it is quite a different thing to run against the existing journals one which shall be worked with funds which these journals helped to obtain for other purposes.'¹³⁶ E. D. Gray, proprietor of the Freeman's Journal, had a similar

experience. He informed F. H. O'Donnell that Davitt had threatened to have the Freeman burned on a hundred platforms if it did not support the league: "I could not afford to beggar my family by opposition or resistance. Davitt could put £100,000 of American money into an anti-Freeman."¹³⁷

The views of Sullivan and Gray were shared by Alfred Webb, who wrote to Parnell in 1883 informing him of his resignation from the treasurership of the National League, because the funds of the league were used to keep United Ireland going and to support persons apprehended in the course of its activities. Webb objected also to the 'violence' of the paper's articles, the trend towards 'coarse and violent language' and disclosed that E. D. Gray planned to withdraw from the organising committee of the league.¹³⁸ Indeed, Webb went further, and sought to forestall the extreme policy of United Ireland by attempting to launch 'a small monthly paper' like the Athenaeum, 'to express the desire and necessity for some form of Irish nationality on the basis of friendliness and union with Great Britain'. It was necessary to condemn the state of affairs and institutions which produced undesirable consequences, without attacking persons who felt they were doing duty, and who were products of the system.¹³⁹ As might have been expected, however, this project failed, and the disillusionment of others came to the fore.

In a perceptive passage in his diary, W. J. O'Neill Daunt,

the life-long repealer, noted: 'Parnell and his followers acquired vast popularity by denouncing the evictors, the extortioners, the rack-renters. Had they stopped there they would have merited praise. But in attacking all landlords, good and bad indiscriminately, they totally widened the severance of classes which has always been the curse of Ireland.'¹⁴⁰ Moreover, he wrote to W. E. H. Lecky in terms which could only have confirmed the latter's fears as to what home rule under Parnell would mean: '...in my judgment...home rule if administered by Parnellites, would be as great an evil as the hideous usurpation which is called a union'. The no-rent manifesto of 1882 had stamped its authors with 'the ineffaceable character of incompetence for national government' and their rule could be expected to result in 'bloodshed and chaos'.¹⁴¹

A similar impression was produced on Andrew Dunlop, a journalist with experience of writing for both unionist and home rule papers in Ireland. Dunlop's refusal to put a nationalist slant on his writings incurred the wrath of William O'Brien, who, he argued, forced his removal from the staff of the Freeman's Journal and the English Daily News. Dunlop also claimed that O'Brien's verbal abuse caused him to be physically attacked.¹⁴² As a result of his experiences and those of others similarly placed, Dunlop contributed to the home rule debate in 1886 a pamphlet in which he declared: 'There can be no true estimate of public opinion - no

one can tell what "the views of the majority are" when a penalty is attached to the expression of any opinion save such as have received the sanction of those who have assumed the position of dictators of the people.'¹⁴³ Ironically, William O'Brien was to make exactly the same complaint when he fell foul of official party opinion many years later and sought to publicise his own views.¹⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

To look back on the limited scheme for Irish autonomy that Gladstone proposed in 1886, it is difficult to understand why it aroused the passions that it did. But to understand this phenomenon it is necessary to look beyond the details of the plan and to understand what kind of meaning was invested in the term 'home rule' by contemporaries; and it would be difficult to underestimate in this respect the role of nationalist propaganda in general, and of United Ireland under William O'Brien's editorship in particular. Appeals to a violent history of struggle to justify and conceptualise political actions in the present, could not but strike fear into those sections of society, whether in the north or south, who were not part of the agitation; and given nationalist reluctance, or inability, to define what exactly home rule meant, it was only to be expected that critics would invest the term 'home rule' with the violent and highly charged images of party

propaganda. Herein lay the great negative aspect of nationalist ideology.

'People', as Karl Deutsch perceptively argues in his study of nationalism, 'are masked off from each other by communicative barriers, by "marked gaps" in the efficiency of communication'.¹⁴⁵ While nationalist propaganda was an excellent medium for uniting those with a stake in identifying with dispossessed and persecuted ancestors, it could hardly be expected to make converts among those sections of Irish society stigmatised in nationalist legend as the descendants of dispossessors and persecutors, and whose own awareness and interpretation of the Irish past was very different from the nationalist view. The comments of the earl of Courtown on the Parnellite movement - at a time when nationalist leaders were anxious to stress the 'constitutional' nature of the demand for self-government, its compatibility with membership of the empire and the authority of the Queen - would have been endorsed by unionists, north and south:

It suits the purposes of their leaders to disclaim any intention of separation from England; but the title of "nationalist" alone connects them inseparably with the rebels of 1798, with James II's Irish parliament, with the nationalist and ultramontane factions of the confederates of Kilkenny, with the rising of 1641, and with the many futile attempts to expel the English from Ireland. 146

The police, who had a better idea of the actual political

practice of the National League up to 1886, were aware that the movement had worked to prevent the commission of crime in these years and strongly urged the conservative government in January 1886 against suppressing the league.¹⁴⁷ But in the popular imagination the organisation had unmistakable connotations of revolution and violence - reinforced by such well publicised utterances as Parnell's declaration that no man had a right to place the ne plus ultra to the march of a nation.¹⁴⁸ It is against this background that much of the hostile reaction to home rule in 1886 has to be seen, for placing the ne plus ultra to the march of a nation was precisely what Gladstone intended when he proposed home rule as a 'final settlement' of the Irish question. Moreover, as will be seen, the scheme Gladstone formulated was not such as to inspire confidence that this objective would be secured.

CHAPTER II

GLADSTONE, LIBERALS AND IRISH NATIONALISM:

THE MAKING OF THE HOME RULE SCHEME OF 1886

Whatever be its fate in the present parliament, everyone must recognise that the introduction of this measure [Gladstone's home rule bill] did one great irrevocable service to the cause of Irish nationality: it defined it. 1

In taking up the question of Irish autonomy in 1886 Gladstone marked a new stage in the development of home rule nationalism. Whereas Parnellites had hitherto emphasised the long history of violent struggle against England to legitimise their campaign for self-rule, he was to develop a 'constitutional' historical legend on which to base the home rule case. But more immediately, he gave specific form to what had hitherto been the abstract nationalist demand for self-government. The scheme Gladstone formulated, although defeated in 1886, became both the basis for the discussion of home rule in general and the point of departure in the making of the home rule bills of 1893 and 1912. This chapter will attempt to analyse the liberal contribution to home rule nationalism through an examination of the liberal 'conversion' to home rule, and the making of the land and home rule bills.

GLADSTONE AND THE LIBERAL CONVERSION TO HOME RULE

The question of Gladstone's conversion to home rule has long been a subject of debate among historians. Possessed of a mind imbued with both an acute moral and political sense, his attempts to synthesise the dictates of morality with the necessities of party politics have offered much scope for argument as to whether his conversion to home rule was determined chiefly by moral or political motives. Essentially this debate has focused on two opposing views of Gladstone. The first, emphasising his profoundly moral and religious frame of mind, charts his views on Irish autonomy as being in the process of development over a considerable period of time; how every attempt of the Westminster parliament to govern Ireland efficiently and fairly had failed, leaving home rule as the only satisfactory moral and political solution once it became certain, after the general election of 1885, that this was the wish of the great majority of Irish people.²

The opposing view, while accepting that Gladstone was inspired with great moral fervour, contends that his conversion to home rule was, nevertheless, effected as much for party political reasons; to diminish 'the independence and strength of Irish nationalism, so as to benefit the liberal party and his position in it'.³ Thus, there is, not surprisingly, a considerable amount of published material on the subject of Gladstone's taking up of the home rule question.

However, while it is important to explain the nature of Gladstone's commitment to home rule in general, and while bearing in mind the material which already exists on this subject, of equal importance is the allied question of why Gladstone, once having declared for home rule, proceeded with such haste to implement a home rule scheme in circumstances which were anything but congenial and in which his government depended on the support of the Parnellite party; an eventuality which he had previously declared to be of 'vital danger to the country and the empire'.⁴ In examining this question attention will be focused on Gladstone's views of the state of Ireland in the period from the general election of 1885 until April 1886 and his sources of information on the Irish question.

Despite their differences, both schools of thought on Gladstone's conversion to home rule agree on one important point; that before 1885 he did not practically consider home rule as a solution to the Irish question.⁵ However, once he was convinced of its necessity his commitment was real. Herbert Gladstone has argued that when the whig element in the liberal government rejected Joseph Chamberlain's central board scheme in 1884, his father privately arrived at the view that as a matter of practical politics a separate parliament for Ireland 'in some form or other' would eventually have to be conceded.⁶ A few months later Gladstone accepted the moral case for home rule; that self-government should be conferred

on Ireland as an act of atonement for decades of misrule under the union. Asked in 1890 by Lee Warner, headmaster of Rugby school, if he could identify 'the crucial moment' at which he determined to adopt the home rule policy, Gladstone replied:

Yes; I had been reading a speech of Mr William O'Brien, and I put it down and said to myself - what is there in this speech that I must get to realise before I put it aside? And I saw then that there never was and never could be any moral obligation to the Irish race in the act of union. 7

Thus Gladstone's personal commitment to home rule was apparently settled some months before it was necessary to make a public declaration in favour of Irish autonomy. His conversion to home rule, nevertheless, was always considered a likelihood by some. Following his public declaration in favour of Irish autonomy, Lord Hartington remarked: 'I think no-one who has read or heard, during a long series of years, the declarations of Mr Gladstone on the question of self-government in Ireland can be surprised at the tone of his present declaration.'⁸

Writing of his own mental evolution towards public acceptance of Irish home rule in July 1886, Gladstone argued that there had been several paramount conditions which had to be met before a home rule scheme could be considered ripe for implementation. It was essential that the failure of the Westminster parliament as a satisfactory legislative instrument

for Ireland' should be demonstrated; that the demand for home rule should be 'made in obedience to the unequivocal and rooted desire of Ireland expressed through the constitutional medium of the Irish representatives'; that Irish home rule must not endanger the unity and security of the empire; that any Irish home rule scheme should be of such a nature as to apply to Scotland if so desired; that the home rule question should, so far as possible, be kept out of the arena of party politics. On the fulfilment of these conditions, he argued, it was essential that 'the question...be promptly and expeditiously dealt with', otherwise it would gravely dislocate the British political system by changes of government, dissolutions of parliament, obstruction, 'and derogating further from the character of the house of commons'.⁹ Clearly, Gladstone was concerned as much for the stability of the British political system as he was for the peculiar needs of Ireland. But how far does Gladstone's explanation for his actions of the previous months adequately account for the course he took?

Certainly some of the conditions Gladstone stipulated had indeed been met. Ireland had endorsed the nationalist demand at the 1885 general election; the Westminster parliament had, arguably, failed to govern Ireland as well as a domestic legislature might have done; nationalists were prepared to accept a measure of autonomy which did not endanger imperial unity. But one important condition was not met. It rapidly

became clear in the aftermath of the 1885 general election that the tories were not prepared to concede home rule to Ireland, and that the subject, if taken up by Gladstone, dependent for support on the Parnellite party, would be very much at the centre of party politics. Moreover, an equally important consideration for the successful implementation of a home rule scheme was the necessity of allowing enough time for educating the British public on the justice and necessity of Irish autonomy.

Gladstone, however, though he had formed his government ostensibly on the basis of an inquiry into the subject of home rule in general,¹⁰ moved rapidly to formulate and implement a home rule scheme in the teeth of stiff opposition from a considerable section of his own party and from the tories - a combination which would guarantee that his attempt would fail. His argument that the threat to the British political system necessitated such a course is inadequate, for, as will be seen, leading nationalists were prepared to move in the direction of home rule at a much slower pace than Gladstone.

To some extent the speed with which Gladstone took up the home rule case is explicable in terms of his personal make-up. Lord Selborne, who parted company with him over the home rule issue, gave a perceptive and not unsympathetic analysis of his motives. Whether wise or unwise, he wrote, they were nevertheless 'higher and more honourable than those of mere

personal ambition'. Gladstone had an impatient spirit allied to a strong distaste for coercion, which blinded him to the necessity of firm government and maintenance of existing laws. Moreover,

The sands of his life were fast running out; whatever there might be still to do must be done quickly. "The time", especially in Ireland "was out of joint"; he was born to set it right"....When he determined to run any great risk in politics it was not his nature to feel doubt or misgiving; if one experiment failed he was so much the readier for another....It is to this state of mind that I trace his new departure in politics at the age of seventy-six, a departure not new as to Ireland only but...to many other questions also. 11

Certainly Selborne highlights characteristics of Gladstone's personality which historians have commonly noted as influencing his political actions; his distaste for coercion, sense of justice, historical sense, belief in a personal mission, and an excessively optimistic frame of mind once having settled on a course of action. However there were far more concrete reasons for Gladstone having dealt with the home rule question in the way that he did, and these are to be sought in an examination of what Gladstone believed to be happening in Ireland following the Parnellite successes in the 1885 general election and the sources on which his information depended.

Anxious to assist in a solution to the Irish question, and yet not wishing to appear to be soliciting Parnellite support at a time when the tories seemed prepared to confer

home rule on Ireland, Gladstone's facilities for obtaining accurate information on Irish affairs in the autumn of 1885 were severely restricted. The problem, he informed Lord Rosebery, was that

the unfriendly relations between the party of nationalists and the late government in the expiring parliament, have of necessity left me and those with whom I act in great ignorance of the interior mind of the party, which has in parliament systematically confined itself to very general declarations. 12

Having virtually no practical experience of Ireland himself, Gladstone's sources of information on Irish affairs were to remain scanty, being confined to 'two or three colleagues'.¹³ Thus the reports on Ireland he received were prone to assume greater significance than they might otherwise have done had his sources been more numerous. As it was, the context in which they had meaning was one of rumour and supposition as to what Irish nationalists were likely to do having swept the board at the general election of 1885, and following Parnell's vow that the chief task of his party was now to obtain the restoration of a native Irish parliament.¹⁴

Highly important in shaping Gladstone's mind on Irish affairs following the general election, was an extensive memorandum on the Irish question drawn up by James Bryce. Bryce had made a tour of Ireland after the election, with the express purpose of taking the political temperature of the country,

and his report, entitled 'Irish opinions on the Irish problem', was not calculated to calm Gladstone's mind on the Irish question. Emphasising the authority of his inquiry by pointing out that his sources were 'several of the leading judges and higher officials, leading professional men, prominent merchants and influential nationalists', Bryce proceeded to paint a picture of Ireland on the verge of social dissolution. The general opinion among educated men, he remarked, was that 'things could not go on much longer the way they were. The sentiment of uncertainty and insecurity is telling injuriously in commerce and industry.' Moreover, the land market did not operate:

Very many estates are in the hands of receivers. It is feared that the difficulty in collecting rent will soon become very serious. The fall in the price of agricultural produce, especially cattle, has heated a widespread demand for a revision of judicial rents before the expiry of the fifteen years fixed by the land act of 1881. The success of the Parnellite candidates coupled with the conduct of the present ministry has given rise to a feeling of contempt for the authority of parliament. One is told everywhere that many persons, especially young men of education, are going over to the nationalist party.

Two possible solutions to this state of affairs had been suggested to Bryce from his unionist and nationalist sources respectively. The former rejected the desirability of a domestic Irish parliament and suggested instead a reform of the existing administration; substitution of a secretary of state for the

lord lieutenant, abolition of the grand jury system and its replacement by the creation of elective boards, and reform of the police administration, among others. Significantly, Bryce recorded, many of those who suggested these reforms reluctantly admitted that if they could not be effected, 'legislative independence' was preferable to the existing state of things.

The solution to the Irish problem emanating from nationalist sources was more predictable. A domestic parliament for Ireland based on the Westminster model was suggested, to deal with purely Irish affairs; to have no control over foreign affairs or imperial matters, the appointment of judges or the military forces, and with a power of veto over acts of the Irish parliament to rest with the imperial parliament at Westminster. All parties in Ireland agreed, Bryce noted, that the land question would have to be settled before the existing constitutional arrangements were interfered with. He concluded by urging: 'it is essential to obtain as soon as possible a statement from Mr Parnell on what he would accept'.¹⁵ In sum, the general impression of the state of Ireland presented in Bryce's memorandum was of a country moving steadily, for various reasons, towards a situation approaching anarchy, but at the same time being capable of pacification if resolute action was promptly taken.

The threat of social dislocation conveyed by Bryce was again impressed on Gladstone a short time later by Lord Richard

Grosvenor, the strongly anti-Parnellite liberal chief whip, who informed him that he had it on good authority that a move was afoot among Parnellites to withdraw completely from the Westminster parliament. Gladstone replied:

I should regard the withdrawal en bloc as by far the most formidable thing that can happen. It will be followed by an assembly in Dublin, which brings into view very violent alternatives. If Parnell is wise he will keep to the game he has been upon heretofore, viz, the ejecting of govts....¹⁶

Historians, where they have noticed this communication, have tended to minimise its significance. Hammond, though he acknowledges that 'Gladstone had been haunted by the fear that Parnell might take his eighty-five men to Dublin, and set them up as a parliament defying England', argues that he only considered the possibility in terms of the detrimental effect it would have on England's international image: 'England the mother of free institutions...the nation that had read the tyrants of Europe so many a lesson'.¹⁷ Cooke and Vincent regard the threat to withdraw from Westminster as merely a 'madcap' possibility that Gladstone had to allow for.¹⁸ Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien regards Gladstone's fears on this issue as 'speculations in the dark...there is no evidence on the Irish side that the idea of secession was ever seriously considered'.¹⁹ However, the real significance of this communication is only apparent when considered in the context of a flow of information,

all of which generally supported the view of Ireland as being on the verge of revolution.

Coming just a few weeks after Bryce's report, Grosvenor's letter preceded by only a week what was perhaps the most serious and influential report of this nature. In a letter written for the attention of both Gladstone and his son Herbert, Edward Hamilton, Gladstone's private secretary, detailed the substance of a conversation he had with Sir Robert Hamilton, undersecretary at Dublin Castle. Hamilton had replaced the unfortunate T. H. Burke who was murdered in the Phoenix Park in 1882, and was known to favour home rule. He was not given to hysterical outbursts on Irish politics. As Edward Hamilton reminded Gladstone: 'His opinion on the situation in Ireland is entitled to great weight, not only because of the official position he occupies, but because his judgment is singularly sound and calm'. He then detailed exactly what Hamilton had to say on Irish affairs:

We are...approaching a crisis of no ordinary kind. Unless the dreadful policy of drift is superceded by some statesman taking a bold line the difficulties all round will become intolerable. We are in the throes of a revolution. [My italics]. There is no use blinking the fact, and the press is a poor guide in such a case unless directed. 20

Clearly Ireland, according to apparently reliable sources, was approaching a state of social chaos that only rapid and radical

action could forestall. It was an impression endorsed by at least one leading Parnellite, T. M. Healy. Henry Labouchere, who throughout this period acted as a political intermediary between all parties and especially as a source of information on Ireland for Gladstone, informed Joseph Chamberlain of W. V. Harcourt's belief that "if the Irish found that they could get nothing, they would resort again to dynamite".²¹ Having communicated Harcourt's views to Healy, with whom he was in close and frequent contact, Labouchere received the following reply:

Harcourt's views quite interest me, and he is quite right, for if the people are disappointed after the visions held out to them, they cannot be held in. This country could easily be made ungovernable so far as the collection of rent and legal process is concerned, and the obstructers would find that they were not dealing with playboys but with resolute men. It is because I am for peace and feel the necessity for it that I am willing to accept any reasonable settlement, as things could not go on as they are for very long. If prices next year are as bad as this the country will not be habitable in any case for rackrenters. 22

Indeed, on the rent question, Lady Cowper had already gone much further than Healy on 14 December 1885, when she told Gladstone that no rents were being paid in Ireland, even those judicially settled.²³ The broad consensus of opinion on the state of Ireland exhibited by Gladstone's informants, was supported by a new development in Irish politics in the period from the autumn of 1885 to the summer of 1886. This was the emergence and rapid development of the House League.

Originating in County Longford in the summer of 1885, the movement had a fivefold objective; to reduce 'rack-rents' in town dwellings, improvement of dwellings, fostering of sanitation, encouragement of home industry, and legislation in favour of house owners in towns. With the avowed intention of applying the methods of the Land League against rack-renting landlords in the towns, the movement found widespread support and had considerable success. By October 1885 branches had been organised in many parts of nationalist Ireland, including Donegal, Cavan, Sligo, Carlow, Wexford and Kerry.²⁴ Indeed, so widespread did House League branches become in Kerry that the R.I.C. were of the opinion, based on 'excellent authorities', that 'in the event of the National League being proclaimed illegal, it is intended in Kerry to utilize "The House League" for all its purposes'.²⁵ Official endorsement of the movement by the Parnellite party was only prevented by the prorogation of parliament.

The emergence of an organisation like the House League, raising up visions of the strife of the land war being repeated in towns all over Ireland, was just the kind of tangible indication of impending revolution that gave substance to the fears expressed by Gladstone's sources on Irish affairs. The following report by The Times on the affairs of the league would have adequately expressed the apprehensions of British opinion, whether liberal or conservative:

Leagury of all kinds is flourishing in Ireland. The National League is practically a Land League, and closely associated with it is the House League, an institution which has already assumed formidable proportions, not only in Kerry, but in the midlands and in the north....At present it is not too much to say that the owners of houses in towns in Ireland are on the eve of being attacked in precisely the same way as were the owners of land. 26

In the event, however, the House League did not prove to be the weapon of urban revolution predicted by The Times, but seems to have disappeared as quickly as it arose, sometime in the summer of 1886; presumably a victim of the liberal-Parnellite alliance and the efforts then under way to prove that Ireland was peaceful and ready to accept the boon of home rule. What is important, though, is its emergence and rapid expansion at a crucial stage in Anglo-Irish relations. The particular effect the emergence of this organisation had in moving Gladstone to take up home rule as a policy requiring immediate implementation is, of course, difficult to ascertain, but what is clear is that fear for social order in Ireland and consequent violence in England were the prime factors in determining his approach to the tory party on the home rule issue in mid-December 1885. Gladstone contacted A. J. Balfour, who described their conversation some months later in a letter to the press, which is worth quoting extensively for the indication it provides of Gladstone's frame of mind:

The conversation, entirely informal...consisted chiefly...of statements made by Mr Gladstone to me respecting the serious condition of Ireland, and the urgency of the problem which it presented to the government. He told me that he had information of an authentic kind, but not from Mr Parnell, which caused him to believe that there was a power behind Mr Parnell which, if not shortly satisfied by some substantial concession to the demands of the Irish parliamentary party, would take the matter into its own hands, and resort to violence and outrage in England for the purpose of enforcing its demands. "In other words", I said to Mr Gladstone, "we are to be blown up and stabbed if we do not grant home rule by the end of the next session". "I understand", answered Mr Gladstone, "that the time is shorter than that". 27

Following this meeting Gladstone wrote to Balfour promising his support for any tory home rule scheme and emphasising the 'stir in men's minds' and the 'urgency of the matter, to both of which every day's post bring me new testimony'.²⁸ Balfour replied in a conciliatory tone but highlighted the difficulty in keeping the home rule issue out of party politics and on a national plane, given that Ireland was an integral part of the United Kingdom and not a remote region such as Afghanistan or Roumelia.²⁹ Gladstone replied stressing the urgency of the matter and hoping that the government would act, as 'time is precious, and is of the case'.³⁰ As is well known, Gladstone's attempts to persuade the tories to take up the home rule issue failed,³¹ but the value of his correspondence with Balfour lies in indicating the frame of mind with which he took up the home rule question. To Gladstone's mind the Irish question ceased to be just a serious problem facing the

Westminster parliament: it became an emergency. As he put it in a letter to W. V. Harcourt: the 'Irish emergency at the present minute dominates and overshadows every other emergency'.³²

However, to emphasise this point is not to detract from the extent to which Gladstone sympathised with the Irish demand for home rule per se, but rather to point out that his belief that Ireland was on the verge of massive social disorder had a determining influence in setting the pace with which he would deal with the question once having decided that it was 'ripe' for settlement. This is a crucial point, for the haste with which Gladstone proceeded to construct and implement a home rule scheme must have been an important factor making for the failure of his attempt to confer a domestic parliament on Ireland in 1886. Given the suddenness with which the home rule question came to the fore and the total lack of preparation on the part of the British public and political parties to consider the question, the most effective course to have taken would have been to declare in principle for Irish autonomy and then to proceed to investigate the problem by means of a parliamentary inquiry. Indications, moreover, were not wanting from Parnellite sources that this would have been acceptable. T. M. Healy informed Labouchere with characteristic sarcasm: 'Is it not plain that if we plunge into home rule plans just now before your intelligent public apply their enlightened minds to it that we shall get far less than what we

should get by waiting and worrying you for a few years.'³³

Michael Davitt, in like manner, informed Labouchere that both he and Parnell were agreed that the resolution of the land question should proceed with a 'representative commission' to fix the amount of compensation that should be given to landlords, and that if, while the land question was in the process of being settled, 'a parliamentary committee' was appointed 'to inquire into what amount of self-government could be given to Ireland without endangering the unity of the empire, this country would immediately settle down'.³⁴

However, as was noted,³⁵ although Gladstone had formed his government ostensibly on the basis of a general inquiry into the subject of Irish home rule, he chose to pursue a contrary course of action, moving to construct a home rule scheme with breath-taking speed. Defending his actions in the period immediately following the home rule debate, Gladstone metaphorically dismissed the view that he should have proceeded more prudently to deal with the home rule question:

For England, in her soft arm-chair, a leisurely, very leisurely consideration, with adjournments interposed, as it had been usual, so also would have been comfortable. But for Ireland, in her leaky cabin, it was of consequence to stop out the weather. To miss the opportunity would not have been less clearly wrong than to refuse waiting until it came. The first political juncture which made action permissible also made it obligatory. 36

The 'weather' Gladstone refers to was the apparently very real threat of revolution in Ireland. Yet fear of revolution in itself was a very negative reason for wishing to admit the nationalist claim for self-government. This was, of course, recognised as such by a considerable section of British political opinion, which refused to be 'coerced' into accepting home rule. Gladstone, however, believed himself to be well equipped to deal with the home rule question: 'he said it was exactly because he was an old man that he felt he could deal with the subject. Everyone was violent about it. But everyone would pay respect to age and him.'³⁷ Moreover, there were positive indications that seemed to suggest that if a scheme for the solution of the land and autonomy questions were proposed, it would stand a good chance of success.

First, in the autumn of 1885, there was the increasing recognition in Gladstone's mind that Parnell could be trusted to accept and work a moderate measure of home rule enforced by Westminster.³⁸ His speech on the address in January 1886 had supported that view, while at the end of the month Mrs O'Shea informed Gladstone that 'some days ago Mr Parnell sent Mr Harrington to Ireland, with directions to overhaul the doings of the branches of the National League and with power to dissolve any that would not keep within bounds'. Enclosed with her letter were cuttings of Irish newspapers giving reports of local league branches that had been dissolved.³⁹ Secondly,

and more important, were the indications coming from Irish landlords themselves that they would be prepared to accept major land and political reforms in Ireland.

H. V. Stuart, a substantial landowner, informed Gladstone that only a solution to the land question would make home rule possible.⁴⁰ Lord Midleton, although declaring himself against home rule, said he was willing to sell out on 'reasonable terms'.⁴¹ Mr W. D. Webber, writing for himself and Lady Kingstons, argued that the land question, not home rule, was the important one, and that 'the proprietors are still anxious to avail themselves of any fair terms for sale that would leave them the power of fulfilling their duties as residents as they have hitherto done.'⁴² Lord Powerscourt wrote urging state aid to assist some degree of buying out of the owner's interest in land and provision for private bills to be dealt with by committee in Dublin.⁴³ Also, in early January 1886, Parnell communicated to Gladstone, through Mrs O'Shea, a plan he claimed had been submitted to him by 'the representatives of the chief landlord political organisations in Ireland', designed to secure the resolution of the land and home rule questions.⁴⁴

Encouraging as these communications were in indicating, at least a willingness to accept some major changes in Irish administration, much more influential were the efforts made in this direction by Lord Hartington.

Hartington is known primarily for his strenuous unionism and aversion to home rule, but surprisingly, he played a major role in arranging contacts between Gladstone and representative sections of Irish landlord opinion in March 1886. Hartington arranged for his father's former land agent in Ireland, William Currey—'a reasonable cultivated man who never took an extreme line in Irish politics'—to 'obtain the views of the most representative class of Irish landlords in regard to land purchases'. Currey saw T. C. Trench, Major Perceval Maxwell, H. H. Townsend, who was A. H. Smith-Barry's agent, Sir Richard Keane, Percy Smith and Sir Robert Paul. The general feeling entertained by this group and by another conference of owners and agents, was that 'if land purchase became inevitable' a large scheme to effect a complete solution of the land question was preferred.⁴⁵ The details of these letters will be covered when examining Gladstone's land bill: what is important to note at this stage is that when Gladstone decided to formulate his land and home rule bills in 1886 he had good reason to expect that they would, as a whole, be acceptable to most shades of Irish political opinion. If his reading of the political state of Ireland impressed on him the need to devise some large measure to settle the Irish question, his Irish contacts suggested that it would to a great extent succeed. But having decided to construct a home rule scheme, how far was Gladstone able to effect a conversion to Irish autonomy in the

liberal party?

For many sections of British opinion the question of home rule in 1886 was considered primarily as an imperial question rather than an issue of local devolution within the United Kingdom. Gladstone's second ministry had presided over a series of imperial disasters, especially in Egypt and South Africa, and Gladstone's conversion to home rule was interpreted as another aspect of imperial feebleness: 'the Irish question was to broaden its significance as it came to be seen as a domestic outbreak of a general epidemic which threatened the existence of the international order'.⁴⁶

The English business class, it has been argued, was intensely patriotic and resented violence in Ireland as a threat to England; 'and as the affront - with others, e.g. Majuba and the loss of Gordon - occurred under a liberal government, it withdrew its allegiance from the liberal party'.⁴⁷ Certainly there was a steady stream of deserters from liberal ranks: Matthew Arnold, A. V. Dicey, Goschen, Chamberlain, Bright, Sir John Seeley and Hartington. There was little enthusiasm for home rule in general in liberal ranks and thus it is not surprising to find a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the question among the leading liberals who supported Gladstone. At the same time, though, it was important for Gladstone to have their support. For example, the support of Lord Spencer was essential. His influence in the party was second only to

Gladstone's: 'His unrivalled experience of Irish administration ...powers of fixed decision in difficult circumstances, and the impression of high public spirit...gave him a force of moral authority in a crisis that was unique'.⁴⁸ Morley wrote elsewhere that his conversion gave driving point to general arguments for home rule, and without his 'earnest adhesion to the revolutionary change in the principles of Irish government, the attempt would have been useless from the first, and nobody was more alive to this than Mr Gladstone'.⁴⁹ Yet Spencer's support for home rule was determined, not by a belief in the justice of the nationalist demand, but by the fact that the tory action in reversing the stern 'law and order' policies he had pursued in Ireland, led him to believe that Ireland could not be governed 'successfully' by the Westminster parliament since it allowed such sharp changes of policy.⁵⁰ This development was also influential in moving W. V. Harcourt to support home rule even though he despised the Parnellites and had virtually no faith in home rule as a solution to the Irish question.⁵¹

John Morley, who was to become deeply committed to Irish home rule, argued that a settlement of the home rule and land questions was necessary both to prevent a collapse of British political institutions and to prevent the peasants confiscating landlord property.⁵² Even Hugh Childers, who alone of leading liberals declared for home rule at the 1885 general election by actually producing a home rule scheme, was not prepared to go

as far as Gladstone originally intended in his home rule plan.⁵³ James Bryce, who was also to play a leading role in publicising the home rule cause, was a 'home ruler in despair, adopting it as the least of a choice of evils and being far from hopeful as to its results'.⁵⁴ He also saw the Irish problem as an obstacle to Anglo-Saxon unity which could be achieved were it settled.⁵⁵ The general feeling among leading liberals towards the home rule question was accurately described by Bryce when he said that, though home rule was not desirable, it 'would come and must come'.⁵⁶ In a perceptive note, Henry Ponsonby wrote: 'Today I talked to Lord Spencer....What makes me uncomfortable is that he does not seem keen. In all great reforms the leaders are always keen....But those who talk of home rule talk more in the "What else can you do?" tone.'⁵⁷ However, while the conversion of leading liberals to home rule was motivated mainly by negative reasons, their views were to condition the character of the home rule scheme in some important respects.

As for the liberal parliamentary party at large, the extent to which any specific process of 'conversion' to the view that the demand for home rule was a just one, actually took place, is difficult to determine. It is likely that, for many, Gladstone's influence carried the day, though he was to remark:

although our home rule bill was eventually supported by more than 300 members, I doubt whether, if the question had been prematurely raised on the night of the address, as many as 200 would have been disposed to act in that sense. 58

Certainly most of the liberal candidates at the 1885 general election did not commit themselves on home rule. It has been estimated that of 321 liberals who voted on 8 June 1886 on the home rule bill, 48 during the election were favourable to home rule, 29 were 'at least sympathetic in some degree towards the concept of Irish nationalism', 28 were opposed or unsympathetic, and 216, or two thirds, did not commit themselves.⁵⁹ During the course of the home rule debate, however, significant changes of attitude seems to have taken place. R. A. Hufford argues: 'It would seem that an estimate that 1 of every 3 liberals who opposed Gladstone before the home rule debates was won over during the debates, was approximately correct.'⁶⁰ The liberal party conversion to home rule, though, does not appear to have prompted any great interest in the Irish problem among individual party members. Alfred Webb was to complain that the liberals who came to Ireland to support the nationalists during the plan of campaign, 'did so because Ireland was the fashion...[They] never took the trouble to really understand what the problem was in its essentials'.⁶¹

As to how far liberal supporters in the country supported home rule per se, a useful source of information is the survey

conducted by the Pall Mall Gazette on this question. Several investigators were sent to the chief areas of liberal support in the north of England and Scotland. In the north of England it was found that Gladstone's influence, rather than any real interest or concern for home rule, was the determining factor among supporters of the liberal party:

"People don't personally feel these Irish questions as they have felt other questions" explained an intelligent liberal, "But the great body of the population retain their faith in Mr Gladstone, a faith which is responsible for the conviction that he will not deliberately mislead them." 62

In Glasgow it was also felt that 'an intense devotion to Mr Gladstone, combined with a strong reliance on [his] judgment, formed by an unexampled national service' would influence a large body of liberals to vote for the home rule scheme 'in opposition to their own sympathies and desires'.⁶³ It was also reported that in Leeds, local liberal acceptance of home rule was really an act of faith in Gladstone: 'in his earnestness and sincerity of purpose'.⁶⁴ This feeling also prevailed in Manchester.⁶⁵

In an interesting assessment of local liberal association attitudes to home rule throughout the country, the Pall Mall Gazette concluded that the local associations supported Gladstone to a far greater degree than either the parliamentary party or rank and file liberals:

The liberal associations throughout the country are much more in favour of Mr Gladstone than the members whom they return to support him in the house of commons....The caucus exists in a large measure to win elections, and anything and everything which threatens success at the next electoral combat is hateful in the eyes of the thorough-going liberal association.... Neither the members of parliament at the top nor the rank and file at the bottom are so keen in support of Mr Gladstone as the members of the liberal hundreds who stand between the two....Nearly all the resolutions of liberal associations reported within the last ten days accept the principle of home rule.

However, the report continued: 'while this a somewhat remarkable phenomenon, it is perhaps less significant than the fact that, with all their devotion to Mr Gladstone, the liberal managers are wonderfully unanimous in expressing their acceptance of his bills in very guarded terms'.⁶⁶ Gladstone was, it seems, in the intensity of his commitment to home rule, very much alone among liberals.

THE HOME RULE BILL: SHAPING THE IRISH LEGISLATURE

In moving to formulate his home rule scheme early in 1886, Gladstone's scope for manoeuvre was considerable. As was seen, Parnellites as a group gave little time either to studying the question in general, or formulating a scheme of their own. Only in the autumn of 1885 did a committee, including Thomas Sexton and T. P. O'Connor, meet to study formally federations, but since Parnell 'hardly spoke to his followers upon political matters' there was not much enthusiasm for the endeavour.⁶⁷ Thus there was no collective party view of what home rule for

Ireland should be, though leading nationalists had their own individual ideas of what should be the basis of a solution to the problem.

Parnell spoke at this time in general terms of a 'unicameral legislature unencumbered by a house of lords' and with varying degrees of emphasis on the need for Ireland to have powers to impose protective tariffs.⁶⁸ More privately, he provided Gladstone, through the agency of Mrs O'Shea, with a home rule constitution that included special proportionate representation for the large protestant minority in Ireland and left the definition of what 'matters did or did not come within the province of the local legislature' to the imperial parliament. The scheme was carefully designed with a view to 'propitiating English prejudice, 'and to effect those guarantees against hasty legislation, interference in extraneous matters and unfair action against particular classes, apprehended by many people as the result of an Irish parliament'. His scheme, Parnell stressed, did not involve a repeal of the act of union - 'an irrevocable step' - and while 'it was not one I could undertake to suggest publicly myself', he would work to have it accepted in Ireland as a 'final settlement'.⁶⁹ Michael Davitt rejected totally Parnell's views on protection and claimed that he had taken 'his one-chamber idea' from his own book, Leaves from a prison diary.⁷⁰ In the concluding chapter of the book Davitt sketched a scheme of local and

national self-government for Ireland: local government would be managed by elective county boards which would supercede the grand jury system and be invested with powers to manage all aspects of local government, including schemes for arterial drainage, tramways, railways, canals, docks, harbours and similar enterprises.⁷¹ The enactment of such schemes would be dependent on the ultimate approval of a national assembly, that would operate in much the same way as the British colonial legislatures except for 'the substitution of one for two chambers'.⁷²

T. M. Healy, describing his own views on Irish autonomy, informed Henry Labouchere that an Irish parliament should have 'full power over everything here except the army and the navy, as, I cannot see what other interest England has here'. If paid a due taxation, 'what possible care of hers is it how else we order our affairs'. As for the protestants, they would soon realise they were 'safe with the catholics', though if specific safeguards were required he would not object.⁷³ However, unco-ordinated as individual views among nationalists on home rule tended to be, something close to a collective view on the subject did emerge in January 1886, and that it did so was largely due to Gladstone's inspiration.

Gladstone had set about sounding nationalist opinion on home rule in August 1885, using as an intermediary John Knowles, editor of the Nineteenth Century, who asked the

nationalist propagandist R. B. O'Brien to write an article on the history of the Irish question. He followed this with a request to get 'Mr Parnell's mind on paper', regarding what he would accept as home rule for Ireland.⁷⁴ O'Brien's article appeared in January 1886 and claimed to represent the views, not just of Parnell, but of the 'five most influential men in Ireland...Mr Parnell, Mr Davitt, Mr Healy, Archbishop Croke and Archbishop Walsh'.⁷⁵ O'Brien outlined a scheme that resembled Gladstone's bill in April 1886. Ireland should have a parliament for purely domestic affairs: the questions of exactly what sort of chamber it should be and whether there should be Irish representation at Westminster or not, were essentially subordinate.⁷⁶ The subjects reserved to the imperial parliament should include 'foreign policy, peace or war, the army and navy, matters relating to the crown...the currency, the post office'. Irish questions should include 'education, land, police, trade and commerce, customs and excise'.⁷⁷ In a passage clearly designed to allay British fears, O'Brien declared:

Fortifications should be erected, harbours built, and garrisons established in any part of Ireland, irrespective of the views of the Irish legislature, and the question of the purse, so far as these matters are concerned, should be an imperial one. The appointment of the commander-in-chief of the forces in Ireland, and other military officers, should be at the disposal of the imperial parliament. ⁷⁸

O'Brien concluded by emphasising that while it was important for an Irish parliament to have control of land and the police, and that the refusal of these subjects would lead to a 'rupture of negotiations', nationalists did not regard customs control as ultimately essential as 'there are few industries in the country which can be fostered by protective tariffs and little support for such a policy'. Moreover they would also accept a veto on the endowment of any religion.⁷⁹ O'Brien's article contained probably the most comprehensive statement, then obtainable, of the Parnellite view of an acceptable home rule scheme; and its credibility in this respect would have been enhanced in Gladstone's mind by the fact that it was both broadly synonymous with the scheme communicated to him by Parnell himself, and was consistent with the nationalist views contained in the report on the state of Ireland submitted by James Bryce in the autumn of 1885.⁸⁰

Satisfied that the Irish demand was compatible with imperial unity, Gladstone informed Mrs O'Shea that a full 'interchange of ideas' with Parnell was indispensable to any examination of the 'autonomy' question.⁸¹ Discussions with Parnell, however, were to be conducted chiefly through the agency of John Morley, who has claimed that Gladstone 'was never fond of direct personal contentions, or conversations when the purpose could be well served otherwise'.⁸² The question is, was the purpose well served otherwise? Although the

general nationalist view of an acceptable home rule plan was clearly enough expressed, the actual details of Ireland's relations with Great Britain as defined by that scheme involved important matters, particularly on finance, and, as will be seen, these were to provide fertile ground for disputes between liberals and Parnellites.⁸³ Moreover, any disagreement between these two parties on the home rule scheme was sure to give ammunition to the tory and liberal unionist argument that home rule would fail to solve the Irish question. Why then did Gladstone fail to consult Irish opinion more fully on the details of his Irish plan?

Apart from the reason given by Morley, it is likely that he was influenced in this course of action by W. V. Harcourt, who professed disbelief in the feasibility of an Irish parliament but accepted cabinet membership; however, Harcourt was concerned to ensure that the cabinet would be able to discuss fully the home rule issue. In this respect he urged that

no communication should be made to Mr Parnell which in any way involved the idea of an Irish legislature until the cabinet had a full opportunity of considering the question. In short, that Mr Parnell should receive no information as to your views on this point other than those publicly made by you already, until the basis of action has been settled by the cabinet. For of course if Mr Parnell was made acquainted with your views on this matter there could no longer [be] any freedom of judgment left to the cabinet. 84

It is likely that Gladstone, anxious to maintain cabinet unity,

may well have decided to follow this advice; especially since R. B. O'Brien's article had already provided the 'basis of action'. In the event he was to keep the evolution of his scheme very much to himself. His private secretary, Edward Hamilton, noted: 'he...keeps the construction of the measure entirely in his own hands with occasional reference to Lord Spencer and John Morley and consultation with the lord chancellor and attorney general'.⁸⁵ In some respects this course was unavoidable: there was no great enthusiasm for home rule among most cabinet ministers⁸⁶ and Gladstone, having great fears for social order in Ireland and inspired by a personal sense of mission, felt the necessity to produce a plan for Irish autonomy as quickly as possible.

Moreover, given the problems that had to be overcome, such drive and enthusiasm as Gladstone brought to the subject were essential if a home rule plan was to make headway. John Morley has emphasised the difficulties that surrounded the formulation of the home rule scheme in the short period between the formation of the government in mid-February and the introduction of the bill to parliament on 8 April:

Considering the enormous breadth and intricacy of the subjects, the pressure of parliamentary business all the time, the exigencies of administrative work...and the distracting atmosphere of party perturbation and disquiet that daily and hourly harassed the work, the despatch of such a task within such limits of time was at least not discreditable to the industry and concentration of those who achieved it. ⁸⁷

It is in the context of the very difficult conditions that surrounded the formation of his scheme that Gladstone's contribution to home rule nationalism has to be sought.

Formidable as the problems he encountered were, Gladstone's communications with Irish nationalists at least provided the basis from which to build an acceptable home rule plan. From this basis he set about producing a detailed scheme for Irish autonomy, and a supporting view of Irish nationalism that sought to obviate objections to home rule by demonstrating that Irish nationalist sentiment had always been compatible with imperial unity. As will be seen, in both cases, his ideas had been the product of very recent and sustained study of local constitutions and Irish history. Consequently, what was to emerge when he introduced his plan in parliament was a scheme for Irish self-government complete with a historical pedigree emphasising the essentially 'constitutional' character of Irish demands for self-government.

Aware that both public opinion and parliament were largely unprepared to consider the home rule issue, Gladstone was concerned to present his bill, not as something new or revolutionary, but as an essentially conservative measure: it would restore to Ireland a parliament that she had possessed for 500 years before the act of union.⁸⁸ However, having a profound sense of history as the expression of the Christian spirit in world affairs,⁸⁹ Gladstone's need to provide a

historical pedigree for his home rule scheme cannot be considered only as a tactic for calming British fears of Irish autonomy. Home rule would also be a means of repaying the debt owed by England to Ireland for the misgovernment of the past: 'a sad exception to the glory of our country'.⁹⁰ But most importantly, Gladstone's historicist outlook was influential in colouring his view of what home rule could be expected to achieve.

It might not always have been at the centre of Irish history, but Irish parliamentarianism not only provided Gladstone with a 'pedigree' for his home rule scheme, but also the inspiration for a theory of Irish nationalism that he was to develop during his crusade for home rule in the period 1886-93.⁹¹ Gladstone focused primarily on the history of Grattan's parliament and used that institution both as a point of comparison in the explanation of his home rule scheme, and as a portent of the benefits that would follow self-government. He emphasised the moderate nature of his proposed Irish legislature by declaring that, unlike Grattan's parliament, it would not be co-ordinate with Westminster,⁹² and referred to Ireland's imperial position in Grattan's time to demonstrate the 'absurdity' of the unionist argument that home rule would disrupt the empire.⁹³ Indeed, at a later stage of the home rule debate he argued that in any future war involving Great Britain an Irish legislature could be relied on to

freely vote money and supplies to support her, since such action had already taken place in Grattan's parliament during the Anglo-French war in 1795.⁹⁴ But for all its virtues, Gladstone admitted that the chief fault of Grattan's parliament was the ease with which British politicians could interfere with its executive government; had it been free of this interference, it could have worked 'out a happy solution to every Irish problem'. His own scheme, by removing that interference, would thus be 'a real settlement'.⁹⁵

Gladstone's preoccupation with the late eighteenth century was enhanced by his reading of Edmund Burke, who apparently also favoured Irish local autonomy with control of imperial affairs remaining with the Westminster parliament.⁹⁶ However, inspiring as these historical studies undoubtedly were, they were nevertheless open to the objection of being of little relevance in the very changed political climate of the 1880s. But when G. J. Goschen made the relevant point that the loyalty of Grattan's parliament was due to its being a protestant and landlord parliament, very unlike the institution being proposed under 'home rule', and therefore no analogy between the two could be drawn, Gladstone seems to have entirely missed the point and practically accused him of being anti-democratic and approving of government by 'placemen and pensioners'.⁹⁷ His reply to Goschen illustrates an attitude of mind that was often noted by contemporaries: "...when he has

convinced himself...of some view, he thinks everyone else ought to see it at once as he does, and can make no allowance for difference of opinion".⁹⁸ This characteristic made for a powerful combination when allied with the high degree of optimism with which Gladstone approached the subject of Irish autonomy, and it provides an important perspective from which to examine the provisions of his home rule bill.

Gladstone began the formulation of his Irish scheme with a consideration of those aspects of the Irish question in which he felt most competent: 'namely...land and finance'.⁹⁹ It was mid-March before he earnestly set about getting his materials on Irish government into order.¹⁰⁰ From that time on, he worked rapidly to bring to a head discussion on the plan to be adopted by producing a specific scheme.¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly the speed with which the home rule bill was produced - its main provisions were established by 1 April¹⁰² - was greatly facilitated by the fact that Parnell was, with the exception chiefly of finance, prepared to leave the formulation of the plan in Gladstone's hands.¹⁰³ Fearing the collapse of social order in Ireland, his immediate necessity was to produce a plan that would be the basis of a settlement, whether or not he got the final credit for its enactment. As Edward Hamilton wrote: 'He will be content to have laid the foundation of a settlement. He does not care who gets the credit of eventually effecting it.'¹⁰⁴ The question was, how far was Gladstone's

scheme likely to provide a settlement of the Irish question? Some of the most important clauses of the home rule bill exhibit the twofold influence of Gladstone's optimism as to the political acceptability of home rule and of colonial precedents: it is questionable how far these reliably provided guidelines for the construction of a workable scheme.

The clause defining the executive government of the Irish legislature, for example, a highly important element of the home rule bill, was both extremely brief and generalised in its definition of the powers to be exercised by the lord lieutenant:

The executive government of Ireland shall continue vested in her majesty and shall be carried on by the lord lieutenant on behalf of her majesty, with the aid of such officers and councils as to her majesty may from time to time seem fit. 105

Explaining this part of the bill in parliament, Gladstone argued that it was 'most requisite that our act should be as elastic as possible'. While it was important that a legislative body should be established 'by a single stroke', the executive transition 'must necessarily be gradual':

We propose, therefore, to leave everything as it is until it is altered in the regular course; so that there shall be no breach of continuity in the government of the country, but that by degrees, as may be arranged by persons whom we feel convinced will meet together in a spirit of co-operation, and with not great, much less insurmountable, difficulty in their way, the old state of things shall be adjusted to the new. 106

Gladstone also vaguely referred to a privy council 'in a certain form', that would be established to 'aid and advise' in the government of the country.¹⁰⁷ In addition to his Irish intelligence, Gladstone's optimism as to the 'spirit of co-operation' which he believed would enable this part of his scheme to function satisfactorily, was based on the experience of self-government in the colonies.

Lord Thring, the chief parliamentary draftsman of both the land and home rule bills in 1886, was to point out that the enumerating of the specific powers of the lord lieutenant would have been impractical, as 'the mode in which a governor ought to act under the endless variety of circumstances which may occur in governing a dependency...never have been and never can be expressed in an act of parliament'. Moreover, in practice there existed no examples in England nor in any of her dependencies where 'any vital collision' had arisen between the executive and legislative authorities, and that all the 'home rule' colonies had managed to surmount the obstacles which opponents of home rule argued would be fatal to their existence.¹⁰⁸ But to what extent did colonial precedents apply to Ireland's case in 1886? In these examples the fact of distance alone made impractical any close scrutiny and working involvement on the part of Westminster in the affairs of local assemblies. In addition, in the great majority of cases the only important link between the local assemblies and Westminster

was that of the crown. Ireland's case was very different. Not only was she close to Great Britain, but, as will be seen, it was intended that Ireland would also remain closely enmeshed in the affairs of Great Britain in many important respects.¹⁰⁹ Again, the home rule question came to the fore in a climate of great imperial fervour and aroused depths of passion which the granting of autonomy to far-flung dependencies in former times had not. It is highly questionable whether, if Gladstone's home rule scheme had been enacted in 1886, those who had been its opponents would have settled down to work it in the 'spirit of co-operation' he had envisaged, especially since ambiguity in its framing would have made possible interference in Irish government without the necessity of having to repeal the home rule act.

J. H. Morgan, commenting on this part of the home rule scheme, pointed out that the freedom given to the crown to determine exactly what powers the lord lieutenant should possess; the fact that these would be vested in the person of the lord lieutenant rather than the lord lieutenant-in-council; the undefined nature of the privy council which was to advise on Irish government both in terms of its constitution and powers, and 'the extent to which the lord lieutenant was bound to act on its advice': all of these considerations offered scope for a quite legal interference in Irish government by a Westminster administration so inclined. Thus:

it would have been quite possible for a unionist government coming into power immediately after the home rule bill had passed into law and an Irish parliament had met at Dublin, to retain in their own hands the executive authority in Ireland without breach of statutory obligations. 110

Supplementary legislation and the 'tacit adoption of the unwritten convention of the English constitution that the advisors of the governor must command the confidence of the legislature', would, Morgan continued, have resolved these issues as they had in the colonies.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, given that British unionists were encouraging Ulster protestants to rebel should home rule be enacted, that many British peers had extensive land holdings in Ireland,¹¹² and that the southern landlord community was strenuously unionist, the possibility of British interference in Irish affairs had home rule been conferred certainly cannot be dismissed lightly. But in noting the faults of the scheme it is important to remember that one of the most serious difficulties associated with its construction was the sheer lack of adequate information.

Lord Welby, who played an influential role in drafting the financial clauses,¹¹³ wrote many years later:

It must be remembered that there had been no sufficient time for the collection of data on which an effective measure could be founded, and the collection of this data was a task of great difficulty, for the departments did not possess them. The government came into power in February and the bill was introduced on April 6 (sic); thus there was no real opportunity for testing the value of the data collected in that short

interval, or for gauging beforehand objections both to the principles and details of the scheme adopted. 114

The state of Gladstone's thinking in mid-February 1886 about a home rule legislature can be gauged from a letter he wrote to Lord Granville:

Please ask (as for yourself)

1. Whether the general rule of our chief colonies is to have dual legislative chambers.
2. Whether the second is in some cases nominated, in some elective - what are the examples of each - and which is found preferable.
3. If elective - is it by a different constituency? for a longer term?
4. What are the cases if any [are] of one chamber only and is the system found to work well. 115

In fact, it will be seen that Gladstone's scheme can be identified with no single constitutional model, but, reflecting perhaps the anxiety of having to produce an adequate plan without proper materials, would incorporate features of both single and dual chamber models with a combination of nominated and elected representatives sitting for different periods of time.

Deliberately avoiding the term 'parliament' - presumably because of its separatist connotations ¹¹⁶ - the Irish assembly was to consist of one legislative chamber, divided into two 'orders', that would debate and vote together

except that if any question arises in relation to legislation, or to standing orders or rules of procedure, or to any other matter in that behalf in this act specified, and such question is to be decided by vote, each order shall, if a majority of the members present of either order demand a separate vote, give their votes in like manner as if they were separate legislative bodies, and if the result of the voting of the two orders do not agree the question shall be resolved in the negative. (9)

A negative decision by the first order, however, was only to be in force either until a dissolution, or the lapse of three years, whichever occurred first.¹¹⁷

Gladstone's Irish assembly, thus, was to be neither of a bi-cameral or uni-cameral type, but rather a hybrid of the two. The experience of deliberating as one body, it was hoped, would have a harmonising effect when the assembly voted in its separate orders: 'Each order shall have ample opportunity of learning the strength and hearing the arguments of the other order. They will therefore, each of them, proceed to a division with a full sense of the responsibility attaching to their action.'¹¹⁸ As reflected in their conditions of membership, the orders were intended to give representation to the most important classes of Irish society. The second, a wholly democratic order, was to consist of 204 members, to be elected on the existing franchise and electoral divisions. After the first dissolution the Irish legislature could change the second order, with the exception of laws affecting the ratio of members to population, and the number of members in the order.¹¹⁹

Insofar as this order would have included the majority of nationalist representatives it was to find no great objection among Parnellites. As to the first order, however, a willing acceptance by those whom it was intended to represent was highly questionable.

This part of the legislature was to consist of 103 representatives; 75 elected members and 28 Irish peers. It was intended that ultimately the first order would be totally elective, as the peerage membership, consisting of the Irish representative peers in the house of lords, was to end after thirty years. Indeed the peers were not to be compelled to take their seats in the Irish legislature, but to have the option of either doing so or remaining in the house of lords; vacancies in the first order due to peers refusing their seats were to filled by election. The 75 elected members were to be elected on a high property qualification of an annual income of £200 or the possession of £4,000 free of debt. Moreover, the electorate which would send these representatives to the assembly, would itself consist only of those who were 'the owner or occupier of some land or tenement within the [electoral] district of a net annual value of twenty-five pounds or upwards'.¹²⁰

Taken as a whole, the legislative body would give political power to the most important classes of Irish society, from the aristocracy to the small farmer.¹²¹ In this way, the 'social order' of Ireland, which Gladstone believed was

undermined, would be restored; both in the sense that the threat of social chaos would be removed, and the landed gentry, removed from their predominant role in Irish affairs by militant nationalism, could once again come to the fore in the political life of the country. In the process, not only would the 'natural' balance of Irish society be restored, but the very nature of Irish nationalism itself would be transformed, from a potentially revolutionary sentiment supported by men of mostly low social origins into a safe constitutional idea influenced by the propertied classes.¹²²

In his speech introducing the land purchase bill he expressed the belief that even the Irish nationalists 'may desire' that those marked out by leisure, wealth, and station for attention to public duties, and for the exercise of influence, may become '...the natural, and effective, and safe leaders of the people'.¹²³ He was to express more forcefully this point of view in a press interview which C. E. Lewis, an Ulster tory M.P., repeated in the commons in the hope of creating dissension between liberals and Parnellites:

As soon as the question is settled - the question of an Irish legislature - the unity will vanish, and all the sectional differences of the Irish people will re-appear. The forces of intelligence, the wealth and interests of every class of the population will assert themselves and the members returned to parliament in Dublin will be very different in all respects to those who represent Ireland now (My italics). 124

This is what Gladstone meant when he ridiculed Lord Salisbury's intention of suppressing the National League by repression, and argued instead: 'I trust that we shall be the suppressors of the National League. That, if it comes about, will certainly be by a different process.'¹²⁵ In one of the rare press reactions to Gladstone's home rule bill that correctly diagnosed his intentions, the Daily News declared: 'So far from handing Ireland over to the National League, this scheme may, on the contrary, be charged with handing the National League over to the middle classes and the aristocracy.'¹²⁶ Gladstone's confidence that his home rule plan would find substantial acceptance among the Irish peers was demonstrated in sub-section 7 of clause 10 of the bill, which declared that membership of the peerage body was to be voluntary and Irish representative peers would not be compelled to join it.¹²⁷

His optimism, however, does not seem to have been widely shared in cabinet. When informed by Gladstone of his intention to give the 28 representative Irish peers the choice of either taking their places in the Irish assembly or remaining in the house of lords, Harcourt replied that he did 'not think Irish peers would be fool enough to exchange voluntarily their seats in the h.[ouse] of lords for the...Irish parliament where they could be mobbed out of existence'.¹²⁸ Harcourt, admittedly, was the least sympathetic to home rule of Gladstone's cabinet colleagues, but his views were widely

shared. Gladstone, however, believed the Irish peers would take their seats in the first order, and substantiated his case by reference to the part Irish peers played in Grattan's parliament: Irish peers had 'an Irish as well as an imperial patriotism' and that if the home rule bill passed under happy circumstances 'one of its effects will be a great revival of the local as well as a great confirmation and extension of imperial patriotism'. Moreover, he went on to declare that Irish peers would be enabled to sit both in the Irish assembly and the house of lords: 'since they did so in Grattan's time we certainly see no cause for putting an end to the double qualification which was thus enjoyed, and which, I think, worked beneficially'.¹²⁹ However, this intention was not followed up, and did not find expression in the home rule bill when it was printed on 13 April.¹³⁰ Nevertheless it does underline the extent to which Gladstone's hopes for Irish self-government were based on the precedent of Grattan's parliament; a precedent which would have been enhanced by his communications with Irish nationalists and unionists.

Through Mrs O'Shea Gladstone was made aware of Parnell's hopes of conciliating the landlords, and of a compulsory land purchase plan allegedly submitted to Parnell by a group of Irish landlords.¹³¹ More important, though, were the memoranda by Irish landlords on their terms for selling their estates and communicated to Gladstone by Lord Hartington.¹³² Their

apparent willingness to accept a comprehensive solution to the land question, and to stay in Ireland if the imperial government retained control of the police, would have removed in Gladstone's mind the chief obstacle to local autonomy. However, in his enthusiasm for home rule Gladstone apparently overlooked an important consideration attached to their views: they were describing the terms they would accept for the sale of their estates if land purchase became inevitable. At the time their views were ascertained the political situation was uncertain and rather confused: the breadth of Gladstone's bills and the extent of their support had yet to be determined.

With the experience in 1885 of Lord Ashbourne's land purchase act, which marked the first important step toward a solution of the land question, it was certainly not unlikely that a major undertaking on the land question might become inevitable in 1886. With the publication of Gladstone's Irish bills, however, and the linking of land purchase with home rule, the political situation clarified in a way adverse to his hopes. But despite evidence to the contrary, Gladstone was highly optimistic that the house of lords would support his home rule scheme, and to some extent his confidence was not entirely without foundation. Early in January 1886 the Central News Agency carried the following report:

We have authority for stating that the earl of Kilmorey, a

conservative Irish representative peer, who has initiated his intention of bringing forward a motion in favour of the abolition of the lord lieutenancy of Ireland, has received promises of support from a number of Irish, Scotch, and English peers on both sides of the house. 133

Reports such as this may well have accounted for Gladstone's highly optimistic frame of mind regarding the attitude of the lords to his scheme. At the end of January 1886 he informed the duke of Argyll that in their attitude to home rule: 'The peers of the late government are generally, I think, in a very reasonable frame of mind.'¹³⁴ Towards the end of March he was confident that Lord Hartington would take an attitude of 'benevolent neutrality' to the home rule scheme, even though it was by then clear that Hartington would strenuously oppose home rule.¹³⁵

Lord Derby noted his reaction when it was put to him that the lords would throw out his home rule bill: 'He had his answer at once. Why should the peers reject it? Who could tell that they would? and if once, would they do it a second time?'¹³⁶ What is clearly in evidence here is Gladstone's power of self-deception, noted by more than one of his contemporaries as often being in evidence whenever he was engaged in a project of great moment.¹³⁷ But, notwithstanding his errors of judgment, Gladstone's faith in the political acceptability of his Irish bills drew also on the belief that in the balance of powers and restrictions to be invested in the new

Irish legislature, he had taken into account many of the major objections to home rule.

There were basically two ways in which Gladstone could have defined the powers of the Irish legislature: he could have defined specifically what subjects would fall within its purview, or have cited the range of restrictions on its powers and left authority over all other matters in its hands. Gladstone chose the latter course. Clauses 3 and 4 of the home rule bill detailed a considerable number of exceptions and restrictions on the powers of the Irish legislature. It was to have no powers to make laws affecting the crown, peace or war, any matter affecting the forces of the crown or defence of the realm, treaties or relations with foreign states.¹³⁸ These first four cases of exception were most important in defining the rights of Westminster, and in maintaining Ireland's position as a portion of the empire.¹³⁹ There followed a range of subsidiary exceptions: titles of honour, war booty, offences against the law of nations, treason, alienage, naturalisation, and more importantly, trade, navigation and quarantine. Other exceptions included matters affecting the postal and telegraph service, beacons, lighthouses, the coinage, copyright and patent rights.¹⁴⁰

The chief restrictions on the powers of the Irish legislature related to matters of religion, education and customs and excise: religious endowment was specifically banned and

the undenominational character of the national school system was to be maintained. A ban on the making of laws affecting customs and excise would be necessary, as will be seen, to carrying into effect the financial scheme of the bill.¹⁴¹ Additionally, the Dublin Metropolitan Police was to remain under imperial control for two years, as was the R.I.C. while it existed, though the Irish authority was to have power ultimately to create a new force under the control of local authorities.¹⁴² Civil servants were to be retained at their existing salaries, though if either the Irish government wished to remove them or they wished to retire themselves, they would qualify for pensions out of Irish government funds.¹⁴³

This part of Gladstone's bill naturally offered much scope for tory claims that, given the extent of these exceptions and restrictions, he did not trust the Irish to govern themselves wisely or fairly. Gladstone met this criticism by pointing out that these provisions were included 'not in consequence of mistrust entertained by me, but...of mistrust entertained by others'.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, he had originally intended to give the Irish parliament extensive powers over customs and excise. He informed John Morley: 'Individually, I am perfectly ready to give to Ireland the right to impose protective tariffs on British goods....But the main thing is to pass our measures. In this view we have to weigh British prejudices.. ..'¹⁴⁵ These prejudices existed not only in tory ranks but

in the government. On hearing of Gladstone's intention of giving Ireland a limited power of imposing - not protective duties - but merely tariffs purely for revenue purposes, and additionally, power of currency regulation, Hugh Childers, the home secretary, stymied the proposal by threatening to resign immediately.¹⁴⁶ Yet the question of the powers to be invested in the new Irish assembly were far from being the most contentious part of his home rule plan: the financial basis of the scheme caused serious misgiving among nationalists and provided a legitimate ground for objections to home rule for unionists.

THE PROBLEM OF HOME RULE FINANCE

It was this part of the scheme which constituted the tangible connection between the home rule and land schemes. Forming a separate section of the home rule bill, the finance provisions were included in clauses 12 to 20,¹⁴⁷ while the machinery for putting these provisions into effect were to be found in part 3 of the land bill.¹⁴⁸ Since there had to be an equitable division of imperial burdens, the first point to be established was the amount Ireland was to contribute to imperial taxes and problems immediately arose on how this was to be determined. Gladstone decided that Ireland should contribute one-fifteenth of total imperial expenditure, and despite Parnell's vigorous protests that one-twentieth or one-twenty-first would be a

fairer charge, and that "without a right budget all would go wrong from the start",¹⁴⁹ he resolutely refused to budge. Why?

Essentially, the point at issue between Gladstone and Parnell was the question of whether the basis on which Ireland was taxed was fair or not. In a letter to John Redmond, Sir J. N. McKenna, the nationalist economist, described the problem as it presented itself to Parnell in arguing his case with Gladstone:

When Parnell and I conferred in 1886 (on the bill of that year) Gladstone had left him (C.S.P.) under the impression that he... believed we were all along financially favoured and that England was at a loss by us. I said, be it so I shall be contented with a clause that will limit the total of our payments under the bill for imperial purposes to the scale applicable to Great Britain on the ratio of the taxable means of the two countries respectively; but both Butt and he at their respective times lacked faith in their own ability to show that we not only paid more than we cost the exchequer of the U.K. - they in fact accepted the fact that we did so, but the question was how was it to be shown and proved (My italics). 150

This was the nub of the problem, for to show that Ireland was overtaxed would have entailed an accurate knowledge of what the relative taxable capacity of the two islands was, and on this subject no information existed in any of the government departments.¹⁵¹ However, the noted British economist, Robert Giffen, did provide statistics to show that Ireland paid twice as much in imperial contributions than she ought to: 'Ireland, while constituting only a twentieth part of the United Kingdom

in resources, nevertheless pays a tenth or eleventh of the taxes. Ireland ought to pay about £3,500,000 and it pays nearly £7,000,000.'¹⁵² At the same time, though, Giffen admitted the problem to be a difficult one, and while the imperial exchequer received an excessive contribution from Ireland it did not derive any benefit from it, as all of Ireland's contribution, and much more, had to be spent in Ireland: 'partly through excessive military expenditure, and partly through excessive civil expenditure, Great Britain spends upon Ireland a disproportionate sum.... Actually, it is beyond question, we lose as a government nearly £3,000,000 while taxing Ireland over £3,000,000 more than it ought to be taxed.'¹⁵³

Given the paucity of reliable information with which to work, it is virtually certain that Gladstone was familiar with Giffen's article, and it is likely that it provided the basis of his argument with Parnell, as described by McKenna, on the question of Ireland's imperial contribution. At any rate, it is clear that he was not prepared to investigate the relative taxable capacity of Ireland and Great Britain as a basis for determining what Ireland's contribution to imperial charges should be. Taking as his point of departure the Irish imperial contribution in 1885, which was the surplus of Irish revenue remaining after the deduction of expenditure in Ireland on Irish services, he estimated that this surplus constituted a contribution by Ireland to imperial expenses in the proportion

of 1:11½, or £2 where Great Britain paid £23. He pointed out that his proposal, which was to have Ireland pay in the proportion of 1:14 or 1:15, or £2 to £28, was a generous arrangement. Gladstone measured the taxable capacity of the two countries by a comparison of income tax returns, the amount of property falling under death duties, and the valuation of land. Income tax statistics showed a proportion of £2 to £38 which, however, Gladstone considered to be an imperfect test because it was paid on a lower valuation in Ireland than in Great Britain, and because many Irishmen also held securities upon which dividends were received in London. Thus, he argued, a considerable sum ought to be added to the Irish income tax which would raise it proportionately from 1:19 to 1:17. The valuation of property, he continued, was likewise lower in Ireland in proportion to the real value than in Great Britain, though the property passing under death duties provided a better test, as the law affecting this had been recently revised, and on this basis of comparison the proportion of payments between the two countries was £2 to £26.

Arguing from these premises Gladstone held that his proposed estimate of £2 to £28 was a generous one, justified by the necessity of starting the Irish parliament off with a balance to its credit. Moreover, he went on to add that while Ireland's existing proportionate contribution to imperial contribution, 1:11½, was based on 'the amount of the whole gross

imperial expenditure', the proportion of 1:15 that Ireland would pay when the Irish parliament was established in Dublin, would be estimated on an imperial expenditure very materially cut down: it would be based on a peace time assessment and would not incur the increased military charges of wartime.¹⁵⁴

The fund out of which the imperial taxes were to be paid would be established by clauses 25 - 7 of the land purchase bill,¹⁵⁵ which provided for the appointment of an imperial receiver to whom customs and excise and all other duties would be paid, including local taxes imposed by the Irish parliament. There was, moreover, apart from imperial taxes, other charges strictly Irish, such as the salaries and pensions of judges and civil servants. As decreed by the land purchase bill the Irish parliament would be bound to impose taxes to meet these charges. The imperial receiver was to keep an Irish and an imperial account, and any surplus remaining after Ireland's imperial contribution was deducted would then be moved to the Irish account. As John Morley was later to affirm, through the imperial receiver 'all rents and Irish revenues whatever were to pass, and not a shilling was to be let out for Irish purposes until their [Irish] obligations to the imperial exchequer had been discharged'.¹⁵⁶ Thus the imperial receiver would constitute the security for the Irish imperial contribution. This form of guarantee, however, was far from perfect, as will be seen when examining the weaknesses

of the land purchase bill and other parts of the home rule scheme. Not the least serious of these weaknesses was the estimated balance on the Irish budget should home rule be conferred.

Gladstone calculated the combined Irish revenues from imperial taxes, local taxes and the post office, at £8,350,000. Irish expenditure, which included an imperial contribution of £3,602,000, £1,000,000 for the constabulary, as well as local civil charges and the cost of revenue collection, was estimated to be £7,946,000; leaving a balance between revenue and expenditure of £404,000.¹⁵⁷ This sum would constitute the finances of an Irish government for all expenses other than those listed above—an aspect of the bill that critics would effectively exploit.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, John Morley admitted: 'this may seem a ludicrously meagre amount, but, compared with the total revenue it is equivalent to a surplus on our budget of that date of something like five millions'.¹⁵⁹ However, while that may have been so, Morley's view hardly suggests a highly developed, or realistic insight into the problems that would face an independent Irish government. Gladstone, though, did not accept that this arrangement was anything other than generous. Why?

In fact, although Ireland was formally to contribute £3,602,000 to imperial funds, her real contribution would be considerably less. This was because Gladstone decided not to subtract from the Irish revenue the duty on goods collected

in Ireland, but consumed in Great Britain. The goods concerned were chiefly spirits, porter and tobacco, and the revenue, which Gladstone calculated to be £1,400,000, being paid by England and Scotland, should really have been credited to Great Britain if a true financial account between the two islands was being made. However, in the interests of maintaining 'the present absolute [fiscal] freedom between the two countries',¹⁶⁰ Gladstone allowed this sum to form part of the fund out of which Ireland's imperial contribution was to be made.

Thus, if this sum of £1,400,000 is subtracted from the imperial contribution of £3,602,000, Ireland's real contribution would have been £2,202,000, or a proportion in relation to Great Britain of just under £1 to £26.¹⁶¹ In a reference directed to the Parnellite benches, Gladstone declared: 'I hope this will be borne in the mind by those who think this charge of one-fifteenth is a heavy charge to be thrown upon Ireland.' He further emphasised the generosity of his plan by pointing out that, whereas under the existing imperial arrangements Ireland's per capita contribution was 16s. 0d, under the new arrangements it would be reduced to 13s. 5d. He also expected the Irish government to be able to make a substantial reduction in the £1,000,000 needed for the upkeep of the R.I.C.,¹⁶² and that it would receive a 'further sum of uncertain but substantial amount', in the form of a commission paid on the collection of instalments from tenants buying their

holdings under the land purchase bill.¹⁶³ However, too much should not be made of Gladstone's generosity in crediting Ireland with revenues properly belonging to Great Britain. The fact was that he had laboured until 30 March 1886 to find a workable method whereby the Irish parliament would only collect and have the use of customs and excise duties derived from articles consumed in Ireland. He abandoned this project, however, when he recognised that this could only be achieved by establishing customs barriers between the two islands, with the impression being created that Ireland was not really part of the United Kingdom and that home rule meant complete separation.¹⁶⁴ But more importantly, Gladstone's optimism about the additional revenue to accrue to the Irish government from handling land sales was not widely shared.

Many well informed people - both home rulers and unionists - were convinced that unless the Irish government had the benefit of this revenue it would be virtually without funds; however, they argued that because of the current agricultural crisis and the stringent terms to be imposed on tenant purchasers rents would be impossible to collect.^{164a} Thus, in such a situation, an Irish government without funds would be driven to repair its finances by increasing the only taxes it would be empowered to levy - the direct taxes. Indeed, as was seen, an increase in the existing burden of these taxes - amounting in 1886 to £1,150,000 from stamps and income tax and representing less than one-fifth of Ireland's total tax revenue of £7,330,000^{164b} - was forecast by the provision

in the land purchase bill binding the Irish government to raise taxes to pay pensions and the salaries of judges and civil servants. But what sum did nationalists think an Irish government would need to function effectively?

According to Thomas Sexton, writing in 1893, £1,250,000 would be required 'at the outset'.^{164c} However, if such a sum was to be realised under the terms of the home rule scheme of 1886, £846,000 would have to be raised from direct taxes to supplement the original surplus of £404,000 allocated by that plan; and it is highly debateable how far such an exercise would have succeeded. One means by which it might have been tried would have been to impose a tax on land values. But such a proposal would almost certainly have been opposed strongly by the Irish parliament - especially the upper chamber which was so constituted as to give a large representation to the landed classes. It is much more likely that, rather than accept a steep increase in direct taxes, the Irish parliament—reasoning that its problems did not arise from any inherently Irish cause—would have fought to reduce Ireland's imperial contribution. Moreover, the possibility of such a situation arising would have been enhanced by the emergence of problems relating to the payment of Ireland's imperial contribution which Gladstone failed to allow for in the haste with which his Irish plan was formulated.

For example, the fact that the Irish would be credited with revenues from goods consumed in Great Britain was not

the guarantee for the payment of Ireland's imperial contribution that Gladstone seems to have assumed. Indeed, under the bonding system the British trader could have paid these duties in Great Britain,¹⁶⁵ and as nationalists accepted in 1893,¹⁶⁶ any change in the law intended to ensure that the Irish parliament received these duties would meet with fierce British resistance. Relatedly, equally serious problems were likely to arise from the desire to ensure the fiscal unity of Great Britain and Ireland by keeping customs and excise duties under imperial control. These were pointed out by W. V. Harcourt in 1893, in a searching analysis of the financial provisions of the second home rule bill.

It is important to note that, unlike many critics of Gladstone's views on Irish finance, Harcourt did not accept that these views proposed an excessive imperial contribution being paid by Ireland and that a financial crisis for the Irish government would, on that account, result. He was concerned mainly with demonstrating how the imperial parliament's control of Irish customs and excise duties would impair the Irish parliament's financial autonomy and so perpetuate discord between Great Britain and Ireland. For example, Harcourt argued that a lowering of the duties on spirits, porter and tobacco would mean that the Irish government, being legally compelled to meet its imperial obligations, would have to make up the revenue lost by raising the relatively small direct taxation under her control, and this despite the fact that it was not necessitated by Irish needs.

On the other hand if, for example, the duty on spirits was raised significantly, the resultant increase of revenue would disturb the equilibrium of the Irish budget, which would be 'adjusted according to...[Irish] wants, on the basis of existing taxes'. Moreover, the disposal of his windfall could only be effected by reducing direct taxation, as indirect taxation would be under Westminster's control; and if direct taxation were reduced it would benefit the wealthy classes at the expense of products consumed by the whole community. Thus the Irish would complain

of any dealing on our part with indirect taxation, because it of necessity affects their direct taxation....The taxation, which is supposed to be under their control....will in fact compulsorily vary inversely as the British policy in respect of indirect taxation. So far, therefore, from the bill giving to the Irish financial autonomy, they will be more at the mercy of English finance than ever. The distinction between British interests and Irish interests as regards taxation will be accentuated and exaggerated, and the British budget will be a perpetual battlefield between the two nations. 168

Clearly in the light of the problems that could be expected to arise over questions of taxation, it is unlikely that Gladstone's plan for Irish autonomy would have been a final settlement of the Irish question. Moreover, the problem of taxation was bound up with the equally intractable problem of Irish representation at Westminster.

TAXATION AND IMPERIAL REPRESENTATION

Initially, the idea of getting rid of the Irish from Westminster

was the most attractive feature of the home rule scheme for nearly all members of the cabinet. Both Harcourt and Morley were enthusiastically in favour of it,¹⁶⁹ as were Lords Spencer, Granville and Kimberley.¹⁷⁰ Gladstone, though he had an open mind on the subject at the beginning of February,¹⁷¹ had also come down in favour of exclusion by mid-March.¹⁷² However, once it was decided that Ireland was to pay an imperial contribution the question of Irish taxation without representation immediately came to the fore. The issue as it faced the cabinet was well summarised by Edward Hamilton:

If you give the Irishmen absolute fiscal freedom, you accentuate the idea that legislative independence means separation to all intents and purposes. If on the other hand you keep the customs in the hands of the imperial parliament, you must also retain the Irish representation in the parliament. Representation must go hand-in-hand with taxation - and yet the idea of getting rid of the Irishmen commands itself to many to whom [imperial] federation pure and simple is a bug-bear.¹⁷³

It quickly became clear, moreover, that this was a question of great political importance. Following Gladstone's speech introducing the bill, the Pall Mall Gazette published a survey of press opinion for and against the bill, with particular reference to the question of Irish representation at Westminster. Covering all of the leading newspapers in Great Britain that had time to react to Gladstone's bill, the most significant result of this survey was the number of liberal

press organs that opposed home rule on this issue, particularly in Scotland where liberal support was strongest. Of the 8 most important Scottish newspapers, only 1 was in favour of excluding the Irish from the imperial parliament, while 2 tory and no less than 5 liberal papers opposed it.¹⁷⁴ In the English provinces and Wales liberal press reaction showed a marked division of opinion on the subject.¹⁷⁵

The problem was how to divide imperial from non-imperial issues. Gladstone declared that he was of the opinion that the distinction between the two could not be drawn, but that it had been made in the bill. He continued: 'This house is not merely a legislative house; it is a house controlling the executive; and when you come to the control of the executive your distinction between imperial and non-imperial subjects totally breaks down'. Gladstone cited the example of Irish M.P.s coming to Westminster to take part in a discussion on foreign policy, and being thereby entitled to vote on a motion for the dismissal of a foreign minister, which, if successful, would have the effect of bringing down the entire government. Since that government would also have been charged with the affairs of England and Scotland, its removal by a vote of Irish representatives would make impossible, in practice, the distinction between imperial and non-imperial affairs. Gladstone therefore concluded: 'I arrive at the next conclusion - that Irish members and Irish peers cannot, if a domestic legislature

be given to Ireland, justly retain a seat in the parliament at Westminister'.¹⁷⁶

Personally, he was of the opinion, supported no doubt by the fact that Parnellites were willing to accept exclusion, that the troubled history of a country like Ireland 'must throw back the mind of a people upon itself and its own concerns' and thus the Irish would concentrate primarily on 'the management of Irish affairs'.¹⁷⁷ But the necessity of finding a solution to this problem was great, and was given point when Joseph Chamberlain, who had resigned from the cabinet partly on this question, made it known that if the Irish were retained in the imperial parliament he would vote for the second reading of the home rule bill.¹⁷⁸ With much truth Gladstone wrote to Lord Granville, that while the exclusion of the Irish was the most enthusiastic point of agreement on home rule in the cabinet, it was also the point most likely to ensure the 'shipwreck' of the home rule scheme in parliament if it was insisted on.¹⁷⁹

The bill as it was printed did, in fact, allow for the Irish to be represented at Westminster under certain conditions: if any alterations in the government of Ireland act were to be made on which there had not been previous agreements between the two legislatures.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, although the Irish parliament would not have power over certain subjects that were reserved to Westminister, the addresses of the Irish parliament on such

subjects, might if reasonable, 'have a great deal of influence'.¹⁸¹ However, since these forms of connection between the two parliaments were deemed insufficient, more tangible relations had to be established.

Gladstone ruled out the simple retention of the existing Irish M.P.s and peers at Westminster as 'unsafe', or a reduced representation of such M.P.s and peers, as this would require new legislation to bring it into effect. Federation to include Scotland and Wales as well as Ireland was ruled out because it would mean the withdrawal of his home rule bill, and to this 'I do not see my way'. Any further changes that were to be made had to be such as 'would not alter the principle of the bill, nor extensively modify its framework'.¹⁸² Both on principle 'and as a matter of policy', Gladstone was prepared to allow the Irish the right of attendance in the imperial parliament 'on any question altering taxation for Ireland', and while the possibility existed that the Irish might intrigue with others to overthrow a ministry on the budget, it was not probable: only two ministries since the union had been overthrown on budgets and the ministry of the day 'would have full opportunity of forecasting consequences in determining on its finance'.¹⁸³

Apart from the question of representation with regard to taxation, there remained other subjects on which the Irish might have a right to attend at Westminster, such as matters

relating to crown and defence, foreign and colonial relations, and subjects like patents and copyrights which were reserved on practical grounds. On the crown and defence Gladstone did not see how the bill could be modified to advantage, and while it might be possible for provision to be made in the home rule act for 'regular communications between the British and Irish executives' on the subjects of foreign and colonial relations, and patents and copyrights - similar to the way in which foreign relations were managed between Sweden and Norway - he did not see that much could be effected in that direction; especially since it would fail to satisfy the "sentiment" for manifest symbols of imperial unity.¹⁸⁴

A more hopeful idea, Gladstone thought, would be to have a standing committee or delegation, to meet periodically during the Westminster parliamentary session, composed of representatives from both orders of the Irish Assembly and both houses of parliament, in the proportion of 1 to 2. Such a committee would have power to report and make recommendations upon any of the subjects reserved under the government of Ireland act: it would largely satisfy the craving for symbols of imperial unity and would have 'no dangerous connection under any ordinary circumstances' with the responsibility or stability of ministries. Gladstone subsequently recommended this scheme to the cabinet on 8 May,¹⁸⁵ and included it in his¹⁸⁶ speech on the second reading of the home rule bill on 10 May.

Given the need to eliminate Irish interference on British affairs, and the equally important necessity of having visible constitutional links between the Irish and British parliaments, it is likely that this scheme was the only one which could hope to work, though for it to have done so would have required, as a recent commentator puts it, 'a great deal of good will and mutual forbearance'.¹⁸⁷

However, due to the misunderstanding between Gladstone and Chamberlain on the kind of representation Ireland was to have at Westminster,¹⁸⁸ the latter did not support the second reading of the bill and was thereby instrumental in causing its defeat. Yet the defeat of the bill was in itself an important factor in determining the nature of the liberal contribution to home rule nationalism. Driven by the force of events in Ireland, Gladstone saw his home rule scheme as constituting the basis of a solution to the Irish question. Had it passed beyond the second reading the process of debate and evolution in committee, would, it is reasonable to assume, have produced some significant changes, particularly with reference to the financial basis of the scheme. However, the defeat of the bill in June 1886 ended the process of debate and evolution and consequently the bill as it stood became the basis for discussion of the home rule question thereafter. But as has been seen, it was in many respects far from being an adequate measure. In fact, it contained enough faults to cast

doubts on the extent to which the very concept of home rule nationalism, that is, the attempt to satisfy Irish nationalist sentiment by legislative independence within the overall sovereignty of Westminster, was viable.

THE LAND PURCHASE BILL

As Gladstone emphasised during the debate on his Irish bills in 1886, 'the aim and end of all our endeavours' was not simply for its own sake the contentment of the Irish people, but the social order of the country: 'That is the first, the greatest, the most sacred and the most necessary aim of every government that knows its duty.'¹⁸⁹ It was this aim which necessitated a land purchase bill large enough effectively to solve, once and for all, the problem of agrarian violence in Ireland; a necessary condition if his home rule bill was to have any chance of success. This was a realisation born both of the unrest attending the fall in Irish agricultural prices in the period 1885-6,¹⁹⁰ and of the urgent pleadings of both Irish nationalists and unionists.¹⁹¹ Consequently, Gladstone, normally a champion of economy in public expenditure, wrote in the following terms to W. V. Harcourt, also a champion of economy:

It is plain to me that if we are to cherish a rational hope of dealing effectively with the huge mass of the Irish question, we must found ourselves on an operation as to land, calculated on a scale which will exceed any former transaction.

I am the last to desire any extension of the demands on our financial strength. But I am morally certain that it is

only by exerting to the utmost our financial strength (not mainly by expenditure but as credit) on behalf of Ireland, that we can hope to sustain the burden of an adequate land measure - while without an adequate land measure, we cannot either establish social order, or face the question of Irish government. 192

Gladstone's land bill was thus intended, not simply as an ancillary measure to the home rule bill, but as a vitally important and integral element of the scheme for Ireland as a whole. This was true not only in the sense most often employed by Gladstone, that agrarian peace would be essential to the proper functioning of the Irish parliament, but in an operational sense as well: if a really extensive land measure was to be enacted, it would require a local authority in Ireland actually to put the scheme into effect and carry out its day-to-day operation, and to provide security for the English money and credit lent to finance the scheme: 'The Irish revenues are the only collateral security that can be obtained for loans of English money, and Irish revenues are only available for the purpose on the establishment of an Irish parliament.'¹⁹³

Moreover, as Lord Thring, the chief draftsman of Gladstone's Irish bills, was to point out, unlike Lord Ashbourne's land act of 1885 which had the highly undesirable effect of making the English government the actual mortgagee of Irish land by lending money directly to the tenant, and exacting a debt 'which the tenant is unwilling to pay as being due to

what he calls an alien government',¹⁹⁴ Gladstone's bill removed this problem. The Irish government and not the English, would become the virtual landlord:

The substance is to interpose the Irish government between the tenant and the English mortgagee, and to make the loans general charges on the whole of the Irish government revenues as paid into the hands of the imperial receiver....It would be the interest of Ireland that the annuities due from the tenants should be regularly paid, as, subject to the prior charge of the imperial exchequer, they would form part of the Irish revenues. 195

In effect, the Irish government would become, as Edward Hamilton described it, a 'buffer'¹⁹⁶ between the Irish tenants and the British government, charged with the responsibility of ensuring that tenant annuities were paid, with all that that might imply.¹⁹⁷ Gladstone could thus rightly inform the house of commons when introducing the land bill, that it would, 'by building upon the responsibility of the Irish state authority... not increase, but will greatly diminish the public risk....this bill, if passed...will be a diminution of public responsibility'.¹⁹⁸

The importance Gladstone attached to the connection between his land and home rule bills is important to emphasise, given the claim made by John Vincent that the land bill was a 'dummy'. Vincent argues that two such complex measures as Gladstone's Irish bills could not possibly have passed within one parliamentary session 'merely on grounds of time'; and he suggests strongly that until 12 March 1886 Gladstone was keen

to implement his land bill only, 'while the bait of home rule tomorrow kept the Parnellites in tow'.¹⁹⁹ This situation changed, he contends, when, at a cabinet meeting on 13 March 1886 which met to discuss Gladstone's land proposals, Joseph Chamberlain 'switched the business of the meeting by raising the question of home rule'. The result was to commit the cabinet to 'home rule in principle rather than as a practical and immediate legislative commitment'. In fact, Vincent argues, the land bill retained its priority until Chamberlain's resignation:

It was Chamberlain's resignation [on 26 March] which made home rule the central issue and which created a situation to which Gladstone had to respond. The unfavourable parliamentary reaction to the land bill in April was its coup de grâce, but the land bill had already fallen from first to second place by the time of the cabinet of 29 March. Gladstone began March 1886 as a discreet, possibly procrastinating home ruler who was anxious to legislate on Irish land while avoiding radical overtones; he ended the month as an unenthusiastic land reformer whose chief immediate commitment was to home rule. The details are uncertain but it is likely that 13 March 1886 was the point at which history jumped from one set of tracks to another. 200

Vincent's argument, however, is weak in several respects. Not only is it inconsistent with the foregoing description of the vital connection between the land and home rule bills, but Gladstone made it clear on 2 February 1886, that his land scheme would be merely part of a much larger Irish plan: 'I think it [the land issue] has a logical priority, but that practically it is one with the other great members of the trilogy, social order and autonomy'.²⁰¹ Accordingly, on 12 February he informed his son Henry: 'I have

framed a plan for the land and...finance of what must be a very large transaction....unless these portions of anything we attempt are sound...we cannot hope to succeed'.²⁰² In this respect it is worth noting that the imperial receiver, who was to take charge of Irish government finances and ensure that Ireland's imperial contribution was paid, was to be appointed under the land purchase bill, and that during February and early March 1886, while primacy was being given to the construction of the land purchase bill, many important elements of the home rule bill were also under discussion with leading cabinet members such as John Morley, Harcourt and Lord Granville.²⁰³

Given Lord Welby's admission that when Gladstone took office there were no materials in government departments with which to begin the immediate construction of an 'effective' home rule measure,²⁰⁴ it is not surprising that he should begin work on his Irish plan by dealing with the land question - a subject which he felt most competent to deal with. But that his land bill would proceed in conjunction with a home rule bill there is little doubt. Certainly Joseph Chamberlain, on being informed of the land scheme at the cabinet meeting of 13 March 1886, recognised immediately its vital connection with Gladstone's home rule plan: "I contended that it was impossible to judge this scheme fairly without knowing what were to be the provisions of the home rule bill which was to accompany it. Upon the constitution of the new local authority would largely depend the security [for the

money advanced to implement the land purchase scheme]".²⁰⁵ Chamberlain's remarks were very much to the point: the operation of the land purchase scheme presupposed the existence of an Irish legislature, since the latter was to constitute the State Authority that would put the land scheme into operation.²⁰⁶ Thus Vincent's argument that Chamberlain 'switched the business of the meeting' to home rule - implying a sharp distinction between discussion of the land and home rule bills - is not an accurate description of what occurred. In fact, once Gladstone outlined his home rule proposals debate continued on both the land and home rule issues.²⁰⁷ The most that can be said for Chamberlain's actions at this meeting is that they forced Gladstone to elaborate on his home rule proposals earlier than he intended. This is not to say that Gladstone was not faced with a problem regarding the implementation of his Irish bills, but that problem was not one of alternatives - either to implement a land or home rule bill - but of procedure: how was his vast and complex Irish plan to be introduced so as to secure its enactment.

It was apparent early in March that its introduction in one piece was impractical; and Edward Hamilton noted disapprovingly on 9 March that Gladstone intended to 'expound the policy in piecemeal fashion'.²⁰⁸ In the event he was to introduce the home rule bill first; however, what evidence exists for the reasons behind this decision does not support Vincent's claim that it was determined by Chamberlain's resignation. Indeed, the

introduction 'without delay' of his home rule bill was urged on Gladstone by Harcourt on 7 March 1886.²⁰⁹ But the most influential communication in this respect came on 23 March from Gladstone's close adviser on Irish affairs, Henry Labouchere, who assured him that by introducing the home rule bill first he would succeed in enacting his Irish plan.²¹⁰ But what of Vincent's argument that the parliamentary timetable did not allow of both Gladstone's bills being passed in one session?

In fact, this was not the insurmountable obstacle it might have seemed. For instance, the Ashbourne act of 1885 took but a matter of weeks to enact: introduced shortly after Lord Salisbury took office on 24 June, it received the royal assent on 14 August.²¹¹ Of course, some special factors attended its enactment. Being in a minority the tories had only taken office on the condition that the liberals would not obstruct the government's 'vital' work.²¹² Moreover, being a conservative measure the Ashbourne act had virtually automatic support from the house of lords. Nevertheless, some special factors also attended Gladstone's land purchase bill. As Vincent admits, there was considerable support among tories and whigs for a comprehensive land purchase scheme.²¹⁴ Moreover, the reaction of the Irish landlords' political organisation - the I.L.P.U. - to the land purchase bill was - judged by the standard of their often hysterical anti-home rule propaganda - conciliatory and highly constructive.²¹⁵ Thus had a situation obtained where Gladstone's

home rule bill was going to be approved by parliament²¹⁶ it is unlikely that the passage of the land purchase bill - with its promise of saving the landlords from being 'plundered' by a Dublin parliament - would have been obstructed. At any rate, it is clear that Gladstone did not regard the parliamentary timetable as posing a serious problem to the implementation of his Irish plan.

While it is true that the land bill was withdrawn shortly after its introduction, it is, nevertheless, a popular misconception that Gladstone had thereby abandoned it. The land bill's withdrawal was a result, not only of the adverse political reaction it provoked, but also of its connection with the home rule bill and its deteriorating fortunes in the period from April to June 1886. However, Gladstone intended the land bill's withdrawal to be merely temporary. In a cabinet memorandum of 31 May, in which he set out his future tactics regarding his Irish plan, Gladstone made clear his intention to secure the second reading of the home rule bill, and then to reintroduce the land bill when the home rule bill was 'on the orders of the day with a view to immediate prosecution through its stages'.²¹⁷ Clearly, then, Gladstone was prepared to proceed with his land purchase bill despite the hostility it provoked - much of which came from liberals. But why was the bill so regarded and what influences determined its content?

Difficult as the task of settling on an adequate land

bill was, Gladstone was not without advice on the problem once it became widely known that he was taking up the home rule question, and as he felt personally most competent in dealing with the subjects of Irish land and finance, it was these aspects of the Irish question that he tackled first.²¹⁸ By far the most influential article on the Irish land problem was published by the Statist in January 1886, under the signature 'Economist', and was apparently written by Robert Giffen.

Giffen's solution to the land question involved buying out every Irish landlord by giving him government stock equivalent to 20 years' purchase of the existing judicial rents; giving the land free to the existing occupiers subject only to a rent-charge of one-half or two-thirds of the judicial rents, payable to new local authorities in Ireland to be set up simultaneously with the implementation of the scheme; and relieving the imperial exchequer of all payments then made out of it in connection with the local government of Ireland. In sum:

The plan is...to throw the cost of local government in Ireland upon Irish resources exclusively, and to give the Irish people the rents of the country for the purpose of conducting it. The conflict between landlord and tenant would thus be at an end. We need not longer fear that if we give Ireland home rule the property of the landlords would be confiscated.

Giffen took the rent of Ireland 'settled judicially' at roughly

£8,000,000 and the government stock to be given in exchange at 20 years' purchase, to be £160,000,000, involving an annual charge of £4,800,000 upon the imperial exchequer. Currently £4,000,000 alone was spent on Irish local government 'for law, prisons, police, education and such matters', exclusive of the outlay for the army in Ireland, the collection of revenue, 'and other imperial matters which would still remain imperial'.

The position of the tenants would be that whereas they currently paid £8,000,000, they would, under the new arrangements, pay only from £4,000,000 to £5,500,000. This reduction was justified in order to allow for the variation in the prices of agricultural products which had upset the payment of judicial rents: the agricultural depression had shown the impossibility of fixing rents for fifteen years by external authority, because tenants could not pay even judicial rents when prices fell.²¹⁹ In future the rent-charge would be fixed in relation to the 'average changes in the prices of agricultural products'. If his plan was to put into effect, Giffen argued that the new Irish local authorities would have to be their own rent-charge collectors, and would thus need to have control of the police.²²⁰

Giffen's article was important in more respects than one: it not only recognised in a complementary way the intimate connection between the land and national questions, but provided a scheme whereby the land question could be solved

with a minimum of expense to the imperial exchequer, and on the responsibility of Irish local authorities rather than Westminster.

Irish reaction to the article was enthusiastic. Michael Davitt, while reserving judgment on some aspects, recommended its leading features to Gladstone as a basis on which to 'mould his legislation'.²²¹ Similarly, Parnell, while not pledging himself to its details, recommended its principal tenet—the wholesale buying out of the landlords—to parliament. A similar view was taken by the Freeman's Journal, and Archbishop Croke of Cashel, described by Davitt as 'next to the Irish leader the most influential man in Ireland'. Furthermore, the catholic hierarchy as a whole endorsed the principle of the scheme in a letter to Gladstone on 17 February 1886. In England its most notable support came in the form of an article in the February issue of the Fortnightly Review by Joseph Chamberlain.²²²

Encouraged by the support his article received, Giffen expanded further on his ideas; while £8,000,000 was roughly correct, the exact figure of the effective rent the landlord had to sell could only be determined after an analysis of the conditions of past valuations, and methods of fixing judicial rents in different localities. Similarly, the 20 years' purchase he suggested was only a provisional estimate, though it could be justified by the need 'to show that the scheme was

practicable even if the landlords got very good terms'. More significantly, he emphasised the soundness of his proposal to finance the internal administration of Ireland by providing local authorities with the rent-charge accruing from buying out the landlords, instead of contributions from the imperial exchequer. This plan, he admitted, would still leave the imperial exchequer liable for a debt of £800,000 in regard to Irish administration, but there would be no great concession involved given that Ireland paid twice as much in income-tax than she ought to.²²³

As noted above, it is reasonable to assume that Gladstone, pitifully short of information on which to build his Irish scheme, would have been influenced by Giffen's articles.²²⁴ Certainly one of the more important elements of Gladstone's Irish plan - the partial financing of home rule with commissions on rental receipts drawn from a comprehensive solution of the land question - would seem to have been inspired by the widely praised ideas sketched out by Giffen.

However, an equally important source of information would have been the communications Gladstone had from Irish landlords on the subject of Irish land reform, through the agency of Lord Hartington. Hartington's man in Ireland, William Currey, had seen several leading landlords, among them, T. C. Trench, W. R. Meade, Sampson French, T. Hare,

J. Penrose Fitzgerald, H. H. Townsend, Sir Richard Keane, Captain Maxwell, Percy Smith and Sir Robert Paul. In a letter addressed to Hartington, which was forwarded to Gladstone, Currey enclosed notes he had taken in conference with this group and others, and declared that the general view was that 20 years' purchase of the judicial rental would be acceptable if land purchase became inevitable, and that purchase should be compulsory. Moreover, they all agreed that whether many landlords would remain in Ireland or not, would depend mainly on whether the imperial government still maintained its hold over the country, especially over the police, magistracy and judicial administration, so as to effectively secure order and liberty.²²⁵

A few days later Currey attended another meeting with A. H. Smith-Barry, Major Perceval Maxwell, J. Penrose Fitzgerald, W. R. Meade, Sampson French, T. Hare, Sir Robert Paul and others, and made notes of some individual opinions. Currey himself thought that where holdings were large they would prosper, but a small holding with no manufacturing industry to supplement it would get worse over the years, and unless the 'rent charge is redeemed it would become impossible to collect'. Major Perceval Maxwell of Downpatrick did not think that compulsory purchase was possible without attendant revolution, but that 20 to 25 years' purchase 'would do'. H. H. Townsend favoured 20 years' purchase of judicial rents but

thought that there should only be a partial buying out of landlords so as to 'stop them leaving the country'.

Sir Robert Paul disapproved of compulsory purchase as 'unconstitutional' but if it was to come he would require 25 years' purchase of Griffith's valuation or 20 of the gross judicial rental. In addition to the views of this group, Currey enclosed the conclusions of some 5 or 6 landlords and agents which met at Cork, and which endorsed either 20 years' purchase of judicial rents, or 25 years' purchase of the net rental. This group also concluded that the landlords would stay in Ireland if the police and magistracy were retained in the hands of the imperial government, but 'not otherwise'.²²⁶ Insofar as these views represented the most authoritative statement obtainable by Gladstone of the opinions of the class whom his land scheme was intended to benefit, their impression on him would have been strong, and would have strengthened the view he had already formed that Irish landlords as a whole would welcome his Irish bills. Early in February he informed Harcourt: 'There is before us the possibility, even the likelihood of a vast issue of consols to those now holders of land.'²²⁷

With the prospect, or rather Gladstone's belief that the prospect existed, of a massive sale of land by Irish landlords, the question of how much money should be advanced for this purpose became the most immediate issue facing the cabinet

in discussing the land purchase bill. Gladstone had begun his exploration of the subject by taking the net, rather than the judicial rental, as the basis on which to found his land measure, a course which was felt by other cabinet members to be unrealistic, as the judicial rent was the 'ordinary basis' on which to give so many years' purchase.²²⁸ It was a view that Gladstone soon came to accept also.²²⁹ But on the amount to be allocated to effect the expected massive transfer of land, considerable division of opinion began to emerge in the cabinet.

In a memorandum dated 20 March 1886, Gladstone put the view that £60,000,000 rather than the previously discussed £120,000,000 would be a better amount to begin the process of land purchase; it might be less shocking to opponents of the measure and more acceptable to liberal opinion; it seemed a more sensible sum, given the fact that the whole Irish scheme was still tentative and could not be certain of any operation at all: if the act worked well parliament would still be free to enlarge it. Again, the smaller sum might have the effect of bringing round those who had doubts about the bill in general.²³⁰ Support for this proposed course of action came from Granville, who noted: 'of those who are really anxious to sell, the greater number will believe that by early applications they will secure their object'.²³¹

Opposition, however, came from both Lord Spencer and Harcourt. Spencer complained: 'the bill as originally intended

will carry an idea of thoroughness which the new proposal would not do, and I cannot say I at all like the proposed change.' Spencer was also optimistically of the view that only 'one-fifth of the landlords would not apply for various reasons to be bought up'.²³² John Morley's opinion was more neutral. He accepted Gladstone's view of the tactical advantages to be gained by the reduction of the sum proposed, and while he accepted Lord Spencer's point about the need for 'finality', he believed this was secured by the fact that parliament could vote additional sums if the scheme worked well.²³³ Consequently, Gladstone decided on 22 March that 'cutting down the figure in the land bill will be a good parliamentary measure quite apart from difficulties with reluctant colleagues'.²³⁴ It is probable that he was influenced by the strong objections that were being voiced against the land bill even then.²³⁵ Subsequently it was decided that the sum of £50,000,000 in the form of imperial credit would be provided in the years 1887-90.²³⁶

Having established the amount to be laid out on the scheme, the important question of security for this extension of imperial credit immediately arose. It has been pointed out that under the financial clauses of the land bill all Irish revenues were to be collected into the hands of an imperial receiver, whose function would be to discharge all Ireland's imperial debts before Irish needs were attended to.²³⁷ However, it will also be seen that once the Irish administration had

fulfilled its imperial charges, the amount of revenue it would have on hand to carry on the government of Ireland would be largely determined by the amount of rental receipts that would accrue from tenants buying their holdings, and that without these receipts the Irish government would practically have a deficit.²³⁸ The clauses dealing with this part of Gladstone's Irish scheme caused serious misgivings in cabinet. The question was, would the Irish administration be able to collect rents?

Unlike Robert Giffen, Gladstone did not envisage a massive reduction in the amount of rent paid by tenants purchasing their holdings. He intended that landlords generally would receive 20 years' purchase of the net rental and that tenants would pay an equivalent amount.²³⁹ Thus, he argued, on an estate with a gross rental of £1200 and with outgoings fixed at 20 per cent, or £240,²⁴⁰ the landlord would receive £960. However, the corresponding reduction on the gross rental involved for tenants buying their holdings would be reduced by their liability as owners for the 'half-rates',²⁴¹ previously paid by the landlord. As to the State Authority²⁴² that would represent the Irish government in collecting rents, it would contribute to the finances of an Irish government by retaining 20 per cent, or £192, of the £960 received from the tenants.²⁴³

However, the point that raised most concern in the cabinet was the relatively small reduction on the existing

gross rental that the tenants would obtain. In Gladstone's example, a saving of only £240 for all the tenants of an estate, plus their becoming liable for the total payment of poor rates, when the fall of agricultural prices had already made impossible the payment of existing rents, did not augur well for the success of the bill. When this section of the land bill was made known to the cabinet much disquiet prevailed. It was, moreover, compounded, when at the same time, a letter appeared in The Times from the economist Sir James Caird, to the effect that given the agricultural crisis five-sixths of Irish tenants could pay no rent. Caird divided Irish land into two classes:

Of the first class there are 548,000 holdings averaging £6 each; of the second class there are 121,000 holdings averaging £58 each. The rent payable by the first class is £3,572,000 and by the second class £6,845,000. Five-sixths of the Irish tenants thus pay about one-third of the total rental, and one-sixth pay nearly two-thirds....If the present prices of agricultural produce continue to decline I should fear that from the land held by the large body of poor farmers in Ireland any economical rent has for the present disappeared. A purchase of it at any price would therefore be certain loss.

As for the good land, it was held by 'strong farmers'; they were prosperous, well able to take care of themselves, and thus there was no need to buy the good land, though if it was to be bought, the current agricultural crisis meant that the risk of loss would be present here too. In an editorial

based on Caird's article, The Times declared: 'any capital invested in buying out the landlords must be regarded as thrown away'.²⁴⁴

Taken together, the relative smallness of the rent reduction envisaged by Gladstone and the view of the Irish land question presented by Caird, gave a legitimate cause for concern. Moreover, this concern would have been intensified by the process by which it was proposed to transfer the land from owners to tenants. Apart from tenancies rented at £4 and under, and land in the congested districts of the west, the tenants were to become owners if the landlord chose to sell. In other words, while the landlord had a voluntary option of whether to sell or not, if he did so, the tenants were to be compelled to buy their holdings.²⁴⁵ The reasoning behind this provision was to obviate what was considered to be the chief obstacle to previous land purchase schemes — securing the assent of the tenants. Moreover, compulsion was considered as acceptable for another reason: 'The tenants need not be consulted, as the purchase, if completed, will necessarily better their conditions...'²⁴⁶ As will be seen in chapter three, this view was not widely shared in Ireland.²⁴⁷

Yet, it is worth pointing out that Gladstone had not originally intended that the Irish tenants should be compelled to purchase their holdings. In a cabinet memorandum written in early March 1886, he asked the questions:

Are we bound in honour or policy to do more than give to the landlords of Ireland fair optional terms of withdrawal from their position? Why should we not do this, and having done this, leave the land question to Ireland herself? 248

However, feeling was strong in the cabinet against this course of action. Lord Spencer, in particular, felt strongly that the omission to provide for the conversion of the tenantry into proprietors was a serious 'blot' on Gladstone's land proposals. Edward Hamilton, who shared the views of those who favoured compulsion, described their argument as follows:

....one of the main pleas for so revolutionary a measure as that of expropriation [given the voluntary option for landlords this was surely an exaggerated description of the land bill] is to create a peasant proprietary which will instil into the minds of the masses a sense of property and a sense of respect for property; and I do not believe that parliament will be content to commit this task to the discretion of the Irish Authority. Parliament will insist on its being ensured; and I do not think that provision to secure this will greatly enhance the complication of the measure. Moreover, the tenant cannot object to being turned into a landlord if the whole of the purchase money is found for him in return for his paying an annuity of a considerably less amount than his present rent for a certain number of years. 249

Gladstone, apparently, soon came to accept this view also: at a cabinet meeting on 15 March 1886 he 'agreed to provide in his [land] scheme for the re-sale of land by the Irish Authority to the tenants'.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there were also those in the cabinet whose view of this concession, as of the land scheme as a whole, was quite the

opposite of those favouring compulsion.²⁵¹ G. O. Trevelyan, who was to resign with Joseph Chamberlain from the government on the home rule issue, declared the whole financial plan of the home rule scheme to be

an act of lunacy...the financial proposals...must break down. It is admitted that the Irish Authority would have a deficit without the aid of rental receipts; and these will become impossible to collect. An Irish tenant will never be content with a reduction such as the commission of his rent into an annuity for a certain number of years will secure to him. Many tenants can pay nothing - an admission actually made by The Times today, in consequence of the great fall in agricultural products. 252

Even Sir Robert Hamilton, a keen home ruler and under-secretary at Dublin Castle, was convinced that Gladstone had not made out his balance sheet on a sufficiently favourable basis: 'The Irish Authority would never be able to collect rents, and if it could it would be without receipts for some time to come'.²⁵³ The fearful consequences of such a situation were spelled out by Joseph Chamberlain in a letter to Gladstone offering his resignation from the government:

This scheme while contemplating only a trifling reduction in the judicial rents fixed before the recent fall in prices would commit the British taxpayer to tremendous obligations, accompanied in my opinion with serious risk of ultimate loss.

The greater part of the land of Ireland would be handed over to a new Irish elective authority who would thus be at once the landlords and the delegates of the Irish tenants. I fear that these two capacities would be found inconsistent and that the tenants, unable or unwilling to pay the rents

demanding, would speedily elect an authority pledged to give them relief and to seek to recoup itself by an early repudiation of what would be described as the English tribute. 254

Together with the heavy imperial charges imposed on Ireland, these liabilities would be far too burdensome for such a poor country, and their fulfilment by the Irish legislature could only be enforced by military intervention by the imperial parliament.²⁵⁵

It might be argued that Chamberlain's criticisms were not uninfluenced by both his personal antagonism to Gladstone and strenuous opposition to home rule. Nevertheless these considerations should not disguise the sincerity of his views, particularly on the financial basis of Gladstone's Irish scheme. It should be borne in mind that when Gladstone suggested he draw up a plan for Irish land purchase in February 1886, an important feature of this plan, considered crucial to its viability, was a provision providing for 'judicial rents to be reduced at once by...twenty-eight per cent'.²⁵⁶

Gladstone, however, while familiar with Chamberlain's scheme - as he undoubtedly was with the work of Sir Robert Giffen who also argued that an extensive solution to the land question could only be based on a large reduction in existing judicial rents - was not prepared to take this course of action. His views on the subject are best expressed in his reply to the warnings of Sir James Caird in The Times against any plan of Irish land

purchase. Gladstone rejected Caird's claims as to the extent to which Irish land was incapable of yielding rent, and while admitting that a class of estates such as Caird described did exist, he felt that such cases were 'exceptional'. He declared that with regard to these, the land commission to be set up under the land purchase act would be empowered to refuse an application for purchase if it thought it inequitable that 'the State Authority should be required to buy an estate at the price laid down in the act'.²⁵⁷ However, given the extent of the apprehension about the viability of the land purchase bill, it is not surprising that Gladstone's reply to Caird failed to mobilise opinion behind the measure.

Not only did fears about its workability, moreover, fuel the belief that British money laid out to finance its operation would be lost, but the impression was assiduously created that this money was to be expended to support an idle clique of Irish landlords. As John Morley recorded: 'Vivid pictures were drawn of a train of railway trucks two miles long, loaded with millions of bright sovereigns, all travelling from the British son of toil to the pocket of the idle Irish landlord.'²⁵⁸

Given the weight of opinion against it from both pro- and anti-home rule quarters,²⁵⁹ it is not surprising that Gladstone decided to withdraw it shortly after its introduction. He had, in his highly optimistic frame of mind, hoped that it

would meet with immediate approval from the Irish landlords. Just a week after it had been first circulated, and before any detailed consideration could be given to it, Gladstone was complaining that it was regrettable that while sands were "running out in the hour-glass, the Irish landlords have yet given no indication of a desire to accept a proposal framed in a spirit of the utmost allowable regard to their apprehensions and their interests".²⁶⁰ Yet, while he quickly withdrew the land purchase bill, its withdrawal, as was noted,²⁶¹ was intended to be temporary: Gladstone planned to reintroduce it following the second reading of his home rule bill.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL OPINION AND THE HOME RULE SCHEME:

THE NATIONALIST AND UNIONIST REACTION

NATIONALISTS AND THE HOME RULE SCHEME

It was seen that when Gladstone set about formulating his home rule scheme he took steps to gauge nationalist opinion as to the general nature of an acceptable plan; and that while the bill was taking specific form he maintained contact with nationalists chiefly through John Morley's discussions with Parnell. The plan when it emerged, however, did not meet with an enthusiastic welcome from leading nationalists. Parnell, it has been seen, had already strongly criticised the financial scheme of the bill.¹ The first indication he was given of the true extent of the home rule bill was just a few hours before its introduction in the house of commons, and with John Morley's permission, shared his knowledge with a number of leading nationalists, including Justin McCarthy, J. J. O'Kelly, Thomas Sexton, John Dillon, E. D. Gray, T. P. O'Connor, T. M. Healy and Michael Davitt.²

Their reaction to the scheme was later to be a subject of some dispute during the wrangles of the party split in 1890. Nevertheless, the accounts given then provide the fullest description of leading party opinion. At a meeting of the central branch of the National League in Dublin on 4 December

1890, Parnell gave his account of what took place when he informed his colleagues of the nature of the home rule bill:

Here is the bill. It is a parliamentary hit, it is nothing more. I have been told today by Mr Gladstone that it is for us to take or reject that bill, and if we undertake the responsibility of leaving it, he will make a statement in the house commons tonight saying he can do no more, and that the responsibility and want of solution for the Irish question must rest upon us.... Here is the bill with all its defects, absence of sufficient control of the police; will you take it or will you leave it?And my colleagues said to me that they would accept it pro tanto, reserving for committee the right of enforcing and, if necessary, reconsidering their position with regard to these important questions. 3

T. M. Healy, however, disputed Parnell's version of events and claimed that he had virtually curtailed discussion on the bill: cavilling was taking place over details, especially the lack of provision for an Irish custom house. At this Parnell rose and declared that two men - Chamberlain and Trevelyan - had already left the cabinet, and they had the opportunity of wrecking it completely. He also warned: "'it would be a fatal error if we did not close with this offer, and further, to put it on record at once that this bill is in principle accepted by the Irish party"'.⁴

Of the two accounts, Healy's has the ring of truth. That Parnell was ready to accept a more conservative bill than his colleagues is attested by John Morley, who noted his general indifference on most aspects of the home rule bill other than finance; being apparently willing to accept even an upper

chamber nominated by the crown, if need be.⁵ During the bill's preparation, however, leading party members were kept virtually in the dark about the form it was taking. T. P. O'Connor notes: 'He (Parnell) never consulted any of his colleagues except individually, and by questions apparently casual, during the consultations that preceded its final shape.'⁶ In such a context it was likely that nationalist expectations would mushroom. Notwithstanding the moderate and limited autonomy R. B. O'Brien claimed was acceptable to Irish leaders,⁷ the very rumour in January 1886 that Gladstone was in favour of home rule, provoked a meeting of the central branch of the National League in Dublin to demand nothing less than 'such a comprehensive measure as would enable them to take control of the country into their own hands, and allow Ireland to resume her proper place among the nations'.⁸

Parnell himself, moreover, contributed to such expectations. In a letter to A. J. Kettle on 21 March 1886, he wrote: 'Things are looking very hopeful here. I have every confidence that Gladstone's proposals will be very large and that we shall be able to accept them freely, and build up the nation by their means.'⁹ The reality was now very different and Parnellites were in the position of either provisionally accepting an inadequate bill, and the prospect of future satisfactory amendments, or seeing home rule postponed for the foreseeable future. Ultimately there was little doubt as to their decision. The

fullest account of the factors that weighed with party leaders was provided by Michael Davitt. Parnell, he records, was severely critical of the financial provisions of the bill, speaking strongly against them as "unjust and extortionate", and condemning Gladstone's refusal to modify them, despite his most strenuous protests:

He led us to think that he thought the bill scarcely worth acceptance. He favoured, however, the dropping of the land-settlement part of the ministerial scheme, believing that this would be the only way in which the home rule part of it would stand any chance of passing a second reading....¹⁰

The feeling of the meeting was strongly in favour of accepting the bill, subject to its improvement in committee, if possible. Sentiment rather than the merits of the complicated and incongruous character of the proposed legislative body weighed with us. It would be something in the nature of a parliament anyhow. Its many obvious defects would give reasonable ground for demanding amendments in the near future. There was in it a recognition of Ireland's right to nationhood, in a cribbed, cabined, and confined kind of way, no doubt. But it would be an end to England's rule in Ireland's domestic affairs. The detested Dublin Castle system, with its "hacks", renegades, and informers, would disappear, and the substitute would offer our country a modest status of racial self-government among the nations. It would stand too, for a victory for the Celt, after his long and agonising struggle for national recognition while the consideration also weighed that a native government of some kind would do more than any other change in the condition of the country to stem the fatal tide of emigration. For these and other reasons it was agreed to accept Gladstone's offer, and to stand by the bargain, bad as it was, should the bill become law. 11

T. M. Healy's recollection supports Davitt's view: 'in those days of 1886 it seemed a mighty great thing to get control of an Irish parliament'.¹² Immediately following Gladstone's speech introducing the home rule bill, a full meeting of the

Parnellite party convened; "open dissatisfaction" was expressed by Parnell and others on four points: customs, the imperial contribution, the constabulary and voting by orders. It was agreed that Parnell should voice these criticisms in his speech on the bill and that if these issues were resolved in committee, the party and Irish people would accept Gladstone's scheme as a final settlement.¹³

While it is true that Parnell would have settled for a more conservative Irish constitution than his colleagues would have preferred, nevertheless, he was very much alive to the fact that unless the financial basis of home rule was right the whole experiment would fail: his speech on the bill was intended forcefully to emphasise that point. He prefaced his remarks with the observation that the limitations of the scheme were, to some extent, due to the fact that Gladstone had to 'shape his measure to meet the tremendous opposition which has been invoked against him'; but having declared his sympathetic understanding of Gladstone's difficulties, Parnell launched into an attack on the bill as forceful as that of any unionist. By keeping control of the customs, he put it, England would retain control of three-fourths of the Irish revenues: 'It would be absolutely as much within your power as it is now, both as regards the original assessment of taxes and the receiving of the money.' With specific reference to the 'free gift' of £1,400,000 that would accrue to Ireland from duties

on goods consumed in England,¹⁴ he accepted that this sum would indeed be a fair exchange for the surrendering of the customs, were it not for the fact that Ireland would still have to pay £1,000,000 'for the Irish constabulary, over whom we are not to have any sort of control whatever, at all events for the present'. In like manner he criticised Ireland's proposed contribution to imperial expenditure. Parnell emphatically denied that the basis on which Gladstone had assessed this was either just or liberal. In particular, his preference for using the property passing under death duties as his chief standard for assessing the relative taxable capacity of Ireland, was, Parnell argued, 'the most unfavourable standard' that could have been chosen for Ireland, which was a very poor country. Again the small surplus on the Irish budget proposed by Gladstone would mean that

it will be impossible for Ireland to have any credit for floating loans. Irish landlords can now borrow money at a low rate of interest for the improvement of their estates. Irish tenants can borrow money for sanitary purposes within their jurisdiction. All these are very important matters. But we shall have to surrender all of them under...[this]...scheme...and we shall be left with about £400,000 a year....¹⁵

In other words, Parnell was telling Gladstone that his scheme could not fulfill the liberal leader's expectations of it; indeed it would bring about a state of affairs very much worse than that which existed at present. Moreover, the budget

of the scheme was based on an estimate 'which necessitates that the consumption of spirits, not only in Ireland, but also in England, should continue at its present high rate, and of course that the duty should be kept as it is now'. Indeed, Parnell continued, on the enactment of home rule the Irish legislature would probably wish to pass a law imposing restrictions in regard to 'the sale of strong drink on Sundays as well as on other days', and he hoped to see a reduction in the amount of revenue derived from these duties.¹⁶

Parnell's implication here was that not only the material, but the moral improvement of the Irish people under Gladstone's scheme, would be impossible. He went further and put it that if the proposed imperial contribution was insisted on, the Irish might attempt to repudiate that debt, as had been suggested earlier by G. O. Trevelyan.¹⁷ Consequently it would be unfair to press so hard a bargain; and he reminded Gladstone that the provisions of his plan would have to be seen as just and 'cheerfully accepted by public opinion in Ireland'. To this end, and relying on the recently published work on Irish finance by Robert Giffen, he argued that one-twentieth, rather than one-fifteenth of imperial expenditure, was a fairer estimate for Ireland. Parnell also claimed that the excessive power given to the first order to obstruct measures proposed by the lower order required amendment, and concluded that if his objections were met the bill would be

regarded as a 'final settlement'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the inescapable fact remained that Parnell had declared Gladstone's scheme, as it stood, to be practically unworkable and had contradicted the hopes the latter had entertained of its beneficial consequences for Ireland.

It must be said, though, that this speech of Parnell's represented the height of nationalist criticism of the home rule scheme. Thereafter, as the prospects of the bill's enactment diminished, so correspondingly did Parnellite criticism of its unsatisfactory clauses. Indeed, it will be seen that United Ireland, the most influential Irish nationalist paper, was already in mid-April preparing Irish opinion for acceptance of the bill without amendment if necessary;¹⁹ while Michael Davitt, despite his strong feelings about certain features of the measure, publicly took a similar line to Parnell's, hoping that in the future the British parliament and people would see their way to 'extend the system of self-government further'.²⁰ Parnellite opinion on the land purchase bill, when it was introduced on 16 April, was unenthusiastic, with exception being taken especially to the role of the imperial receiver and the amount of purchase money to be awarded to landlords.²¹ However, the quick withdrawal of this part of Gladstone's plan forestalled debate and kept their attention focused on the home rule bill.

When the second reading commenced on 10 May, William

O'Brien, in a speech that has been described as second only to Gladstone's²² on the introduction of the bill, set the tone for other Parnellites. O'Brien retreated significantly from the stance taken by Parnell on 8 April - that vital amendments were necessary before the bill would be acceptable to the Irish: 'It does not pretend to be without failing or fault, or to satisfy everyone. We intend to fight as strongly as we can, and to protest against some of its details', but the bill was nevertheless accepted by his party in a 'spirit of friendship, cordiality, and peace'. Once the English people saw that this was so, they would have no objection 'to give more enlarged effect to the system of local government in Ireland, and the goodwill of the two countries may determine our course'.²³ Reading between the lines, O'Brien's speech was an admission of the inability of the Parnellite party to effect desired changes in the bill, and accordingly they would accept the bill as better than nothing. Moreover, O'Brien's alternative view, that once the English people saw that the Irish were accepting and working the home rule scheme in a spirit of goodwill they would extend its powers,²⁴ begged the question of how the envisaged equanimity in Anglo-Irish relations was to be maintained given Parnell's effective demonstration that the plan, as it stood, was more likely to aggravate than solve the Irish question.

The weakness of nationalists in their efforts to secure a satisfactory scheme from Gladstone was graphically expressed

by T. M. Healy in 1890. When it was proposed that they should secure firm guarantees from Gladstone as to the shape of a future home rule bill, he declared: 'The party was asked to secure the ground in advance. He would secure the ground if they gave him some millions of men and some artillery, but without them they would be in the future as they were in the past.'²⁵

The tendency to forego criticism of the details of the bill and rely instead on a vague and unstudied optimism as to its beneficial effects, was taken further by John Redmond on 13 May: 'He trusted the house would accept with readiness the statement of the representatives of the Irish people that, on the whole, they were satisfied with this bill, and that, so far as their judgment went, it provided a final settlement of the question.'²⁶ Later speeches by T. D. Sullivan and Justin McCarthy associated the passing of the bill with Irish loyalty to the empire and a great social and economic regeneration for Ireland.²⁷ T. M. Healy informed the house that the 'blots' on the bill 'were small indeed compared with the blots you would create on the hearts of the Irish people by its rejection', while Thomas Sexton departed completely from Parnell's earlier criticisms of the powers of obstruction to be invested in the first order, and cited such powers to emphasise the extent to which the minority was to be protected.²⁸ T. P. O'Connor's speech on 3 June took this argument a stage further:

We are ready to accept any restrictions on the rights of democracy at the start of this grave enterprise; our work is to weld the different classes of our people into a perfectly harmonious whole, to undo the evil work of centuries of a policy, the fundamental principle of which was to divide and conquer, above all to soften and finally to extirpate the estrangement of different creeds which has been not the natural growth of kindly Irish hearts of all creeds....To foster this idea of common nationhood above our strong party differences, our class hatreds, and our distinctions of creeds will be the first work of Irish statesmanship; and by way of starting that work favourably and accelerating its progress, we are quite willing not merely to submit to, but even to welcome, restraints on the rights of majorities, which in ordinary circumstances we would reject.... 29

The very obvious nationalist desire to get the home rule bill under whatever circumstances, prompted Sir Henry James to declare that he had a statement by a prominent liberal home ruler that Parnell was ready to accept anything.³⁰ This impression might have been confirmed by Parnell's final contribution to the home rule debate on 7 June. Departing completely from his highly critical attitude of 8 April, he declared himself satisfied with the scheme as a final settlement, comparing it favourably with Grattan's parliament, which was both encumbered with a house of lords and an executive not responsible to the legislature. He still had reservations about the length of time the first order could hold up measures, but was also confident that the effect of both orders working together 'in one chamber', would lead to the resolution of disputed questions 'on a basis of compromise more or less satisfactory to both parties'.³¹

Taking an overview of nationalist attitudes to the home rule bill during the debate, the line of progression from marked criticism on 8 April to equally marked acquiescence on 7 June, is clearly perceivable.³² As was stated above, this development was paralleled by the increasingly deteriorating chances of the bill passing a second reading and the natural desire to smooth Gladstone's legislative path. Moreover, the latter's attempts to secure the second reading by promising unionist liberals that they were being asked to vote only for the principle of the bill, and that its details would be recast in the autumn parliamentary session,³³ undoubtedly influenced some Parnellites to accept the existing bill for fear that an amended scheme would be a weaker measure. Certainly Parnell became sternly committed to the bill as it stood in June. When T. P. O'Connor sought to support the liberal leader by stating that the bill could be regarded as a 'draft' measure whose final shape was yet to be determined, Parnell impressed on him: "This...is the bill we want"; laying special stress on the "this".³⁴ He protested equally vigorously against Gladstone's intention, noted above, to secure support for the bill by promising to recast its details in the autumn parliamentary session.³⁵

Nevertheless, this desire to hang on to a bill which he himself had so effectively demonstrated to be grievously defective, appears somewhat puzzling, even when we allow for the

obvious satisfaction to national sentiment that the mere existence of an Irish parliament would have given. Perhaps the most important clue to this issue is to be found by asking what leading Parnellites really expected of home rule, and what is surprising in this respect is how closely their views resembled Gladstone's.

Of course, Gladstone's conversion to home rule itself necessitated an ideological readjustment on the part of nationalist leaders: it was now important to emphasise the constitutional basis of Irish nationalism, and Gladstone's favourable references to Grattan's parliament during the introduction of the home rule bill provided the common ground for the meeting of minds.³⁶ Thus whereas the nationalist legend propagated in Ireland was geared mainly to the inculcation of an ethnically Celtic sense of nationality, explicable chiefly through the medium of the historical record of 700 years of oppression of the catholic people, the version presented in parliament was centred on the period of Grattan's parliament. In nationalist legend it provided an example of national unity, prosperity, increasing religious tolerance, and was 'proof' that a local parliament with adequate powers would not agitate for complete separation. A peculiar feature of this aspect of nationalist thought was that the 700 years of English oppression that explained Ireland's woes for a domestic Irish audience, now became the period in which Ireland's parliamentary 'rights' were established.

In an uncommon instance of a minor nationalist M.P. intervening in the home rule debate, which was mainly monopolised by party leaders, J. C. Flynn declared that the 'claim of the Irish people to a separate parliament of their own went back very far into English and Irish history. The claim to an Irish parliament dated from the reign of King John.'³⁷ John Redmond, also, had earlier made it the basis of Ireland's claim to a separate parliament that she had possessed 'distinct parliamentary institutions of her own for 600 years'.³⁸ However, given the inseparability of the warfare and colonisation associated with the establishment of Irish parliamentary institutions, Parnellites were careful to leave the antiquity of Ireland's claim in this respect at the level of a general statement. It was rather the brief period from 1782-1800 that was crucial. In short, this period was presented almost as a golden age, destroyed by English rule in Ireland which subsequently resulted in eighty-five years of distress and coercion. Yet the glories of Grattan's parliament would return once home rule was enacted.³⁹

However, it is worth pointing out, in regard to nationalist expectations of the benefits to accrue from Gladstone's scheme, that in accepting his bill - with its acknowledgement of Westminster's control of imperial affairs, Ireland's commitment to paying a portion of imperial expenditure, Westminster's control of Irish customs and excise, and with no Irish

representation in the imperial parliament - they were accepting a scheme that, in substance, had been rejected by Grattan when offered by the Rockingham ministry in 1782.⁴⁰ Nevertheless this aspect of nationalist thinking was to become the predominant ideological basis of home rule nationalism between 1886-92, in consequence largely of Gladstone's energetic campaigning.⁴¹ But as will be seen more fully in chapter six, Gladstone's view of Ireland under home rule was a highly conservative one, which envisaged the return of the landlords as Irish political leaders. How far was his view of the future of Ireland compatible with that of leading nationalists?

With the possible exception of Parnell, they certainly did not share Gladstone's view of the landlords' political prospects. But that apart, their expectations showed marked similarities in many respects. For instance, the confidence expressed by Gladstone in May that the membership of the home rule parliament would be socially and intellectually superior to the members of the Parnellite party, and more representative of all classes of the Irish people,⁴² was mirrored by that of Michael Davitt. On the land question Davitt's views were far more radical than those of either Parnell or Gladstone,⁴³ but this should not disguise the extent to which his view of life in the new Ireland was itself conservative. He informed Wilfrid Blunt:

There are not many of the present parliamentary party who would

be in the home rule parliament; the leaders would, but not the rank and file...perhaps a dozen or twenty, not more....There are plenty of good men who in a Dublin parliament would come forward, men in professions and official life who were thorough home rulers, but dared not yet touch parliament.... The present men have been elected to get home rule; we shall require another sort to work it. The first years under home rule will be very conservative. 44

Indeed, notwithstanding Davitt's efforts as a labour leader — especially in promoting Irish working-class representation at Westminster in 1892 ⁴⁵ — he shared with John Dillon an essentially conservative view of the proper role of labour in Irish society. Blunt recorded a conversation with him on this subject in 1887:

He [Davitt] had altered his views of late about education, which he was beginning to see had its dangers for Ireland as well as its advantages. Every post brought him in requests from farmers' sons for places as clerks or pressmen, and the labouring population was getting too proud to dig. If this was to be the result of education it would not be well for Ireland, and the education he was inclined to wish for as a manual one. In this Dillon cordially agreed.... 46

Thus, despite Davitt's undoubted preference for a radical settlement of the land question to dispose of the landlord garrison, as well as his democratic 'vision' of Ireland's future, ⁴⁷ it did not necessarily follow that what social scientists describe as 'upward social mobility' on the part of Ireland's labouring masses was any part of his thinking. Indeed, given his democratic and progressive outlook, it is perhaps

remarkable that he should have failed to see the strong probability that the attempts of farmers' sons and labourers to 'better' themselves, was a function of the nationalist agitation since 1879, that destroyed the deferential relationship of the peasantry to their landlords, raised their level of material expectations and often produced local lay leaders to rival the predominant social position of the clergy.⁴⁸ It is not surprising therefore, that Blunt, having observed the nationalist movement in his travels in Ireland in 1886 and 1887, should note in his diary that the unionist view of home rulers as 'Jacobins' was absurd: 'there is nothing more absurd than to talk of home rule as Jacobinism. Ireland under her own parliament would infallibly be retrograde, at least for several years.'⁴⁹ Michael McDonagh, a journalist well acquainted with the leaders of the movement, was to make much the same point but in more specific terms:

None of the very able men enlisted in its cause hardly ever attempted constructively to show how home rule, which was to consist of political machinery of the English type - a parliament of two houses, law courts, police, tax-gatherers - worked according to old established principles, by legislators and officials of the same social class, and fundamentally of the same types of minds and ideas, however they might differ in race, was to set to rights the economic disorders of Ireland, merely because the same kinds of strings, legislative and administrative, were to be pulled in Dublin instead of at Westminster. How were hunger and unemployment to be banished? - those grisly spectres that dogged the footsteps of the Irish wage-earner as he went out to look for work; and that sat down to table with his wife and children. If any of the leaders were asked for his opinion on this point he would be sure to

reply - "Well we could not possibly make a worse mess of Ireland than is being made by the imperial parliament; and, at any rate, the hands pulling the strings would be Irish." Or answering in another and more decisive way, he would say, "The Irish people want home rule, and that, for the present, is enough about it!"...Vague and indefinite hopes prevailed to some extent that a good time would follow - that the worker would have more regular employment and better wages; that the farmer would get higher prices for his produce, that the shopkeeper would have quicker sales and larger profits, and so on. 50

To McDonagh's biting critique of nationalist thinking on the very real problems that a Dublin parliament would have faced, may be added, by way of explanation, A. J. Kettle's opinion, that from the beginning of the land agitation in Ireland very few of its leaders 'knew anything about land, or about the condition of the agricultural population at all. This has been notoriously the case from the first Land League executive nominated by Mr Davitt.'⁵¹ There was, undoubtedly, some exaggeration in Kettle's claim, but its general accuracy would seem to be supported by recent research on the social composition of the Parnellite party: 'Agrarian reform had a strong urban complexion....Outside the party, the most dynamic of all agrarian reformers, Michael Davitt, was from a cotton town in Lancashire.'⁵² It is more than likely that in a general ignorance of agrarian realities, allied to a conservative social outlook and ill-defined ideas about the practical ends for which home rule was desired, is to be found the key to the readiness of leading nationalists to accept a scheme, that would, on

Parnell's own estimation, greatly reduce the Irish standard of living - already greatly depressed by a severe economic crisis.

It is, moreover, worth emphasising that the nationalist view of Gladstone's scheme in parliament was presented by the elite of the party—Parnell, Dillon, Healy, Sexton, T. P. O'Connor, J. F. X. O'Brien, William O'Brien, John Redmond, Justin McCarthy, E. D. Gray and T. D. Sullivan. Apart from Parnell, who could have been expected to have a realistic idea of the effects of Gladstone's plan, none of this group had any practical experience of Irish agrarian life, while the remainder of the party took little part in the home rule debate. In this context it is important to see how nationalist opinion outside parliament reacted to the home rule scheme.

Reaction to the plan in America revealed a predictable acceptance amongst moderate Irish-Americans and strong condemnation from fenians, who viewed it as wholly inadequate.⁵³ However, it was reaction in Ireland that was crucial. There is a long standing view that nationalist opinion there accepted the scheme uncritically. In 1887 Sir Charles Gavan Duffy informed J. F. X. O'Brien: 'What I said about the Irish people being ready to accept Mr Gladstone's scheme without scrutiny... I think...represents the spirit of the press and public meetings at the period.'⁵⁴ More recently, Conor Cruise O'Brien has declared: 'the national press and the people welcomed the bill; almost incredulously'.⁵⁵ These views, however, are not

sustained by an examination of Irish opinion. As shown in appendix one,⁵⁶ this has been examined by taking a sample of reactions in approximately half of the Irish local papers that supported home rule, distributed over the four provinces. But it is important, firstly, to note the views of important leaders of opinion. Davitt's opinion has already been shown, and did not vary greatly in public from Parnell's. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin, however, was more critical of the financial aspects of the scheme than Parnell. Where the latter desired that Ireland pay one-twentieth of imperial expenditure, Walsh favoured one-twenty-fifth or one-twenty-sixth. Moreover, he felt strongly that Irish representation at Westminster should be maintained in numbers proportionate to Ireland's contribution to imperial expenditure while restrictions on the home rule parliament lasted.

Walsh thought that representation at Westminster would not only lessen opposition to the bill, but also safeguard Irish interests in matters of taxation and other questions, as well as benefit catholic interests in Great Britain and the empire. In this last respect his views were shared by Davitt.⁵⁷ A more uncritical view of the scheme was taken by Archbishop Croke of Cashel. On the introduction of the scheme he and his clergy passed a formal resolution expressing their gratitude,⁵⁸ while during the second reading, Croke supported Gladstone's proposal to drop the content of the bill in return for a vote

merely for its principle. Certainly he made an enormous impression on Wilfrid Blunt, who impressed on John Morley his personal importance in Ireland and influence with the clergy generally: 'He is a very powerful man personally and by position, and his word is law to all the clergy of the south, so that everything he says is of importance, especially at the present moment.' Blunt went on to describe how remarkably and entirely

the distrust of English intentions has disappeared during the past few weeks and how cordially the clergy, especially, accept everything that is being done for Ireland as the best that could be done. They quite understand the difficulties of the parliamentary position, and so long as the principle of real home rule is not departed from will, I am sure, do their best to urge patience on the people. To my mind the fact of the clergy being such strong nationalists is the best possible guarantee of an orderly solution....

Croke, he went on, had no thoughts of separation and was probably 'at heart' as loyal to her majesty as 'you or I are'.⁵⁹ But even if Blunt's opinion reflected exactly the clergy's thinking, they did not represent the totality of Irish nationalism; and it is perhaps appropriate to note the views of another important British observer - the wife of Gladstone's Irish viceroy, Lord Aberdeen - on their reception in Ireland:

it used often to be said that the new lord lieutenant was received with open arms because regarded as the harbinger of home rule. Such was by no means the case. True, it was known that a

measure of home rule was to be prepared; but the people had no idea of giving themselves away, so to speak, before they knew what the nature of the proposed reform was to be; and so the prevalent attitude was, though by no means unfriendly, somewhat that of reserve.... 60

It will be seen that 'reserve' provides a better key to local nationalist opinion on home rule than the fulsome praise for liberal efforts that Blunt described. As for Lord Aberdeen personally, though, whatever reserve he experienced was to be quickly dissipated by his public identification with a campaign for relief of distress in the west of Ireland and his involvement in the promotion of Irish industries. The Aberdeens were to pursue this interest well into the twentieth century.⁶¹

Before proceeding to examine local press opinion on home rule, however, it is important to note the reaction to Gladstone's scheme of the two most important national organs of home rule opinion, the Freeman's Journal and United Ireland; especially the latter, since it was both the chief organ of the Parnellite party in Ireland and with an average weekly sale of 90,000,⁶² easily the most influential nationalist weekly.

What is immediately striking in this paper's treatment of the home rule bill, is its markedly moderate tone. Departing from Parnell's trenchant criticism of the scheme, it declared of Gladstone's pledge to confer home rule: 'this one tremendous fact eclipses all details'. The tone thus set, the limitations of the bill were largely overlooked, apart from Ireland's

proposed contribution to imperial expenditure, which was described as 'monstrous'. But this imposition, it continued, would be offset by imperial expenditure in Ireland - on the military and defence and by the £1,400,000 credited to Irish customs. While admitting that £400,000 as a surplus on the Irish budget was too small, and voicing 'a strenuous protest' against the extravagant claims made upon the Irish exchequer, it stressed that 'these are not questions that need diminish one tittle of the frank and cordial satisfaction with which the bill, in its broad outlines, will be accepted by the Irish race'. This encouragement to dwell on the fact of an Irish parliament being conferred, and to ignore the very details which would make or break it, seems clearly designed to prepare the nationalist rank-and-file for acceptance of the bill as it stood.

Similarly, in its treatment of the land purchase scheme, every effort was made to make it attractive to nationalists. It was denied that the average of 20 years' purchase of the gross rental suggested by Gladstone in parliament, would be usual: 'oppressive landlords', on whose estates the great mass of the small tenantry were congregated, would in fact get a lot less than 16 years' purchase of the judicial rent. Moreover, completely ignoring the vital importance of commissions on the handling of land sales to the finances of a Dublin parliament, it was strongly suggested that the Irish government would, in fact, rebate such commissions to the tenants to lower

their repayments. Anxious to include all arguments for supporting the bill, it was put finally that if nationalists threw no impediment in the way of a land bill generous to the landlords and left the defeat of the measure to the tories, then they would, in the next parliament, be in 'an impregnable position to demand that the landlords shall be less tenderly dealt with' in future.⁶⁴

By contrast, reaction to Gladstone's bills in the Freeman's Journal, usually more politically moderate than United Ireland, was far more severe. While the establishment of an executive responsible to the Irish legislature was applauded as a great advance on Grattan's parliament, and satisfaction expressed with the safeguards for the minority, it followed Parnell's attack on the financial provisions, particularly by pointing out that 'the charges...proposed to be put upon Ireland are excessive, and such as might easily and completely break her down'. The financial existence of the country would depend upon the Irish and English people continuing to drink as much as at present and 'the slightest reduction in the drink bill would upset the financial equilibrium', and eventually lead to the Irish exchequer being merged again with the British exchequer. Exception was also taken to the constabulary clauses and hope was expressed that in committee the British would not drive such a hard bargain.⁶⁵

Again, unlike the welcome given by United Ireland to

the land purchase bill, a more critical attitude was taken by this paper. It was pointed out that in becoming liable as owners for the payment of county cess and poor rates, tenants would see the reduction in rental repayments envisaged by Gladstone, greatly diminished. In the case of very small tenants where the landlord paid all of the county cess and poor rate, the devolution of these charges would be much heavier than in the case of larger tenancies which already shared these charges with the landlord. Indeed, in many cases it would be to the advantage of both landlord and tenant to come to an arrangement under the 1885 Ashbourne act than under Gladstone's plan. Under the terms of the former, the landlord could obtain 18 years' purchase of the gross rental provided he left one-fifth of the purchase money, or other security, in the hands of the land commissioners. Under Gladstone's plan he would receive, after deductions, the equivalent of 16 years' purchase of the gross rental. Similarly, under the Ashbourne act, the tenant would be purchasing his holding on the basis of 18 years' judicial rent rather than 20.⁶⁶ In sum then, it was significant that the two most influential nationalist papers took very different attitudes to the home rule scheme. This mixed reaction, however, was characteristic of Irish nationalist opinion as a whole.

Given the highly emotional content of nationalist propaganda, it was inevitable that those emotions would be reflected

in Irish reaction to the home rule scheme, especially in the west of Ireland which had been the centre of agrarian struggle. The Tuam Herald declared that if 1886 was to see the enactment of home rule, 'in the inspired pages of history, ages yet unborn will read of it as the brightest in the long tale of our struggles and suffering'.⁶⁷ The Western News exclaimed that the enactment of the home rule bill would be the 'sun' of Ireland's 'freedom', that would warm and restore 'the splendour of our nationality which years of oppression and tyranny have kept mouldering'.⁶⁸ The Connaught Telegraph welcomed the bill with the hope that 'never again will foreign foemen have power to forge shackles for an emancipated land': it 'religiously' ejaculated 'the fervent prayer of "God save Ireland"'.⁶⁹

Such expressions could be multiplied many times over and there is no doubt that among some uneducated nationalists they stimulated expectations of what self-government would entail, far in excess of what could reasonably be anticipated. The Limerick Chronicle carried a story it claimed was representative of working-class nationalist hopes:

It is really amazing what mad construction the peasantry and uneducated among the working-class have put upon what is known as "home rule". It was believed to be destined, the moment it came into operation, to redress every ill, and to turn the whole country into...a lazy man's elysium. We have been informed by a large employer of labour in this city, that yesterday he was visited upon by one of his workmen, who, with a face full of seriousness, asked him, "Now that home rule was given how soon

would he increase their wages?" Other stories equally absurd, have been told illustrative of the omniparous belief in the regeneration of Ireland by her new leaders. 70

Notwithstanding the fact that this paper was virulently unionist and would thus have had an obvious interest in discrediting home rule, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the above passage.⁷¹ Michael Davitt's estimate of the level of political consciousness among the same social class during the land war, was not markedly different. At that time, totally unjustified hopes prevailed among some that agrarian agitation would secure their holdings for nothing.⁷² But while there is no reason to think that any significant sophistication in the uneducated nationalist consciousness occurred by 1886, and that such expectations existed, it would be virtually impossible to know how many held them. The only means of surveying nationalist opinion generally is by consulting local papers, although, as shown in appendix one,⁷³ this method is not perfect. The sample examined, covering opinion in all four provinces, reveals a mixed reaction to Gladstone's bills.

What is firstly important to distinguish between, is the great national rejoicing at the fact of Gladstone's scheme being introduced, and evaluation of the nature of the scheme as a final settlement of the Irish question. Indeed quite often the same report combined both. The following example from the Roscommon Herald, one of the most radical Irish journals, is

not untypical:

The principle of home rule having been conceded by England's greatest statesman, and received with fervour by an applauding house of commons, the practical questions to be considered are the extent of Mr Gladstone's offer, and...the changes which will be necessary to render the boon one of real and permanent benefit to the country. 74

As table 7a shows, in regard to the home rule bill as a final settlement, there was no unanimity of view. 9 papers, or just over one-third, declared it to be satisfactory as it was; 8 accepted it subject to the amendments suggested by Parnell on 8 April; while 9 others accepted the bill subject to various other amendments.⁷⁵ Moreover, it can be seen in table 7b that the tendency to accept the bill uncritically was most pronounced in Ulster, followed by Connaught, while Leinster most uniformly adopted the attitude taken by Parnell on the first day of the debate.⁷⁶

Reaction to the land purchase bill was more diffuse. 9 papers made no mention of it at all, which may have been due to the fact of its quick withdrawal,⁷⁷ while other views ranged from non-committal reporting to outright rejection.⁷⁸ However, one interesting reaction was that of the Weekly Examiner, which endorsed the criticisms of the bill made by the Ulster Land Committee. This grouping was, in fact, not primarily a political organisation, representing the tenant-farmer interest in

the north generally. Its membership included both unionists and home rulers, and was presided over by Thomas Shillington, soon to be elected president of the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association.⁷⁹ The committee's report on the bill recommended chiefly that two-thirds of the tenants on any estate should have the same power as the landlord to compel a sale; that an average of 15 years' purchase of the gross rental rather than 20 was a fairer figure; that a landlord should have no power to withdraw from a sale if unsatisfied with the land court's estimate of his estates value; and that tenants should have the option of becoming state tenants 'at the lowest perpetual rents which the interest paid by the state will allow'.⁸⁰

A survey of Irish opinion generally, then, clearly does not support the popular view of a people slavishly accepting Gladstone's plan. But equally important is the fact that whereas party leaders in parliament moved quickly to accept the bill unmodified, as its chances of passing a second reading diminished, no such trend is observable in the local press. If anything, local opinion tended to harden as increasing familiarity with the scheme clarified its limitations.⁸¹ Thus, it is hardly surprising that M. J. F. McCarthy, in noting Irish reaction to the bill's defeat, made a sharp distinction between the attitudes of Parnellite party members and the nationalist population:

In Dublin they laughed and made the best of it, taking it in the same spirit as they would have accepted the defeat of Ormonde, the famous Derby winner of that year. Wire-pullers and office-seekers who had played for large stakes felt sorely hit, but met with little sympathy from a public who, having staked nothing, rejoiced at having suffered no loss and drew a breath of relief at the end of the crisis. In the country districts there was not only no anger or indignation, but there was not even disappointment. Parnell's triumph over Gladstone had come so suddenly, the struggle for home rule had been so short-lived and so subordinate to the land agitation, that the people did not regard the reverse in the light of a grievance. The farmers were so keen on getting reductions of rents in the land courts or otherwise, and the labourers so preoccupied by the prospect of new cottages with free half-acres of ground, that they did not feel as if they had lost anything by the defeat of home rule. There was no disturbance whatever in Dublin, and only in a few isolated quarters in the south were there any outbreaks of ill-feeling, and those of no serious import. 82

McCarthy's emphasis on the disparity of view between party leaders and their supporters on the loss of the home rule bill is very much to the point. A. J. Kettle, one of the few prominent Parnellites with an agrarian background and in close contact with rural opinion, consoled a disheartened Parnell with the following advice:

I think you have great reason to thank heaven that you did not succeed in carrying the land and home rule settlements on the lines laid down in Gladstone's scheme. You were giving too much for the land and three millions a year too much for the country. Had Gladstone's bills been passed into law Ireland would have fallen under the burden, and you might...[have left] public life, disgraced and broken-hearted....you should not despond but rejoice. 83

Greater insight into the limitations of Parnell's ideas as to

the value of Gladstonian home rule to Ireland - notwithstanding his criticisms of 8 April - is provided in the notes of a conversation on the Irish question between him and Lord Ribblesdale in 1887, which the latter published shortly after Parnell's death. Parnell, Ribblesdale recorded, believed strongly that self-government would produce both an immediate and beneficial effect on industrial development and invest the people with 'a new sense of responsibility'. While England and Scotland, being 'highly developed and prosperous', would naturally fear great constitutional changes, Ireland 'was in so bad a state' that the risks involved in home rule were barely noticed there. There 'need be no failure', though Parnell admitted that the first years of a home rule parliament 'must be years of great anxiety'. Ribblesdale continued:

I asked him whether home rule had not come to mean to the average Irishman the turning of sixpences into shillings, and what he thought would happen if the people of Ireland ever woke up to find that even under home rule the sixpences were still only sixpences. He again said it would be a very anxious time at first, but he struck me as either shutting his eyes wilfully, or being unable to see how enormously the difficulties of the Irish question would be increased by the economic failure of... home rule. 84

THE UNIONIST CRITIQUE

It has been noted in chapter two that the unsettled state of British imperial affairs was hardly congenial to the introduction of a home rule scheme in 1886.⁸⁵ The year,

moreover, had ominously opened with an extension of the empire - the annexation of upper Burmah - and the significance of this act as an example of the attitude to be taken to Irish problems, was not lost on those who saw the Burmese as the "the Irish of the east".⁸⁶ Attention to imperial questions was to be further enhanced during the year by a colonial exhibition in London. Additionally, there was domestic unrest, with economic distress, riots in Mayfair, shops looted, widespread socialist agitation, and disturbances in many provincial towns. J. L. Hammond has succinctly described the public mood:

The disasters that were fresh in men's minds were not the disasters that had overtaken pride, but the disasters that had followed vacillation. The lessons to be drawn from these disasters seemed to many to be, the need for firmness, for the stubborn maintenance of rights and privileges, for presenting to the world the stout face of an obstinate empire that kept, and meant to keep, what it had got. 87

Nationalists, on the other hand, were now anxious to play down their militant rhetoric of previous years and to quieten agrarian unrest in Ireland, but with doubtful success. The I.L.P.U., having an extensive propaganda network in Great Britain, was in the process of flooding the country with literature containing extensive quotations from nationalist speeches of the period 1879-85, with statistics of boycotting and violence, to demonstrate that home rule would mean disaster for

Ireland.⁸⁸ Support for their claims was forthcoming on 19 March 1886 when the Record published the findings of a survey it conducted among Church of Ireland clergymen into the state of their church. The following questionnaire was sent to each of the 740 clergymen in the three southern provinces:

1. Is boycotting more or less prevalent since Lord Salisbury's resignation? To what extent does it exist in your parish?
2. Do you consider the condition of the church of Ireland to be worse or better than it was five years ago; and especially how has it been affected by the land agitation - (a) materially; (b) spiritually?

Of the 740 forms sent out, 460 replies were received and 314 instances of recent boycotting reported. In 210 parishes it was reported in active existence at the time of the 'poll', to 'a greater or lesser degree'; while in 37 parishes it was reported as having increased since Gladstone had taken office. As for the economic condition of the church, great fears were expressed as to the effect of extensive land purchases and the enactment of home rule. In particular, it was feared that if the landlords were bought out, the local churches which depended on their contributions for survival, would disappear. Equally strong fears were expressed for the three-to-four million pounds 'invested on the security of Irish land by the Representative Church Body out of the commutation capital of the Irish church'.⁸⁹ Of course, the Irish church clergy were almost all

unionists and it could be argued, consequently, that their fears were exaggerated. Nevertheless, given the publicity accorded to this survey by the unionist press, it certainly did not help the prospects for Gladstone's bills. Equally important in this respect was the deep substratum of anti-Irish prejudice in Great Britain and to which Lord Salisbury appealed in his speech at St. James's Hall on 15 May 1886. Comparing the Irish with Hottentots, he suggested that neither were fit for self-government.⁹⁰ This speech produced a strong reaction from home rulers but, in fact, it was simply the most explicit of many such sentiments expressed in parliament.⁹¹

The debate on Irish autonomy was under way well before the introduction of the home rule scheme. As early as the first week in January Sir James Stephens submitted two extensive letters to The Times discussing the various modes of self-government that might be conferred on Ireland, and drawing the conclusion that firm maintenance of the law and the union was the best policy to adopt.⁹² There was yet another adverse factor to the bill's success—the lack of any counter proposals from unionists with which the home rule bill could be compared.⁹³ Attention was focused solely on Gladstone's plan. The best general description of the debate in parliament is probably that given by John Morley:

....the general temper was good....Swords crossed according to

the strict rules of combat. The tone was rational and argumentative. There was plenty of strong, close, and acute reasoning. There was some learning, a considerable acquaintance both with historic and contemporary, foreign and domestic fact, and when fact and reasoning broke down, their place was abundantly filled by eloquent prophecy of disaster on one side, or blessing on the other. Neither prophecy was demonstrable; both could be made plausible....

No bill is ever brought in of which its opponents do not say that it either goes too far, or else it does not go far enough.... There was the usual evasion of the strong points of the adversary's case, the usual exaggeration of its weak ones. That is debating. Perorations ran in a monotonous mould; integrity of the empire on the one side, a real, happy and indissoluble reconciliation between English and Irish on the other.

More specifically, Morley notes, one side dwelt on the recall of Lord Fitzwilliam in 1795, the other on the 'hopeless distraction' left by the 1798 rebellion; denials that the liberals had a mandate for home rule were answered with the retort that such also applied to coercion; if the limitations of the bill were degrading to Ireland, still more so was 'twenty years of firm government', and so on.⁹⁴ It can be argued, however, that the high ground taken by Morley in his description of the debate - providing an 'impartial' recounting of opposing arguments - does an injustice to the unionist case, for it implies that one argument was as valid as another. It will be argued here that this was not so.

For reasons that are not surprising, the unionist case has had a bad press. Given the facts of Lord Randolph Churchill's incitement to civil war in Ulster, Salisbury's

'Hottentots' speech, and the rabid anti-Irish and anti-nationalist prejudice of popular unionism, it is hardly surprising that attention has been directed away from the specific criticisms unionists made of Gladstone's scheme. Yet this was as consistently a part of their argument as was their oft-voiced prejudices.

The first unionist speech of the debate, delivered immediately after Gladstone had introduced the home rule bill, was, significantly, that of G. O. Trevelyan, who resigned from the cabinet convinced of the total unworkability of Gladstone's scheme.⁹⁵ Trevelyan now gave vent publicly to his strongly felt views:

I cannot but think that the right hon. gentleman in making his calculations, has left out of account, not only Irish nature, but human nature itself. Here is a country intensely national, which is characterised by great intensity of political opinion, which when she has got all that this bill proposes to give, will be practically independent - for if I know anything of Ireland she will certainly regard herself as such - and which will be asked to pay to a neighbouring nation, including its contribution to the sinking fund, £3,500,000 a year. This sum she will soon begin to regard as an English tribute...if you add to that...£1,000,000 a year for keeping up this English constabulary [R.I.C.], you have a sum of £4,500,000 which Ireland will have to pay annually over and above what it may have to pay in respect of loans...and the people will say that these payments are the consequence of that English connection⁹⁶ which they will affirm was forced upon them against their will.

Trevelyan, moreover, referred to the recent articles of the economist, Robert Giffen, with whose findings as to Irish

over-taxation Parnellites 'ominously' agreed, and highlighted the fact that Gladstone's scheme

now proposed to make this amount of taxation permanent and eternal, and to keep it at its present figure, in order...that the Irish may pay £4,500,000 a year to the English treasury.How long, I should like to know, will it be before a resolution denouncing this English tribute will be brought forward in the Irish parliament? How long...before it is passed, and how long before any English ministry which refuses to accept it will have ceased to stand? 97

Referring to 'threats' by United Ireland, that if the home rule bill was not enacted Ireland would see a violent reaction, Trevelyan argued that if the bill was passed these would still be made, to get 'everything that this bill omits to give': '...I do not say the Irish nation, but no nation that exists in the world, when it has got a separate parliament will...pay taxes which are to be handed over to something like a foreign treasury'.⁹⁸ The importance of Trevelyan's speech lies in his direct contradiction of the reasoning Gladstone gave for the necessity of his scheme - the satisfaction of Irish national sentiment and the restoration of the 'social order' of Ireland; far from satisfying that sentiment Gladstone's scheme would aggravate it, and be the source of future Irish agitation. Trevelyan's fears were, as was seen, shared by Chamberlain,⁹⁹ and although Trevelyan was not the most influential of unionists - he was, in fact, to rejoin the Gladstonian ranks in

1887 - his speech set a pattern for subsequent speakers.

Lord Randolph Churchill, on 12 April, elaborated on Trevelyan's views by contrasting Gladstone's professed trust in the Irish people with the extent of the restrictions in the scheme:

Is it not an extraordinary thing that her majesty's government are willing to trust the Irish judges appointed by the Irish government with the lives...liberties, and...property of every man woman and child in Ireland; but her majesty's government will not trust the Irish judges appointed by the Irish parliament with one single penny of the British revenue? 100

In the context of the bill's limitations, and with reference to Gladstone's claim introducing the bill that existing English laws came to Ireland in a 'foreign garb', Churchill, with devastating pointedness, argued that Gladstone's scheme was 'no different from other English laws in this respect'.¹⁰¹

The natural development of unionist arguments on this line, was to attempt to exploit Parnellite dissatisfaction with the scheme and thereby prove its insufficiency as a final settlement of the Irish question. Ammunition was to be provided for this purpose by the injudicious speeches of T. P. O'Connor, shortly before the bill's introduction. Obviously expecting a far more extensive scheme than that which emerged, O'Connor declared, in a speech at Kensington on 4 April, that the introduction of the home rule scheme would mean the destruction of

the union.¹⁰² Given Gladstone's concern to present his measure as in no way affecting the overall supremacy of the imperial parliament, such utterances could only be embarrassing, not to mention their usefulness to unionists as proof of the real objectives of Parnellites. In the major conservative contribution to the debate, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, on 13 April, concentrated almost entirely on the limitations and liabilities of the home rule plan, and 'demonstrated' its failure as a final settlement by producing the following extract from one of O'Connor's speeches:

If the system of self-government given to Ireland were deemed by the Irish people insufficient, it is probable that the Irish members would act in the new imperial parliament as they do in the present. Imperial questions would be looked at by them, not from the imperial standpoint, but as affording weapons to be employed between the two English parties for purely Irish purposes. You might have then what you have now, a distracting element in your imperial councils, judging things not on their intrinsic and imperial merits, but in their bearing to Irish national aspirations.

In the light of this quotation, Hicks-Beach then asked whether Gladstone's scheme would be deemed sufficient as a final settlement by Irish members. Given such contentious clauses as those relating to customs and excise, he concluded it would not be. Nationalists would never be able to revive the prosperity they believed existed in Grattan's day under Gladstone's scheme. His conclusion was confirmed, when, in answer to a

direct question on the finality of the scheme, Parnellites gave evasive replies. Consequently:

It seems to me as absolutely certain as anything in the future can be, that if you were to institute the assembly which the right hon. gentleman proposes it would be powerless for good to Ireland, but would be powerful for mischief between Great Britain and Ireland. From the very first...it would be struggling to increase its authority. 104

Thereafter he went on to support his conclusion with reference to other aspects of the bill, such as the extent of safeguards for the minority.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Gladstone, replying to Hicks-Beach immediately afterwards, merely declared that the provisions for safeguarding the minority were inserted to meet the prejudices of the bill's critics, not his own; as to the criticism of the financial scheme, though, he was virtually silent.¹⁰⁶

The home rule bill passed its first reading on 13 April, but when, on the 16 April, Gladstone introduced his land purchase bill, it only compounded unionist opposition to home rule. The nature of its financial basis¹⁰⁷ provoked an outcry from unionist and liberals alike, while the fuller explanation of the role of the imperial receiver it contained, was seen both as further proof of the likelihood of future Irish unrest were the scheme enacted, and of Gladstone's own distrust of the Irish. Anticipating this complaint again, Gladstone unconvincingly

protested that the proposed role of the imperial receiver was not evidence of distrust: 'These provisions have nothing whatever to do with my notions; they are not intended to satisfy me, nor the British public; but these are large operations, and the provisions are intended to satisfy a somewhat peculiar and fastidious class, the class of public creditors'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the charge of distrust stuck.¹⁰⁹ The land purchase bill was withdrawn before any widespread Irish landlord reaction to it could be properly gauged, though, when it did come, it was in the form of an unusually moderate pamphlet published by the I.L.P.U.¹¹⁰

The second reading of the home rule bill began on the 10 May, and the insufficiency of the scheme as a final settlement was again taken up. Whatever Parnellites might say they would never be satisfied with such 'humiliating' restrictions as those in the home rule bill'.¹¹¹ On May 13, however, Sir Henry James developed the unionist argument further by claiming that even if nationalist M.P.s accepted Gladstone's bill, they could not speak for the Irish people. Indeed, none of the claims Gladstone had made for his scheme - unity of the empire, supremacy of Westminster, preservation of social order and the protection of property and minority rights - were secured by the bill:

given the degrading restrictions contained in the bill, I cannot

believe the Irish will accept this as a final settlement.... It might meet the opportunism of the day for certain purposes, but it can never satisfy the wishes of a generous people. 112

Taking up the point of Parnellite acceptance of the bill, E. A. Leatham pressed them whether they accepted it as a final settlement, and was met with a chorus of "Yes".¹¹³ But the highly lukewarm nature of their satisfaction was demonstrated on 17 May, when Viscount Wolmer reminded the house that Parnell had argued on 8 April that unless the bill underwent extensive modifications his party would be under no obligation to accept it. If the bill was not modified would it still be acceptable, he asked. Parnell merely replied with a confirmation that he had stipulated conditions to its acceptability on 8 April; otherwise Parnellites were silent.¹¹⁴ Thus even though nationalists were increasingly prepared to accept the bill unmodified, it was obvious that such acceptance was notoriously devoid of enthusiasm, and as such, provided support for the unionist view that it was merely transitory, that home rule as envisaged by Gladstone could only be a step towards greater autonomy or complete separation. Yet, as if to compound the obstacles in the path of home rule, the liberals inadvertantly provided support for the unionist case when, on 20 May, John Morley moved the second reading of an arms bill. This had been introduced on the 6 May and was designed to continue the provisions of the 1882 crimes act for restricting the sale, importation, and

carrying of firearms; prohibiting their use without government licence, and giving the police the right of searching private houses for arms in proclaimed districts. This measure was taken to indicate a fatal want of confidence in the nationalist majority, on whom the liberals were asking parliament to bestow control of a separate Irish parliament. The bill was carried by 303 votes to 89; the tories and liberals voting together against the Parnellite party and a few radicals.¹¹⁵

Of course the views of different critics varied in the influence they had in defeating Gladstone's bill, but if any one person could be credited with having sealed the home rule scheme's fate, it was John Bright. Bright was known to hold strong anti-Irish prejudices, but even he was careful to maintain that his opposition was based not only on a firm belief in the maintenance of the union as best for Great Britain and Ireland, but also on the conviction that the bill itself offered no hope of a solution to the Irish problem. He explained his views in a personal interview with R. B. O'Brien:

If you could persuade me that what you call home rule would be a good thing for Ireland, I would still object to this bill....It would lead to friction, constant friction, between the two countries. The Irish parliament would be constantly struggling to burst the bars of the statutory cage in which it sought to confine it....If I had trust I would trust to the full; if I had distrust I would do nothing. But this is a halting bill. If you establish an Irish parliament give it plenty of work and plenty of responsibility. Throw the Irish upon themselves....let their energies be engaged in Irish party warfare; but give no Irish party leader an opportunity of raising an anti-

English cry. That is what a good home rule bill ought to do. This bill does not do it. Why, the...[imperial] receiver...appointed by it would alone keep alive the anti-English feeling. If you keep alive that feeling, what is the good of your home rule?¹¹⁶

Bright's views highlight a point that is worth emphasising about the unionist case against home rule; that beneath the anti-Irish and anti-catholic prejudice which often coloured their arguments they made a sustained and valid critique of the bill.

In the last major unionist speech before its defeat, Joseph Chamberlain focused on the contradiction between nationalist views on self-government before it was introduced, and the inadequate measure now before parliament. He asked: 'Could he [Parnell] bind the Irish people to accept his leadership if he accepts this as a final settlement of the question between Ireland and Great Britain?'¹¹⁷ Given the widespread criticism of the scheme in Ireland, and the views of A. J. Kettle already noted,¹¹⁸ this was no mere rhetorical question.

There was, however, another major plank in the unionist case against home rule: the Ulster problem. Besides concern for the maintenance of the union, this subject took up most parliamentary time during the debate.¹¹⁹ Certainly from the time of Churchill's Ulster visit in February 1886 unionists were alive to the value of this issue: almost every critic of the home rule scheme expressed concern for 'prosperous and

protestant Ulster' and condemned Gladstone's readiness to deliver it into the hands of nationalists, ready to 'plunder' the province for the benefit of the less energetic south.¹²⁰ Joseph Chamberlain, in particular, was anxious to encourage Ulster resistance by all possible means, and saw in this issue the most effective means of thwarting home rule.¹²¹ Given the importance of the Ulster problem as an obstacle to Irish autonomy, it is important to investigate in some detail the attitudes of home rulers towards it.

CHAPTER IV

THE ULSTER PROBLEM (1): THE PARNELLITE AND GLADSTONIAN VIEWS

Despite the strength of Ulster unionist opposition to home rule in 1886 and tory support for their case, home rulers insisted on the unimportance of the Ulster issue to the argument for self-government. In doing so, they thus exhibited, both their ignorance of the northern protestant community and the seriousness of the threat it posed to the enactment of Gladstone's home rule scheme. This chapter will attempt to explain the causes of their misjudgment.

NATIONALISTS AND UNIONISTS: A CONTEXT OF IGNORANCE

An appreciation of the ignorance existing in each community about the nature of the other is absolutely crucial to an understanding of relationships between Ireland's nationalist and unionist communities. It was an ignorance shared even by the two communities within Ulster itself. As early as 1865 a parliamentary inquiry into Belfast's magistracy and police arrangements noted, that as a rule, the protestant and catholic communities there 'never exchange a word'.¹ F. F. Moore, writing of his school days in Belfast, noted that the first thing the protestant majority at his school learned was to shun the

others:

We looked on them as curiosities and only spoke to them now and then, as the Bunney family spoke to Ornai, the young South Sea Islander who had come to England with Captain Cook. We wanted to learn from them what it was like to be a catholic, and if they worshipped idols...at any rate I know we invariably cut the catholics whom we met in the streets; and the general idea prevailed through the town...that it was a pity that the terms of the foundation of the school were so loosely worded as to admit of Roman Catholics being "on the strength". 2

Canon John O'Rourke, in his history of Irish catholicism, also emphasised the lack of social contact between the two religious communities in Belfast,³ while J. A. Rentoul, unionist M.P. for East Down, 1890-1902, declared that many Ulster protestants 'have never sat at the table with, or met on equal terms, a Roman Catholic, and... know catholics, if at all, only as domestic or outdoor servants'.⁴ Even in a relatively well-mixed area such as south Down and south Armagh, social intercourse between the two communities was slight. In the course of a letter encouraging the Bessbrook Spinning Company to promote more catholics to positions of authority, J. N. Richardson acknowledged the difficulties involved:

I am aware that it is very difficult to select Roman Catholic foremen for they are kept so much apart that it is difficult for managers to know their capacity or judge of their aptitude, but if their clergy are injudicious in this respect we should not allow it to interfere so much with their welfare or our own responsibility etc. 5

Mutual ignorance was also prevalent in the political sphere. Parnellite ignorance of the nature and strength of Ulster unionism was, it will be seen, an important factor sustaining the internal consistency of nationalist ideology.

Nationalist attention was focused on Ulster in November 1880 with two significant developments; first, the expedition of fifty Ulster loyalists to assist Captain Boycott at Lough Mask in County Mayo; an enterprise treated with contempt and practical jokes by local nationalists.⁶ Secondly, and simultaneous with the Boycott expedition, the opening of 'the land campaign in the north of Ireland' with a meeting at Belleek, County Fermanagh, attended by Parnell, John Dillon, J. J. O'Kelly and Jeremiah Jordan.⁷ This campaign was attended with some success. At the end of November Michael Davitt was told of 'growing Orange and protestant support' for the Land League in Ulster. Thus encouraged, Davitt, with others, drew up an address to Ulstermen emphasising the none-sectarian nature of the Land League, the economic character of the struggle between landlords and tenants, and the fact that different religious groups were involved on both sides. In this respect, it was pointed out that Ulster protestant farmers in the eighteenth century had been the victims of protestant landlords whose descendants were now foremost in hostility to the Land League.⁸ But while the league received some protestant support, it was certainly small in proportion to the support

northern protestants gave the landlord counter-offensive that began at this time. Nevertheless, nationalists seem to have entertained wildly optimistic ideas of their success in Ulster. In December 1880 Davitt informed John Devoy:

It would take me a week to give you anything like an account of the immense growth and power of the L[and] L[eague]. It now virtually rules the country. Ulster has been carried by O'Kelly, Dillon, Kettle, Sheridan and Jordan. We have three organisers out there, three in Leinster, three in Munster and two in Connaught. 9

Davitt was most concerned to gain support among Ulster protestants: on 6 January 1881, he addressed a crowd of 10,000 at Downpatrick, and another of 2,000 at Kinnegoe on 21 January, under the chairmanship of James Weir, master of Kinnegoe Orange Lodge.¹⁰ The leadership under which the latter meeting was held must have been encouraging to nationalist hopes. John Ferguson, at a Land League meeting on 2 February 1881, declared the change in outlook to be 'astounding'.¹¹ However, the Land League's success in involving increasing numbers of protestants in its affairs was to receive a serious setback at the Tyrone by-election in 1881. Despite the urgings of local clergy and a convention of 'timorous' county Land League associations, that T. A. Dickson, the liberal candidate, should be unopposed, Parnell selected his own candidate, the Rev. Harold Rylett.¹² Dickson, however, was elected and the league in mid-Ulster

severely damaged by the controversy.¹³ It was Andrew Kettle's view that it was this defeat and the extensive coverage it received in the English press—which viewed it as a brake on nationalist successes—that impelled Parnell to favour the 'wild demonstrations' which took place during 'the invasion of Ulster' in the winter of 1883-4.¹⁴ There were, however, other reasons for nationalist chagrin.

For example, this was the first occasion on which the strength of Ulster protestant opposition to the nationalist party had been indicated. At neither the 1874 or 1880 general elections did home rulers, as such, attempt to take seats in the predominantly protestant part of Ulster. Moreover, it was the circumstances surrounding their decision not to put up candidates in 1880 that led specifically to their fighting the Tyrone seat in 1881. Nationalists argued that Ulster liberals had betrayed an informal alliance arranged in 1880, whereby, on being given a free hand to oppose conservatives in Ulster constituencies, they would, if elected, support Parnellites on Irish issues. Parnell gave vent to their feeling of betrayal in a speech in Derry during the Tyrone by-election campaign:

In the north of Ireland at the last general election we allowed the whigs to carry any northern constituencies that they could; we stood aside and did not press the claims of the national party....In return for this forbearance we expected the whig Ulster party would have helped the rest of the Irish members to oppose coercion, and would have generally taken up a more independent position in the house of commons that they have

done. In fact, the Ulster members have had a very good opportunity afforded them during the past two sessions, and more especially during the last session, of showing what was in them, and I am sorry to say they have disgraced themselves exceedingly and to a man shown that they are not worthy for the future of representing any Irish constituency. They refused to support us in opposing coercion. 15

The events of this period offer telling examples of the limitations of nationalist thinking on the nature of Ulster protestant opposition to home rule. For the majority of Parnellites the lesson of the Tyrone by-election was not the need to change their policies to take account of Ulster protestant opinion, but rather the need for a more effective registration of nationalist voters.¹⁶ An exception was J. J. O'Kelly, a neo-fenian in touch with John Devoy. In a letter to Devoy, O'Kelly described the effect of the Tyrone defeat on the party, its consequences for his own plans for Ulster, and the attitude of the party leadership to his critique of their approach to the Ulster question:

If men in America would constantly keep in mind that out of a population of 5,000,000 there are 1,500,000 protestants who are against the national movement to a man, and, at least, 500,000 catholics equally hostile, they would have to understand that Irish politics need careful handling. Our effort to neutralise the north, which promised at one time to be completely successful, has completely failed owing to the violence of Davitt, Egan and Dillon who, without knowing anything of the north, and against the counsel of local men and against my vigorous protests, insisted on forcing a conflict in Tyrone, which alarmed and angered the whole presbyterian body, and split Ulster once more into hostile camps of protestant and catholic. For endeavouring to prevent this terrible misfortune

I have been denounced in the most violent and unscrupulous manner by Davitt and his coterie; but I am conscious of the rectitude of my motive, as well as convinced of the wisdom of the policy I advocate...I have not quite abandoned the hope of drawing the northern whigs back into our ranks, but it will now be very difficult work. No doubt I shall again be assailed as a whig by men who are ready to sacrifice the real interest of Ireland for the sake of their own vanity, and whose ideas of political action are that you should imitate the stupid bull in the Spanish corrida and run on your enemy with your head down and your eyes shut. For myself all I can say is that I hope God may deliver the Irish people from such leaders. 17

The inadequacies of nationalist propaganda were clearly exhibited in their speeches. Speaking in Enniskillen, in the autumn of 1880, Parnell described Fermanagh as 'protestant and loyal' and encouraged catholics not to fear their protestant fellow-country men.¹⁸ In fact, the catholic population of Fermanagh was significantly larger than the combined protestant population of episcopalians, presbyterians, and methodists. In 1881 it numbered 47,359, and the combined protestant population 37,445.¹⁹ At Hilltown, County Down, in 1881, Parnell spoke at a meeting chaired by a tenant farmer who was also an Orangeman, and declared that if the land movement had done nothing else, it had at least banished 'religious and sectarian dissension from Ulster'.²⁰ Again, at Gortin, County Tyrone, in the same year, he argued that if the Land League had not had the same success in the north of Ireland as it had in the south, it was due to 'Ulster whig obstruction'.²¹ The views of his chief lieutenants were not materially different.

Speaking in Dungannon during the 'invasion of Ulster', T. P. O'Connor condemned not only landlords, but protestant ministers 'who knew as much of his [Christ's] gospel as the Musselman that mumbled the Koran', and argued that the farmers of the north would have nothing to do with these 'constitutional rowdies'. William O'Brien, labouring under the impression that Ulster tenant-right had been established by the same methods as the Land League was employing in the south, informed his audience: 'it was the landlords and their rack-rents and their bigotry that were the strangers in, and invaders of, Ulster'.²² This view was echoed by T. M. Healy at Rosslea.²³ In the light of such statements it is not surprising that J. J. O'Kelly's exasperation with Parnellite tactics should be echoed by the Irish Times, which explained that Irish nationality as defined by the Parnellite party, amounted to the declaration:

We do not want to have Ulster with us...Ireland has three provinces and not four. The south and west are our nationality. It is not worth the pains to bring the northern people into our movement for any political or practical purposes. ²⁴

Moreover, between the Tyrone by-election in September 1881 and O'Kelly's letter to Devoy in September 1882, the nationalist cause in the north continued to suffer. The passing of the Irish land act of 1881 was greeted enthusiastically and utilised by the majority of Ulster tenants, who had

judicial rents fixed in numbers exceeding those of the other provinces. Thereafter the protestant tenant-righters who supported the league in some instances, along with its protestant membership, largely fell away and ceased to take much part in its activities. At the same time the divisions in the Land League in mid-Ulster, occasioned by the Tyrone by-election, gave the Orange Order the opportunity to take the initiative in its counter-attack against the league. Whole lodges that had supported it were expelled, while a landlord defence association, begun in Fermanagh in October 1881, drew together both protestant landlords and tenants, and began to undo the work of the league in maintaining a multidenominational organisation. This process was speeded up with the establishment of the National League in 1882 and the shift to emphasis on home rule, rather than agrarian issues, which Orangemen could argue had been the real objective of the former agrarian agitation.²⁵

NATIONALIST PROPAGANDA AND ULSTER UNIONISM:

THE ORANGE STEREOTYPE

Nationalist chagrin at the reverses of 1881-2 was compounded when, in 1883, the election of T. M. Healy for County Monaghan was followed by the house of lords's rejection of a bill that would have greatly facilitated nationalist registration in rural Ulster.²⁶ Parnellites reacted by initiating a series of meetings that protestants termed 'the invasion of Ulster'. These were preceded by abrasive propaganda, evoking in the

cause of nationalism a vision of centuries of struggle - not a method likely to win protestant converts. The poster announcing the Rosslea demonstration is a representative example:

Men of Fermanagh and Monaghan, prove by your presence at the meeting your unalterable devotion to the cause that your fathers fought and bled and died for - the cause of Irish nationality; prove to the hydra-headed monster of landlordism and your English taskmasters that you will never rest contented until the land of Ireland is the property of the whole people of Ireland, to be administered by government existing for and by the will of the Irish nation. 27

The incident at Rosslea, in which Lord Rossmore, a magistrate, led a band of potentially violent Orangemen to 'meet' the nationalist demonstration, created a scandal, resulting in his removal from the commission of the peace, the proclamation of political demonstrations and a series of charges and counter-charges in parliament.²⁸

Speaking in the debate on the Queen's speech in January 1884, Parnell denounced the government for partiality towards the Orangemen and proceeded to give his own view of why Orange meetings took place at all. They were, he argued, not spontaneous, but organised by landlords and led by criminal elements.²⁹ They were also mainly episcopalian in character, practically no presbyterians being orangemen; and even of episcopalians, Orangemen formed a very small part. Most significantly, Parnell argued that they were not rural

residents at all, but carpenters from the Belfast shipyards and 'the artisans of towns such as Portadown'. It was from these towns they were chiefly taken because, 'as a general rule, Orangemen, since the land movement commenced, have entirely died out amongst the agricultural population'.³⁰

Parnell equated unionism with Orangeism and his speech is important because it contained all the elements of which a nationalist stereotype³¹ of Ulster unionists would be composed in 1886. What were the elements that made up this stereotype? Orangemen were murderous, cowardly and violent: they were unrepresentative of Ulster protestant opinion, consisting of only a small group of episcopalians: they were factious, having been got up and manipulated by landlords: they had no real base in the countryside, being mainly an urban phenomenon: they represented the only opposition to home rule, and apart from them Ulster protestants were open to nationalist persuasion. Indeed both before and after 1886, Parnell took the view that if home rule were once enacted Ulster opposition would soon disappear.³²

As will be seen, Irish nationalist opinion on the Ulster question would centre upon these characteristics of an Ulster unionist 'type'. Moreover, the effectiveness of this stereotype would be all the more complete, since not only the historical reputation of Orangeism supported the view of the order as a reprehensible organisation, but nationalists were to take the

view that it was mainly responsible for the Belfast riots of 1886.³³ Again, its stability was also reinforced by the fact that lack of communication between the two communities increased the importance of political rhetoric as a medium through which each community would understand the nature and intentions of the other. In effect, they only knew each other through the public pronouncements of political leaders.

For nationalists, having defined the opposition to home rule as being of such a disreputable character, the way was open to draw the logical conclusion that the opinions of such an opposition did not merit consideration and were not intrinsically 'real'. The lack of communication between the unionist and nationalist communities would ensure that this state of affairs did not change.

However, important as the belief in the disreputable nature of Orangeism was in determining the Parnellite view of Ulster unionism, of equal importance was the ideological context in which it had meaning. As was seen, nationalist ideology was of a predominantly historicist nature,³⁴ in which the period of Grattan's parliament had an important place. The special relevance of Grattan's parliament for the Ulster question lay in the predominant role taken by northern protestants in establishing it. This action was pointed to by Parnellites as evidence of the essentially nationalist character of Ulster; a character that was being misrepresented by

landlords and Orangemen. It will be seen that during the home rule debate, the action of northern protestants in 1782 would be the standard against which the unionists of 1886 would be judged. More immediately, though, while nationalists publicly scorned and condemned Orange extremism in Ulster, it was also important - given the need to convince British public opinion that they represented the views of the great majority of Irish people - to prevent displays of anti-nationalist sentiment there.

Thus when J. H. McCarthy won the Newry by-election in 1884, Parnell wrote to Timothy Harrington urging the necessity of self-restraint on Ulster nationalists. Exhibiting no little misjudgment, Parnell declared that while 'our opinions...are the opinions of the majority of the people of Ulster', and while their right to the public expression of their opinions should be defended with energy and courage, it was also important for Ulster nationalists to realise 'the high importance of acting with every possible regard and consideration for the susceptibilities of our Orange fellow-countrymen. At all events for the present.'³⁵ As his later correspondence shows, Parnell was most concerned in this period that county conventions in Ulster be adequately organised in anticipation of the redrawing of parliamentary constituency boundaries³⁶ - a vital factor in nationalist electoral successes in the province at the general election of 1885.

In the light of the liberal conversion to home rule and the electoral control of nationalist Ireland achieved by Parnellites in 1885, the events associated with the 'invasion of Ulster' came to be seen in contemporary nationalist historiography as a desperate attempt by Ulster landlords and Orangemen, who were on the verge of defeat, to preserve their power.³⁷ This view could draw support from the increase in National League branches in Ulster between April 1883 and January 1886, when their number rose from 70³⁸ to 287. The distribution of branches in the province and their contributions to party funds to January 1886, is detailed below.

TABLE 2

National League branches in Ulster at the beginning of 1886

	population 1881	no. of branches	subscriptions to 5 Jan. 1886.
Antrim	421,900	17	£ 107
Armagh	163,100	19	196
Cavan	129,400	46	562
Donegal	206,000	50	450
Down	272,100	30	177
Fermanagh	84,800	28	198
Londonderry	164,900	21	227
Monaghan	102,700	27	349
Tyrone	197,700	49	417
totals	1,742,600	287	2,683

It was claimed that Ulster had only five fewer branches than

Connaught, while the former's contribution to party funds exceeded that of Connaught by £300.⁴⁰ In this context of developing nationalist strength in the province, Parnellites ridiculed Ulster unionism. Writing in 1885, T. M. Healy exhibited the chagrin nationalists felt at their Ulster experience of recent years. He accepted that under home rule some Ulster unionists would be afraid of religious oppression, but the very nature of their fears demonstrated the 'intellectual calibre' of such a party. When landlordism withered away 'the Orange hall would soon be roofless, and militant parsons will no longer have any particular object in keeping the people divided'. He went on to compare the relative merits of northern and southern unionism: 'To my mind the ignorant opposition of uneducated Orangemen is far less worthy of being taken into account by Englishmen than the platonic resistance to home rule offered by the cultured minority around Dublin.'⁴¹

As the home rule debate progressed southern nationalist press opinion endorsed the party's theory of the nature of Ulster unionism. Before the Belfast riots started, the Connaught People described Orange threats to fight as 'empty fire and brimstone talk'. They had threatened to rebel over catholic emancipation in 1829, and over disestablishment in 1869, and in neither case did they carry out their threats. Ulster unionism was not inspired by religious or political beliefs but by selfish considerations, to the disregard of the feelings

and interests of any other section of the people. Once home rule was enacted they would cool down but in the meantime the best policy was to let Orange bluster 'blow'.⁴² The Western News regarded Orange attacks on catholics as 'disgraceful', and argued that the northern catholics on their own could 'annihilate' them. If the government did not stop them the people would, 'and that full soon'.⁴³ Other papers produced similar descriptions of Ulster Orangemen, emphasising their unrepresentativeness, cowardice and bigotry.⁴⁴ The Munster News, moreover, responded to an advert in the Belfast News-Letter in May 1886,⁴⁵ for 20,000 rifles with ammunition for the defence of Ulster, with the following:

The women of Limerick,
To the front,
The advance of 20,000 blackthorns.

Tenders wanted

To supply the women of Garryowen with 20,000 blackthorn sticks....To be delivered according to instructions in different parts of Garryowen and surrounding districts, to repel the intended attacks of 20,000 Orangemen with rifles, under the command of Ballykilbeg Johnston and Co. 46

Inevitably, the Belfast riots confirmed beyond question the nationalist view of Ulster Orangeism.⁴⁷

Begun in the highly charged atmosphere generated by the home rule struggle, these were the worst riots Belfast experienced in the nineteenth century, causing considerable loss of

life and many thousands of pounds worth of damage. They were started by an incident at Harland and Wolff's shipyard, when a catholic worker told a protestant that after home rule neither he nor any protestant would get work. The following day, 4 June, protestant shipyard workers attacked a group of catholic navvies, which resulted in one of them being drowned. Thereafter rioting ensued on and off until 19 September. For the greater part of that time the disturbances involved only protestant mobs and the police, however, considerable destruction of catholic property took place and many catholics were attacked.⁴⁸ The reaction of the Munster News to these events was typical of nationalist opinion generally: 'the Orangemen took up the cause of aggressor, planned a plot...and ten to one, beat individuals to the ground, kicking, trampling, and slaying them there'.⁴⁹

Many years later T. M. Healy was to describe his experience of 'Orange rioters' in 1886, in terms which reveal strikingly the superficiality of the nationalist view of the Ulster problem: 'we walked to and fro from the court without molestation, knowing that an Orange rioter never moves without orders. Unlike the nationalist mobster he is a disciplined unit. Orange leaders control the rank and file when things get out of hand by touching the "soft pedal".'⁵⁰ That the nationalist view of the Ulster question was so resistant to change, however, was partly due to the fact that, in their personal relations

with Orangemen, Parnellites found evidence to support that view. This was especially the case with Colonel Saunderson, the leader of the Ulster unionist group in parliament, who, for many, personified Ulster unionism.

Saunderson proclaimed that northern protestants would never desert their southern brethren, thereby fuelling the belief among home rulers that they would ultimately accept home rule.⁵¹ But more importantly, Saunderson's carefree manner and personal friendliness towards Parnellites helped to persuade them that his frequent threats of civil war, if home rule were enacted, were bluff, and could be readily dismissed. For example, John Dillon, in his lecture 'The survival of Irish nationality', delivered to the Cork Young Ireland Society in June 1886, described Saunderson as a man who would be popular in Ireland yet:

He is in the habit of talking about civil war in Ulster, and at the same time he cracks so many jokes that he keeps the house all the time he is speaking in a roar, and the impression he makes is that he does not care a half-crown whether home rule is granted or not. (laughter). For a man who declares he is about to take the field, it is most extraordinary to see how he keeps up his spirits. 52

Similarly, T. D. Sullivan described Saunderson's threatened rebellion as 'mere Saundersonian slap-dash, with about as much substance in it as a soap-bubble'.⁵³ Unlike Dillon and Sullivan, Justin McCarthy accepted that Saunderson would

sacrifice his life for his cause, but nevertheless wrote:

Just after he has delivered one of his fiery speeches denouncing the Irish nationalists as a body, and challenging them to raise the flag of rebellion in Ulster in order that he and his Orangemen may have the long-wished-for chance of driving across the frontier such of them as have not left their bodies within it, he may be seen sitting in the smoking-room with two or three of these same Irish nationalists, exchanging jokes and humorous sayings and compliments and chaff. 54

It is somewhat ironical, that the very qualities that contributed so much to Saunderson's popularity in parliament and in Ulster, were also those that helped persuade Parnellites that Orange threats were not to be taken seriously.

Indeed, this point was not lost on some sections of liberal unionist opinion in Ulster. In an editorial attacking Saunderson's 'self-assumed' leadership of Ulster unionism, the Weekly Northern Whig denounced his 'Orangeism' because it gave credibility to the nationalist view that only Orange extremists were opposed to them in Ulster. Moreover, Saunderson

perpetrates jokes, some good, some bad, but all in speeches which represent the Ulster protestants as likely to be ruined by the home rule scheme of the government and all similar proposals. If consequences are so terrible as...Saunderson would represent, why should he so inappropriately joke about them before a majority of liberals prejudiced against him and his cause?....It would be well if he showed a little more sense and a little less levity on a great political question which is to us one of life and death. 55

The emphasis laid on the adverse effect of Saunderson's flippancy on liberals, is very much to the point, for their appreciation of the Ulster problem was no more perceptive than that of Parnellites.

GLADSTONE, LIBERALS AND ULSTER

In the same way that the cabinet's role in determining the government's general Irish policy had been very much subordinate to Gladstone's, so also was this the case in regard to the Ulster problem. His conversion to home rule and formulation of a home rule scheme in 1886, aggravated this problem in two important respects: while the home rule bill heightened unionist hostility to self-government by failing to provide specific safeguards for northern protestants,⁵⁶ Gladstone's vindication of the nationalist case for home rule strengthened their belief that their approach to the Ulster issue was correct and needed no improvement. Moreover, of those cabinet members who were closely associated with Gladstone's Irish policy, none, with the exception of Lord Spencer, had any useful experience of Ireland; and Spencer, whose influence with Gladstone was known to be considerable, had a very unflattering opinion of Ulster protestants. His publicly stated opinion was an endorsement of the widely held view among liberals that they consisted mainly of intemperate bigots:

I have some experience of Ireland. I have been there over eight years, and yet I don't know of any specific instance where there has been religious intolerance on the part of Roman Catholics against their protestant fellow-countrymen. Bitter religious animosity has been shown, but where? In Ulster, where, I believe, the protestants have been the chief cause of keeping up the animosity. 57

Spencer's views on Ulster may be taken as representing an important element of cabinet opinion generally on the Ulster question, given the lack of actual experience of Ulster among its members, and the reiteration of such views in much Parnellite propaganda and by other sources. For example, Wilfrid Blunt, the tory home ruler, reporting on the Ulster question from Belfast for the Pall Mall Gazette, declared that the home rule cause was making great progress in Ulster: unionist talk of civil war was bluff, designed merely to enable them to hold on to their monopoly of public offices, from which Roman Catholics were excluded through discrimination. Home rule would sweep this state of affairs away—'hence the bitterness of the Orange side'.⁵⁸

Blunt's assessment of the nature of Ulster unionism corresponded broadly with that of Henry Labouchere, one of Gladstone's few, but close, informants on Irish affairs. In a letter to The Times in December 1885, Labouchere erroneously declared:

...the area over which the Orangemen hold sway is growing smaller and smaller every year. Many of the presbyterians of Ulster have already thrown in their lot with the home rulers. There is now but one single northern Irish county left which does not return a Parnellite-viz. Antrim. In four Ulster counties - Monaghan, Cavan, Donegal, and Fermanagh (sic)- no one but Parnellites have been chosen. 59

The views of Spencer, Blunt and Labouchere on the nature of the Ulster opposition to home rule, exhibit characteristics which strongly influenced the liberal approach to that problem. Like Parnellites, they identified unionism generally with protestant bigotry, but in particular with extreme Orangemen who had no legitimate grievances against home rule and who wanted merely to discriminate against Roman Catholics: their talk of civil war was bluff. Thus Ulster unionism was discreditable and morally reprehensible. Again, the 1885 general election showed that Parnellites were making great gains in Ulster - 17 Parnellites and 16 unionists were returned - and that Orangeism would eventually die out. As was noted with reference to nationalists, this analysis was not likely to facilitate either an accurate estimate of the reality of the Ulster problem or effective action to solve it.

It has been argued, however, that if Gladstone had taken more pains to obtain Joseph Chamberlain's support for his home rule plan, the Ulster problem, 'which he understood much better than either Gladstone or Morley', would have been examined more realistically.⁶⁰ This proposition is highly debateable.

Chamberlain's knowledge of Ulster - despite his emphasis on the Ulster question as an obstacle to home rule - was not more profound than that of his contemporaries. For example, it was pointed out by Canon Malcolm MacColl that Chamberlain's national council scheme of 1885 did not allow for a separate council for Ulster, and as the national council was to have control of the burning question between protestants and catholics of education, 'it is clear that Mr Chamberlain...contemplated no special provision for Ulster'.⁶¹ Again, when he began to consider special treatment for Ulster in the form of a local assembly, in December 1885, it was one to include all of Ulster:⁶² given the fact that the province was almost equally divided between protestants and catholics, few protestants would have been persuaded that an assembly of this nature would have safeguarded adequately their interests. Not surprisingly, Henry Labouchere, his associate at this time, remarked: 'Your Ulster fervour does not wash.'⁶³ Thus had Chamberlain been converted to home rule it is unlikely that the liberal approach to the Ulster question would have been significantly different. Moreover, the cabinet's difficulties in dealing with Ulster were compounded by the conflicting information and suggestions supplied by the two liberal M.P.s most closely associated with the north of Ireland, James Bryce and Sir Charles Russell, the English attorney general.

Bryce was alone in arguing forcefully the case for

special treatment of Ulster protestants in the home rule scheme. In a memorandum of considerable length entitled 'The case of the Ulster protestants', Bryce, who was born in Belfast and many of whose close relations - uncles and aunts - still lived there,⁶⁴ set out to show that Ulster protestant resistance to home rule was genuine and was not solely the preserve of a narrow bigoted Orange clique.

He claimed to speak principally for Ulster presbyterians who were unable to sit in parliament 'because the Roman Catholics, by whose help alone they could carry elections against the Orangemen, have usually played them false'. However, they deserved credit for their fidelity to liberalism in difficult circumstances and 'are the best element in the population of the island'.⁶⁵

Bryce argued that of the two broad religious groups in Ulster, in terms of wealth and intelligence: 'The protestants are of course incomparably superior to the catholics in both respects. It is the Scottish colony that has made north-east Ireland prosperous.'⁶⁶ He then emphasised that Ulster protestants were socially and commercially connected with Liverpool and Scotland, having little to do with the rest of Ireland and did not appreciate the reasons which induced Englishmen to make changes in Irish government. They feared that an Irish parliament would be priest-ridden,⁶⁷ would "Romanize" the whole education system and otherwise damage their Ulster industries

and 'philanthropic enterprises'.⁶⁸ Emphasising that Ulster presbyterians were not fanatics,⁶⁹ he argued that they nevertheless expected civil war in Ulster if they were placed under a Dublin parliament.⁷⁰ Although they were not prepared to say what safeguards would secure their interests, believing that home rule could still be defeated totally, 'their resistance to some sort of Irish legislative body would be much diminished ...and the danger (which is quite real) of a conflict between northern protestants and catholics removed', if safeguards to allay their anxieties were introduced into the government's home rule scheme.⁷¹

Bryce went on to suggest, vaguely, some restriction on a Dublin government's authority over Ulster or 'a local self-governing body or bodies whose consent should be needed to give validity to any act' of a Dublin parliament. Some such safeguard was necessary both to conciliate 'the best element' in the Ulster population and to give home rule a chance of working peacefully.⁷²

However, despite the forcefulness with which Bryce argued his case, whatever effect it may have had on the cabinet was greatly diminished by a counter-memorandum produced almost immediately by Sir Charles Russell. Russell, an Ulster catholic and an eminent lawyer, was a liberal, not a nationalist, and had only come to accept home rule at the same time as Gladstone.⁷³ He was provoked to write by what he took to be

Bryce's erroneous analysis of the Ulster problem. He set out not only to reject Bryce's argument but to explain 'what the Ulster difficulty really means'. He refuted Bryce's claim that catholics had always played the Ulster presbyterians false: 'no statement could be further from the truth'. On the contrary, liberal presbyterians, although they relied on catholic support, never supported Roman Catholics for parliament: 'I speak from personal experience'.⁷⁴ Russell condemned Bryce's reference to catholics 'as if they were an altogether inferior race of beings', and argued that the real cause of protestant opposition to home rule was the religious one. Many Ulster protestants

would regard the dominance of the catholic majority of the people, even constitutionally and reasonably expressed, as little short of persecution; and they have been so long accustomed to look upon themselves as a favoured class, to be regarded exceptionally, that they have not yet been able to accommodate to the notion of being neither more nor less before the law than equals of their catholic fellow-citizens. I feel strongly that once they understand that they have no right to be regarded in any exceptional way, and must cast in their lot on equal terms with their catholic brethren, that the repugnance which they now feel would be greatly lessened, and in time altogether cease. 75

In effect, Russell's argument was that it would be wrong to cater to Ulster unionist objections to home rule given that the basis of their objections was morally reprehensible; a point he emphasised by citing Belfast, Londonderry

and Lurgan, as examples of protestant bigotry in jobs and political offices.⁷⁶ As to Bryce's suggestion that a separate legislative body might be provided for protestant Ulster, he declared:

It seems to me impossible to suggest the conferring of any separate autonomy upon Ulster as a whole, or upon that small part of Ulster which may be called distinctly non-catholic, and I see great peril in the future to the experiment of a national parliament should such a distinction be established. The peril would be twofold; if exceptional favour were to be extended on religious grounds to protestants in Ulster, or in certain counties in Ulster, would that bode well for the position of protestants in the rest of Ireland? But further, if the experiment of a native parliament is to be tried, ought it not to be tried with the aid of the intelligence and experience which every part of the country and every class of the community can supply to the common stock? I submit that no section ought to be heard to allege that they refuse to take pari passu with the rest of their fellow-countrymen, their share in the government of their common country. 77

The chief grievance in Ulster that Russell recognised was related to the land question, and if it was impressed on protestant tenant-farmers that a great land purchase scheme was to accompany home rule 'this will have an important influence on them regardless of religious division'. Again, if it was also impressed on them that a national authority was necessary to implement the land purchase scheme, their opposition to home rule 'will, I think, be materially abated'.⁷⁸ Of the two reports submitted to the cabinet by Bryce and Russell, there is good reason for thinking that Russell's was the more

influential. Bryce was, in the main, a lone voice among liberals in urging the case of Ulster protestants, and whatever impression his argument would have had with cabinet ministers, it would not have been helped by his obvious ethnic prejudices in their favour. Russell's submission, on the other hand, had the advantage of fitting well with prevailing liberal ideas on Orange bigotry, on the place of Ulster protestants in the Irish nation, and on the view that the only serious question that concerned Ulster, apart from that of education, was the land question. Indeed this point was also impressed on Lord Spencer by one of his Irish contacts, the protestant home ruler, Samuel Walker.⁷⁹ Moreover, when Ulster liberals declared against home rule at their convention in Belfast, in March 1886, any effect it may have had on the liberal cabinet was diminished by nationalist claims that the convention contained a considerable minority in favour of home rule.⁸⁰ Nor, indeed, was their case greatly furthered by the action of some members of the Ulster liberal deputations who petitioned liberal ministers against home rule in 1886.

Adam Duffin, a member of at least one deputation, has recorded how, when they managed to obtain interviews with leading liberals, one of their speakers, Finlay M'Cance, reacted to comments with which he disagreed: 'He quite shouted down some of the men we were interviewing when they were trying to make an observation. Much to our horror'.⁸¹ Another member

of the deputation, Robert McGeogh, tried to circumvent Gladstone's inability or refusal to meet the deputation, by enclosing his views on the Ulster problem in an extensive letter, which could only have reinforced the already unfavourable image of Ulster unionists in liberal circles. McGeogh concentrated on the fact that the linen trade was peculiar to, and had flourished only in, Ulster, despite the ideal conditions which existed elsewhere in Ireland. The 'fatal drawback' to its success outside Ulster, he claimed, was the 'undue interference' of the catholic clergy with the factory hands; deciding who should be employed, dictating how the firms should be run, and 'lastly, but not least' the enforced closure of businesses on saints' days, numbering some 15-20 per year. Parnellites, he argued, were jealous of the prosperity of the linen industry because it was 'chiefly protestant owned', and because protestant employees were loyal to Britain and held in check their 'disloyal and catholic fellow-workmen'. If placed under a Dublin parliament the linen industry would be destroyed by nationalists.⁸²

To support this contention, McGeogh enclosed a leaflet containing examples of Irish catholic newspaper articles, apparently hostile to the linen trade.⁸³ His letter exhibited a sectarian spirit which seemed to colour most Ulster unionist arguments, and this must have militated strongly against a sympathetic treatment of the Ulster protestant case; not just

with the cabinet generally, which knew little of Ulster, but especially with Gladstone, whose knowledge of the province was equally sparse and who was in the process of formulating his Irish scheme virtually single-handed. How did he react to the emergence of Ulster protestant opposition to home rule?

For Gladstone, an obvious point of contact with Ulster protestants should have been the liberals of the province. However, even before the rapid development of the Ulster unionist movement in 1886, his attitude to this group - and Irish liberals generally - was fast developing into one of contempt. R. B. O'Brien has described his opinion of them during a meeting in November 1885:

"The Irish liberals", he said with an expression of sublime scorn which I shall never forget, "the Irish liberals." Are there any liberals in Ireland? Where are they? I must confess (with a magnificent roll of the voice) that I feel a good deal of difficulty in recognising these Irish liberals you talk about; and (in delightfully scoffing accents...) I think Ireland would have a good deal of difficulty in recognising them either. 84

Gladstone clearly was in a process of estrangement from the very section of Ulster opinion, which, though it was opposed to home rule, was at the same time most likely to acquiesce in a home rule scheme if provisions to secure Ulster protestant interests were provided. It was a process which would only have been encouraged, both by the nature of the arguments made by Ulster unionists and their supporters, and by Spencer's

views on Ulster. Certainly it is a fact that Gladstone refused to meet Ulster unionist deputations at any time during the 1886 home rule crisis. He also, in common with his cabinet, regarded the threat of Ulster armed resistance to home rule as bluff. Indeed, the Irish chief secretary, John Morley, contemptuously dismissed reports that protestants were drilling in Ulster⁸⁵ and declared that the R.I.C. would easily deal with 'unruly Orangemen' if violence broke out.⁸⁶

Gladstone's view of these reports was more restrained, but no less explicit. In the course of introducing his home rule bill he declared:

...if, upon any occasion, by an individual or section, violent measures have been threatened in certain emergencies, I think the best compliment I can make to those who have threatened us is to take no notice whatever of the threats, but to treat them as momentary ebullitions, which will pass away with the fears from which they spring, and at the same time to adopt on our part every reasonable measure for disarming those fears. ⁸⁷

But what precisely was Gladstone's policy for dealing with Ulster?

Gladstone's conception of the separate interests of Ulster protestants was inadequate to say the least. He apparently believed, as late as the autumn of 1885, that these did not extend further than concern over the education question, which, however, did not require special consideration, as 'I

think there is no doubt Ulster would be able to take care of itself in respect to education'.⁸⁸ His views on this subject do not appear to have progressed greatly following his assumption of office, and the policy he was to follow was already settled by 14 March: he decided to hold open 'the question as to some part of the north', though the Ulster problem would not be allowed to stand in the way of conferring a parliament on Ireland.⁸⁹ Essentially, this position remained unchanged throughout the home rule debate. That it did so, was in large measure due to the tactics of Ulster unionists in meeting the home rule challenge.

Convinced that they could defeat home rule for Ireland in general, Ulster unionists refused to formulate any special arrangement for Ulster alone, even though there was a good chance, that had they done so, their wishes would have been fulfilled. James Bryce informed his uncle, in confidence, that Lord Spencer and Gladstone would, he believed, 'agree to some plan, were any proposed by the Ulstermen, but the latter, in spite of my repeated entreaties, will propose nothing'.⁹⁰ As Bryce recorded many years later, given their complete aversion to home rule this was tactically the right approach for Ulster unionists to adopt, but at the same time it also helped to sustain Gladstone's ignorance of the strength and nature of Ulster unionism. He always took the view that if safeguards, or special arrangements, were to be made for Ulster

protestants, the onus was on them, and not him, to formulate them. Bryce noted:

I tried more than once to make him understand how serious this difficulty was, how amazed the north of Ireland liberals were at this change of front, and what obstinate opposition they would offer. He always replied, "Let them make some suggestions as to what safeguards they want". 91

This, however, Ulster unionists consistently refused, or were unable,⁹² to do, so that when special arrangements for Ulster were proposed - ranging from the exclusion of part of Ulster from the home rule bill and autonomy for it,⁹³ to provision for certain rights to remain with an Ulster provisional council - Gladstone felt justified in declaring:

there is not one of them which has appeared to us to be so completely justified either upon its merits or by the weight of opinion supporting and recommending it, as to warrant our including it in the bill and proposing it to parliament upon our responsibility. 94

This situation remained unchanged when the home rule bill was defeated on 7 June. While not retreating from the attitude he had taken up on 8 April, of giving constructive consideration to suggestions from Ulstermen on their situation, Gladstone explained: 'yet I cannot see that any certain plan for Ulster has made any serious or effective progress'. Instead, he placed much importance on a recent declaration by Colonel

Saunderson, the Ulster unionist leader, emphatically disclaiming 'the severance of Ulster from the rest of Ireland'.⁹⁵ But notwithstanding the influence of unionist tactics on Gladstone's attitude to the Ulster issue, it would be wrong to overlook other important factors.

It is highly probable, that like his cabinet colleagues and Irish informants, he was influenced by the fact that the Parnellite sweep at the 1885 general election gave them a psychologically important parliamentary majority of one in Ulster, and, as was noted,⁹⁶ it appeared to some that this trend would continue. Certainly Gladstone endorsed Parnell's view⁹⁷ that a home rule parliament for all Ireland would soon dissolve divisions between the people; that a separate parliament for the three most protestant counties of Ulster would still leave 'unprotected' more than half of the protestant population of Ireland; and that all protestants belonged to the Irish nation. Thus, despite his apparently objective stance on the Ulster question, there is no doubt that his outlook was essentially synonymous with that of the Parnellite party. When William O'Brien informed the commons that 'instead of depriving them [Ulster unionists] of any power they possess at the moment, this [home rule] bill proposes to confer upon them power of an enormous character', Gladstone ejaculated, 'hear, hear!'; repeating this when O'Brien declared: 'power which they have lost, and which by no earthly possibility can

they hope to recover without this bill'.⁹⁸

Another factor which considerably influenced Gladstone's view of the Ulster question, however, was his current absorption in the history of Irish nationalism. His preoccupation with the history of Grattan's parliament and the part played in establishing it by Ulster protestants, convinced him that they were essentially nationalists. Gladstone informed the commons:

...it should be borne in mind that there was at that time [1799-1800] in existence the greatest difference in sentiment from what we now witness in Ireland. The north was more opposed to that [act of] union probably than the south....I believe that the Irish national patriotic sentiment which I have mentioned with sympathy was more vivid in the north of Ireland than any other quarter. 99

The extent to which the idea that Irish protestants were really nationalists, was to take hold of his mind, will be seen in his approach to the Ulster question in the period 1886-92.¹⁰⁰ More immediately, though, it was a view that played a significant role in the Parnellite argument on Ulster during the parliamentary debate on home rule.

GRATTAN'S PARLIAMENT, ULSTER PROTESTANTS AND IRISH NATIONALITY

Claiming that Ulster was as essentially Irish and nationalist as any other part of Ireland, nationalists regarded the Ulster

problem as consisting of the specific arguments against home rule put by Ulster unionists, and the solution of that problem as lying in showing those arguments to be false. Consequently, when the case was put that Ulster was anti-nationalist and religiously distinct from the rest of Ireland, Parnellites replied by recourse to the central unifying symbol of nationalist ideology: Grattan's parliament. The predominant role of Ulster protestants in achieving parliamentary independence in the 1780s provided nationalists with 'evidence' that Ulstermen were an integral part of the Irish nation.

John Dillon, in parliament, and in a lecture to the Young Ireland Society, compared the actions of the Ulster unionists' ancestors with their 'degenerate descendants...the Archdales, the Vernons, the Saundersons'. Detailing the nationalist activities of Ulstermen in 1782, Dillon declared: 'The man who says that by their past history...protestants and catholics are marked out apart is an unscrupulous party politician, or else ignorant of Irish history.' Ulster protestants had been perverted by foreign influences and Dublin Castle government, but even in the darkest hour the best protestants stood by the national cause.¹⁰¹ This argument was also made by William O'Brien,¹⁰² however, although important, it was not all of the nationalist case on the Ulster question. Equally important, as will be seen, were the statistics on religious division in the province. In fact most nationalist speeches exhibited a contradictory strain of argument. Parnellites

claimed that the 'nationalist' activities of Ulster protestants in 1782 showed that that community was essentially nationalist; but if asked to demonstrate the extent to which Ulster was nationalist, they invariably identified nationalism with the catholic community there and argued that it was equal to, or larger than, the protestant and unionist community.

The religious demography of the province had long played an important part in nationalist arguments. Writing in 1880, R. B. O'Brien used the statistics of religious affiliation in Ulster to counter the unionists' 'Ulster' claims.¹⁰³ What these figures, taken from the 1871 census, revealed, was that over the whole province Roman Catholics numbered 47.9 per cent of the population. More specifically, in the 'loyalist' counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry, the statistics showed the catholics accounted for at least a third of the population, numbering 338,407, to a protestant population of 683,811. In the five nationalist counties of Donegal, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Monaghan, and Cavan, an undisputable catholic majority existed: this area comprised 459,159 catholics and 225,698 protestants. The importance of these statistics to the nationalist argument was incalculable: the catholic majority in five of nine Ulster counties gave nationalists a psychologically important 'majority' overall, while the substantial catholic presence in the four most protestant counties, together with their belief that, except for Orangemen, protestants could be won over to home rule,

served to validate the nationalist strategy of 'winning' Ulster by constantly increasing their parliamentary representation there - a strategy, they believed, that had proved itself at the 1885 general election. Thus during the home rule debate Parnellites showed no inclination to accept special treatment for the province, in any form.

John Redmond's speech in the commons on 13 May 1886, was typical of nationalist arguments on the Ulster problem. Having made the usual references to the 'nationalist' activities of northern protestants in Grattan's day, Redmond proceeded to cite the facts of religious division in the north to illustrate the extent to which Ulster was nationalist. Quoting a recent parliamentary return to show that protestant Ulster did not exist, he declared that 48 per cent of the population was catholic, and if Belfast was left out the catholics were '55 per cent of the whole population'. Moreover, even the most distinctly protestant portion of Ulster - Antrim and parts of Down and Armagh - had a considerable catholic population. This area comprised 542,862 protestants and 188,289 catholics, while in the rest of the province, protestants numbered 316,647 and catholics 645,279.

Rejecting Joseph Chamberlain's argument that a separate parliament for Ulster was necessary, Redmond declared that it was not Ulster protestants that might need protection but those in the three southern provinces who were in 'such a miserable minority.' But even if an Ulster parliament were constituted.

the extent of nationalist support in the province would ensure that it contained 'a majority of catholics'. Similarly, on the question of whether Ulster would violently resist the enactment of the home rule scheme, Redmond declared that the Orangemen would first have to subdue the Ulster catholics, and 'the idea of the protestant portion of Ulster conquering the catholic portion is as absurd as the contention that Lancashire could conquer the northern cities of England'.¹⁰⁴ Redmond's argument was endorsed by T. D. Sullivan.¹⁰⁵ J. F. X. O'Brien¹⁰⁶ and Justin McCarthy, who also dismissed talk of Ulster resistance as bluff: such talk had been inspired by English politicians such as Lord Randolph Churchill.¹⁰⁷ Citing the extent of nationalist support in the province, McCarthy declared: 'We have shown that Ulster is...a nationalist province of Ireland.'¹⁰⁸

Of all Parnellite speakers on the Ulster question, however, it was Thomas Sexton who used the religious demography of Ulster to the best effect. He put it that Ulster was no more protestant than the rest of Ireland: 'leave out Belfast, and at the last census the catholics had a majority of 100,000 over the whole province'. Sexton developed this idea further by arguing that since the last census 'the emigration of the protestants has greatly increased, especially to British North America'.¹⁰⁹ Again, like other Parnellites, he referred, both to his party's parliamentary majority in Ulster and to the likelihood of nationalist control of a provincial Ulster parliament. However,

he also sought to encourage Ulster protestant acceptance of the home rule scheme by emphasising their moral responsibility to the small protestant community in southern Ireland. He declared that the Ulster unionist leader, Colonel Saunderson, would be denounced by the world as a 'dastard' if he deserted the 300,000 southern protestants: 'Those 300,000 are in the midst of a catholic population of 3,000,000. They would never exercise a vote, they would never have a single member in parliament, they could not form a constituency anywhere, they would be absolutely dumb in the hands of the legislature.'

Turning to the question of whether a separate parliament should be created for the small protestant part of Ulster, he argued that given the complex interrelated nature of religious affiliation in the province such a legislature would simply create another persecuted catholic minority there. If such a legislature were constituted and Ireland were to have two parliaments:

You would have not one but two oppressed minorities. You would have the 200,000 catholics and the 500,000 protestants of the north of Ireland, and the 3,000,000 catholics and 300,000 protestants of the south in the other provinces, so that in order to please 500,000 people, or the men who are supposed to represent them, you will outrage the feelings of 200,000 catholics and 300,000 protestants. If you care to pursue the fantastic theory...down to the point of a parish parliament, you would not solve the question, because the catholic population so interpenetrates every portion of Ulster that even if you have a parliament in every parish you would still have a minority in each. There is no safe standing ground except to treat Ireland as a unit, and the demand of Ireland as a demand of the people of Ireland. 110

The arguments used by both Redmond and Sexton as to the 'vulnerability' of southern protestants if Ulster was excluded from the jurisdiction of the home rule parliament, were taken up and endorsed by Parnell on the last day of the debate.¹¹¹

The 'vulnerability' argument was thus not so unique to Parnell as Dr Lyons has assumed: 'his comment on this was...the voice of the quintessential southern unionist which spoke through the mouth of the renegade landlord'.¹¹² It was more the case that Parnell, Redmond and Sexton, were simply seeking to employ one of the Ulster unionists' own claims - that they would not desert their fellow protestants in southern Ireland - in the home rule cause.

Certainly Parnell's attitude to Ulster unionism during the general election of 1886 was as contemptuous as that of his party generally. Speaking in his first major election speech at Portsmouth, Parnell held up a political map of Ireland before his audience and pointed derisively to the Ulster unionist constituencies, coloured, not very tactfully, in yellow: 'this little yellow patch covered by my forefinger represents protestant Ulster - (loud laughter) - and they say now they want a separate parliament for this little yellow patch up in the north-east'.¹¹³

The forcefulness with which nationalists established - to their own satisfaction - that Ulster belonged to nationalist Ireland, was equally evident in their attacks on the

'economic' case against home rule made by northern unionists. As it was often presented, this argument claimed that Ulster was more prosperous than the other Irish provinces, and was a protestant and Anglo-Saxon province fighting against domination by papists and Celts who would tax the north to revive the commercially lethargic south.

THE QUESTION OF ULSTER'S PROSPERITY :

A CONFLICT OF ANALYSIS

The issue of Ulster's prosperity in relation to other regions of Ireland is a deceptively simple one. It has sometimes been assumed that the fact of Ulster's greater prosperity in this respect was so obvious as to hardly require investigation.¹¹⁴ However, it will be seen here that the issue was much more complicated than it outwardly seemed, especially when it came to establishing the facts of relative prosperity.

The unionist argument of Ulster's prosperity in relation to the three southern provinces was not, in fact, a product of the 1886 home rule debate, but was already well established in 1880. R. B. O'Brien succinctly explained how he thought the Ulster argument influenced English public opinion during the land war:

But, it is said, all these disturbances, crimes and discontent prevail only in the south. In the north all is prosperity

happiness and peace. Why, it is asked? And the answer is invariably given, because the northerners spring from a different race, and belong to a different religion. The northern is an Anglo-Saxon and a protestant, and the southern is a Celt and a papist. The prosperity of one district is attributable to protestant energy, and the poverty of the other to catholic indolence...this explanation as it appears to me is founded upon a grave misconception of fact and is an unwarrantable reading of history. 115

Mabel Sharman Crawford, daughter of the famous Ulster tenant-right advocate, writing in 1887, declared this view to be prevalent also in Ulster: 'The widespread belief that Irish poverty and turbulence originate in the baleful influences of creed and race is very generally held as an unquestionable truth in north-east Ulster, where I lived.'¹¹⁶ It was only to be expected that in the heat of the home rule debate arguments of this nature would be used.

The most prominent speech in this respect was delivered in the house of commons by G. J. Goschen, who sought to validate statistically - albeit implicitly - the stereotype of northern Anglo-Saxon protestant prosperity and southern Celtic and catholic poverty. Using the statistics of income tax culled from schedule D (professional and commercial incomes), he argued that if Ulster was excluded from the home rule scheme, a Dublin parliament would be unable to raise enough taxes to run the government of the country: excluding Dublin, the total return under schedule D was £5,584,000, of which £2,520,000 or 45 per cent, was contributed by Ulster. He

continued:

But in Ulster itself the contrast between the industrial condition of separate districts - I will call them for the moment the loyalist and the nationalist districts - is very striking. Out of nine counties of Ulster, four form one predominantly loyal - namely Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry. Those counties, which returned to parliament 15 loyalists and 4 Parnellites, show a return of £2,220,000 under schedule D. The remaining five counties - namely Cavan, Donegal, Monaghan, Fermanagh, and Tyrone, which are predominantly nationalist, and which returned to parliament 13 nationalists and only 1 loyalist, show a return under schedule D. of only £300,000... The proportion contributed by loyal Ulster is 88 per cent and that by nationalist Ulster is 12 per cent.

Goschen also quoted some adverse comments on the Ulster linen industry in the Belfast Morning News to prove the antagonism of nationalists to Ulster industries.¹¹⁷

It was, perhaps, to be expected that Goschen's claims would be answered first by this newspaper. In the issue of 24 April, T. G. Rigg, in answering Goschen, amassed figures from all schedules of income tax assessment to produce a radically different picture of Ulster prosperity in relation to the rest of Ireland. The first fault he pointed to was Goschen's absence of Dublin from the return of schedule D, (professions and trades): he continued by presenting a detailed examination of Ulster's position in Ireland, in a table giving the property and profits assessed income tax for the year ending 1880, under schedules A, B, D, and E. In round figures, the result was as follows:

TABLE 3

Irish income tax assessment 1879-80

	population 1881	income tax assessment 1879-80 (£s)	per capita assessment (shillings)
Leinster	1,300,000	13,300,000	207
Munster	1,400,000	8,000,000	120
Ulster	1,700,000	10,000,000	114
Connaught	800,000	3,000,000	73

Rigg also produced an impressive array of statistics to show that Belfast's income tax assessment, per head of population, was lowest when compared with Great Britain's largest cities; including Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Dublin, Newcastle, Bradford, Bristol, Nottingham and Birmingham. While Belfast remained at the bottom of the scale, Dublin ranked fourth highest. To the question why, if Belfast was so prosperous, it did not rival the great British cities, Rigg concluded: 'Belfast is comparatively poor because it is the business centre of a comparatively poor district'. Dublin was comparatively rich because of its situation in one of the most fertile parts of Ireland, and 'the really active and prosperous portion'. He also compiled a table comparing Ulster and the rest of Ireland purely on schedule D and leaving out

Dublin. In this comparison, Ulster, with a population of 1,700,000 and a total assessment of £2,500,000, showed a per capita assessment of 29 shillings, compared to 34 shillings for the rest of Ireland, which had a population of 3,400,000 and a total schedule D assessment of £6,400,000.

Attacking the implication in Goschen's claims that Ulster's loyalist counties were richer than the nationalist ones in the proportion of 88 to 12 per cent, as the simplest nonsense, Rigg included the schedule D assessment on which Goschen had based his argument, with schedules A, B, and E, to produce a different picture of the relative prosperity of the two areas.

TABLE 4

Ulster income tax assessment 1879-80

	income tax assessment 1879-80 (£s)	per capita assessment (shillings)
Donegal		
Cavan		
Fermanagh	3,000,000	87
Monaghan		
Tyrone		
Antrim		
Armagh	7,000,000	133
Down		
Londonderry		

Finally, although Goschen had made no reference to valuation statistics, Rigg emphasised Leinster's greater prosperity over Ulster with statistics showing the valuation of rateable property in the two provinces, and with Dublin left out of the Leinster assessment. In this comparison Ulster's valuation was £4,300,000; only marginally higher than that of Leinster, which stood at £3,900,000.

Rigg's arguments were repeated and extended on 15 and 22 May in the Weekly News, while in parliament they were taken up by J. C. Flynn,¹¹⁸ Parnell,¹¹⁹ and T. M. Healy.¹²⁰ Thomas Sexton, in his contribution to the statistics debate, also argued that if part of Ulster was prosperous, it was not due to 'any cause of race or creed', but to the fact that while manufacturing industry was encouraged and 'Ulster custom' established, industry in the rest of Ireland was 'crushed out of existence'.¹²¹ However, it was on the statistics of income tax assessment that the debate really turned, and when these were examined for all four provinces a different picture from that given to parliament by Goschen was produced. Nevertheless, they also tended to give an exaggerated view of the prosperity of nationalist areas. For example, what Rigg's demonstration of Dublin's greater prosperity over Belfast did not point out, was that the assessment of income tax was disproportionately swelled in Dublin's favour by the fact that most of the major banks, railway companies, insurance offices

and all government offices, had their staffs of officials and headquarters there¹²² a factor which would have complicated, not just an assessment of the relative prosperity of the two cities, but of Ulster in relation to the three southern provinces. Moreover, it was almost impossible to extricate and apportion to each province the amount of business each company conducted there.¹²³ Another complicating factor was the unknown quantity of English and Scottish capital invested in Ireland through Dublin, and Irish capital invested in Great Britain, which did not show up on Irish income tax returns.¹²⁴

But Rigg's picture of the relative prosperity of Belfast and Dublin is suspect in other ways too. For instance, it fails to show the respective development of the two cities in the period from 1871 to 1881. In this period, Belfast's growing prosperity was underlined by a dramatic rise in population, from 174,400 to 208,100, while the number of electors rose from 14,400 to 22,000. In the same period, Dublin's population rose much less dramatically, from 267,700 to 273,000, while the number of electors actually fell from 13,100 to 12,500.¹²⁵ Thus, not only Belfast's rate of expansion dramatically greater than that of Dublin, but with a significantly smaller population in 1881 Belfast had a far superior number of people qualified to vote. A comparison of the inhabited houses in each area and their rateable valuation likewise told to Belfast's advantage.¹²⁶

Again, on the question of the relative prosperity of nationalist and unionist regions within Ulster,¹²⁷ Rigg's refutation of Goschen's argument rested on the fact that there was a relatively small difference in the per-capita assessment of the two areas. What he did not show, however, was the great difference in the population balance of the two areas; the four unionist counties having a population some 16,500 in excess of the five nationalist ones.¹²⁸ But even taking the statistics at their face value, did they prove - as was Goschen's intention when he brought up the issue of relative prosperity - that one political faction in Ireland was intrinsically more industrious than another? This was not the case, as nationalists, if pushed, would have had to admit that a large section of the income tax paid in the south, was paid by a strenuously unionist population.

Nevertheless, although the issue of comparative regional prosperity was clearly much more complicated than nationalists and unionists admitted, the fact remains that Goschen's use of income tax returns defined the terms on which the debate was largely conducted, and as was seen, it appeared to tell in the nationalists' favour. But since this was so, why was it that unionists made so much of Ulster's prosperity and why did their case fail to register? First, what was the case that could be made? Briefly, that north-east Ulster had little in common economically with the rest of Ireland: it was the

only thriving industrialised portion of Ireland, and the region's industry, being geared to external markets, owed little to the agricultural economy of rural Ireland. Thus north-east Ulster's economic well-being necessitated the close relationship with British commercial and industrial life afforded by the union, or, by a separate parliament for Ulster should home rule be enacted. An adequate formulation of this case would have presented nationalists with an argument much less easy to counter. Certainly the statistics of income tax relating to professions and trades were very important to the case for special treatment for Ulster; however, they required a more careful and qualified presentation than they received at Goschen's hands. The fact was that Goschen raised the question of relative prosperity in terms so abstract that the issue of north-east Ulster's unique industrially based prosperity became submerged in a debate about regional prosperity in general; a debate in which nationalists had the convenient task of simply providing statistics to counter his.

Like many English politicians who knew little of Ireland, north or south, it was easier for Goschen to use statistics to give credibility to a general north - south dichotomy, than it was to present a case that would stand close scrutiny, but which necessitated a fairly close familiarity with the situation to which they referred. In fact his statistics had been supplied by Adam Duffin, a prominent

Belfast liberal unionist who had met him the previous month as a member of a deputation to London to protest against home rule; and there is reason to believe that Duffin may have supplied the figures to present a more qualified case than Goschen made. Following the nationalist refutation of his argument, Goschen wrote to Duffin thanking him for having provided the figures, but adding: 'You will have seen that I put them before the house of commons in a rather different form from that in which you sent them to me and that they were much objected to by the nationalist members.' He concluded by requesting verification of the figures to offset future nationalist attacks.¹²⁹

Certainly Goschen's mishandling of them afforded a major propaganda advantage to nationalists. Derived, as they were, from the most authoritative sources available, these statistics gave a credibility to their argument on the Ulster problem that it would not otherwise have had; and given the difficulty in presenting a true picture of the northern situation Ulster unionist M.P.s did not pursue the statistical debate further.¹³⁰ Indeed when an Ulster unionist M.P. returned to it some years later he abandoned the attempt to prove Ulster's superior prosperity to nationalist Ireland in general, and argued instead, to greater effect, that the real division between Ireland's rich and poor areas, was not that between north and south, but between east and west.¹³¹

CONCLUSION

That the nationalist case on the Ulster question in 1886 was well presented can hardly be denied. However this did not bring the issue any nearer to a solution. Telling points made on the floor of the house of commons did not solve the problem of protestant rejection of home rule in northern Ireland. Indeed some parts of the nationalist argument may well have exacerbated it.

For instance, the suggestion made by Thomas Sexton that the exclusion of Ulster from the jurisdiction of a Dublin parliament would leave southern protestants 'oppressed' by catholic nationalists,¹³² can be viewed as a classic piece of ineptitude. How far such an intimation was from producing a reassessment of northern protestant attitudes to Irish autonomy can be gauged from an examination of the reaction in Ulster to the home rule scheme.

CHAPTER V

THE ULSTER PROBLEM (2): THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

AND THE LOYALIST REACTION TO HOME RULE

NATIONALITY AND ULSTER UNIONISM

Given Gladstone's intention to include Ulster in his home rule scheme it was inevitable that the question of where the national identity of northern unionists lay would come to the fore. That it did so, however, does not mean that the issue is easily resolved. One of the chief difficulties in coping with this problem is that the very meaning of terms like 'nation' and 'nationality' is imprecise. During the home rule debate both were frequently used in contexts where it is difficult to define whether or not they implied a right to statehood and independence, or, as often applied in the case of England, Scotland and Wales, were merely cultural designations referring to component parts of one political nation incorporating the whole United Kingdom.¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Ulster unionist approaches to this issue should exhibit a similar ambiguity. A not untypical utterance on the subject claimed that the Irish were 'a divided nation' consisting of 'two irreconcilable nationalities',² while T. W. Russell, soon to be liberal unionist M.P. for South Tyrone, confessed his ignorance as to whether Ireland was a nation or not.³

In approaching this subject a study has been made of a

sample of thirty unionist speeches, delivered at various venues, mainly in Ulster, during the home rule debate.⁴ These have been examined with a view to providing some insight into the extent to which northern unionists identified with the Irish catholic nationalist community and the population of Great Britain, and what modifications in their political identity, community status and material welfare, they believed the enactment of home rule would entail.

Initially an attempt was made to compile a table providing a distribution of types of identification expressed by individual speakers, including racial, national and class affinity or aversion with Great Britain and the rest of Ireland. However, the ambiguity or confusion on these subjects in virtually all the speeches examined made any kind of specific conclusions extremely difficult to arrive at. Part of the problem existed simply in the nature of the material, which social scientists would describe as 'unstructured'; that is, where information has to be deduced from the material, rather than, as in 'structured' studies, collected in answer to questionnaires. In other words, unionist speakers were not giving replies to specific questions on their concept of nationality and thus were not compelled to define their community's position in this respect. Nevertheless, what clues exist in the material does not indicate a widespread, sharply defined, view of their national identity. Some speakers,

particularly Orangemen, defined the Ulster loyalist community as racially superior to Irish nationalists; others defined their differences in mainly class terms. Some used the term 'nation' to include their own community and the population of Great Britain; others again used this term to refer to all the people of the British Isles. Moreover, race, class and national distinctions were often confusedly employed in the same speech.

At first sight these facts would seem to support the views of one of the most recent and perceptive writers on the Ulster loyalist identity, D. W. Miller.⁵ He argues that the Ulster loyalist identity cannot be explained in terms of national identity, especially British nationality. This was because they did not accept what he defines as three fundamental conditions of national membership. They did not trust the whole people of the United Kingdom, as represented in its democratic regime, as a guarantor of their civil rights, the most important of which, he argues, was the right to march and 'free expression' throughout the state's territory: they did not see themselves as 'like' the other members of the United Kingdom: they did not accept the United Kingdom as a 'terminal community within which there was the assumption of the peaceful settlement of disagreement based on the supreme value of national unity'.⁶ There are, however, several weaknesses in explaining the nature of the loyalist position within

the United Kingdom by reference to these criteria. At a general level, they relate to the basic assumption on which Miller's argument is based: the Ulster loyalist community is defined as a substantially alienated group and contrasted with the population of Great Britain amongst whom a total homogeneity of political views, values and practice, is assumed.⁷

For example, Miller's claim that government policy—by insisting that Orangemen marched only in areas where they would not provoke nationalists—was a major source of their alienation from the United Kingdom state because it treated them differently from Englishmen,⁸ is hardly credible. Throughout the nineteenth century in Great Britain there was a strong tradition of anti-popery and anti-Irish marches and gatherings, similar to that which occurred in Ulster, and which were subject to similar restrictions in terms of area so as to prevent certain violence.⁹ Thus alienation based on different or unequal treatment could hardly have existed. More importantly, though, Miller's claim that Ulster loyalists, in their readiness to enjoin conflict to enforce their 'rights', were effectively rejecting the United Kingdom as a 'terminal community within which there was the assumption of the peaceful settlement of disagreement based on the supreme value of national unity', is similarly suspect. British anti-popery protesters were as ready to enjoin conflict to enforce their 'rights', as were Ulster protestants, and had a similar motiv-

ation. Whereas the latter feared the threat to their spiritual and material security posed by catholic nationalists, the former feared the threat to the security of the state emanating from the supposed 'divided allegiance' of Roman Catholics, whom it was believed, could not be true to 'queen and country' if they were also good catholics and loyal to Rome.¹⁰ Clearly, if acceptance of a United Kingdom nationality was dependent on a rejection of violence, a considerable proportion of British opinion, including those unionists who urged Ulster to rebel, would, according to Miller's criteria, have to be considered as alienated as he claims Ulster loyalists were. Moreover, as a recent study has shown, a not inconsiderable section of the conservative party in Britain was as suspicious of the intentions of their leaders as any Ulster unionist could be.¹¹

Relatedly, Miller's view that the latter did not regard themselves as 'like' the population in Great Britain, but rather took the more calculated view, "Ulster chooses to remain British",¹² because that was the best way of protecting their interests, is not an accurate reflection of their opinion in this period. Ulster unionist attachment to the United Kingdom was not merely instrumental. As their devotion to the empire¹³ shows, they were ideologically and emotionally committed to what they saw as British values and traditions. This attitude of mind was forcefully and succinctly expressed by a deputation of four presbyterians and one baptist, who, in the course

of petitioning British political leaders against home rule in 1886, gave an interview to the Pall Mall Gazette: '...we are against the loss of our birthright as British citizens. We are against being cut off from the country to which we are proud to belong, and being disinherited of the empire which we and our fathers have helped to build up.'¹⁴ Speaking at a slightly later date, one Ulster presbyterian clergyman, in describing his own brethren's attitudes to the empire, could justly have included the protestant population of the north generally:

It is something to be an Englishman in the widest sense of the word, a citizen of the great empire on which the sun never sets, and whose flag wherever it waves, brings justice liberty and peace. Whatever quarrels with British policy...[we] may have had from time to time...the sentiment of loyalty towards, and pride in the British inheritance and commonwealth of peoples, has been common to all. 15

The extent to which these sentiments prevailed was also noted by a reporter analysing the causes of the Belfast riots in 1886. He spoke of 'the indignation aroused in northern protestants by the prospect of being cut off from the empire ¹⁶ in whose greatness they exult and in whose justice they trust'. Miller, it is true, recognises that Ulster protestants did identify with the empire, but again emphasises only the instrumental aspect of that identification; by identifying with the empire they could avoid 'the awkward question of one's political

obligation if one radically dissented from the "national" will,¹⁷ — a question which arose in relation to the Westminster parliament. As theme number 7 in table 9a shows, however, this rather cynical interpretation of loyalist motives ignores their deeply felt emotional and ideological commitment.

Such an interpretation, however, also informs the central thesis of Miller's work, which is that the essence of the Ulster loyalist relationship to the British people was 'contractarian': they came to Ireland in plantation times to perform a great colonising service on England's behalf and for the latter's part, it was bound, in return for this service, not to hand them over to their enemies; something they believed home rule would do. That such a view was a part of the northern loyalist world-view is certainly true, but as to whether it occupied the central role in their political outlook that he ascribes to it, at this time, is debatable.

In none of the thirty speeches studied in table 9a did any speaker specifically refer to such a 'contract', while only four speakers implied a contractual relationship by describing the enactment of home rule in terms of 'betrayal'. Here again, it seems, concern for their status as members of what they saw as a great progressive entity - the British empire - far outweighed notions of a merely contractual relationship with Britain; and for unionists the key to their continued inclusion in the empire was the maintenance of the act of union between Britain

and Ireland.

In other words, the maintenance of their imperial heritage was to be achieved through continued membership of the political nation comprising the whole United Kingdom. That a widespread confusion in the meaning they attached to terms like 'nation', 'nationality' and 'race', existed among loyalists, is not necessarily evidence to the contrary. Joseph Chamberlain, for example, could on one occasion deny nationality to Ireland, and on another claim that Ireland was one of four nationalities comprising the United Kingdom.¹⁸ Indeed, Ulster unionist notions of nationality and patriotism, far from being different from mainstream British thought on such matters in this period of great imperial fervour, were apparently highly representative.¹⁹ R. A. Hufford has shown that in terms of time devoted to them, the subjects of Ulster and the maintenance of the integrity of the empire through the preservation of the 'supreme sovereignty of the parliament at Westminster', were the two foremost issues in the parliamentary debate on home rule.²⁰

Thus to argue on the basis of the three criteria Miller employs, that Ulster loyalists did not fully subscribe to a sense of United Kingdom nationality, is to ignore some highly important aspects of their relationship with the British population. By not examining the population of the state as a whole he ignores the extent to which the actions of northern

unionists were paralleled by those of groups in Britain and overemphasises the homogeneity of political values and practices in the latter. Indeed it could be argued that Scotland, by retaining its own legal, administrative, and educational systems, and in having its own established church, retained many of the trappings of separate nationality and subscribed in a far more limited degree to a 'complete' sense of United Kingdom nationality and sovereignty than Ulster loyalists ever did. The national distinctiveness of Scotland was emphasised during the home rule debate by Sir Lyon Playfair:

Scotland preserved by the union all the institutions which were peculiarly national. Her own system of laws and courts of justice were maintained. Her much-cherished presbyterian form of worship was made the state form of faith. Her parochial schools and her four democratic universities, so unlike those of England, were included in the articles of the union. And...Scotland is as much a nation now as when the union act was passed. Every attempt to weaken her distinct nationality has been indignantly repelled. I am old enough to recollect how profoundly Scotland was agitated when the royal arms were altered, and when the lion of Scotland was removed from the dexter to the sinister side of the shield. 21

The case of Scotland indicates an important characteristic of United Kingdom nationality and the concept of sovereignty associated with it: both were based on compromise and were subject to qualification. In this context the insistence of some Ulster unionists that there was a limit to their loyalty to the Westminster parliament, could hardly be described as aberrant behaviour.

A related issue to that of how far northern unionists saw their national identity as British at this time, is the extent to which an Ulster 'nationalism' began to emerge. This argument has been put forward most recently by Dr Peter Gibbon. Referring, albeit, to the slightly later period of 1892, he claims that 'insofar as northern unionists laid claim to an identity which was territorially based' they 'were creating a form of nationalism'. Moreover, their claim to 'self-determination' involved the creation of a new being: 'the Ulsterman ...with the provision for him, by an array of publicists, of a unique "character", "heritage" and destiny'. Additionally, the ideology which accompanied their claim to self-determination was 'filled out' with a species of social-imperialist arguments. Unlike 1886, he argues, when unionist apprehensions about home rule were expressed in terms of a direct threat to the very lives of Ulster protestants, the emphasis in their arguments in 1892 was on the threat to Ulster's economic life and the extension of social reforms to the working-class that home rule posed.²² There is, however, reason to seriously doubt the validity of Gibbon's argument.

First, as has been seen, the territorially based identity to which the loyalist community laid claim, extended far beyond the confines of Ulster and included the rest of the United Kingdom and the empire. Secondly, the development he claims to perceive in unionist ideology in the period 1886-92, from a

literal fear for their physical well-being to more sophisticated social-imperialist arguments concerning the home rule threat to Ulster's economic life and the prospects for social reform, does not reflect the reality of the unionist world-view. Certainly as table 9a shows, they did literally fear at this time for their physical security; 24 of 30 speakers expressed this apprehension. Simultaneously, though, it also shows that the social-imperialist dimension to their ideology, which Gibbon asserts did not appear until 1892, was already well developed in 1886. Thirdly, and most importantly, the development of an 'Ulsterman' type, on which his theory of Ulster nationalism is largely dependent, did not appear in 1892, but began as early as mid-century, and must be seen in quite a different context.

The crucial event in this development was the meeting in Belfast in 1852 of the British Association, which promoted an intense interest in the heritage and history of the Ulster protestant community; and this must be seen as a local dimension of the general Victorian preoccupation with British history and racial identity that was widespread at this time.²³ The most immediate result of the Ulster phase of this phenomenon was the founding of the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, whose first series of universally popular articles was collectively entitled, 'The origins and characteristics of the people in the counties of Down and Antrim'. These articles subscribed

to prevailing race theories about the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race, which included Ulster protestants, over the Irish Celts. More specifically, the characteristics of the 'Ulsterman' that Gibbon identifies as developing in the post-1892 period - respect for law and order, thrift, hard work - were, in fact, first widely developed in this series of articles.²⁴ Thereafter, the notion of a separate Ulster ethnic identity with attendant virtues developed throughout the late nineteenth century in much the same way as such ideas did in Great Britain.²⁵

Moreover, the racial sense of Ulster loyalists was apt to be heightened by the injudicious utterances of prominent nationalists. When Michael Davitt claimed that Ulster unionists were only alien settlers in Ulster, Celtic neither by race nor habit,²⁶ The Belfast News-Letter retorted: 'We have every reason to be thankful...that Ulstermen are not Celts and not being so, why should they be subject to a government of the worst class of Celts'.²⁷ But with reference to how far this aspect of unionist thinking might be seen as supporting the view of an emergent Ulster nationalism, it must be remembered that what was being affirmed in these race theories was not just the sharp ethnic division of communities in Ireland, but also the close blood relationship of Ulster protestants with the population of Great Britain. As Colonel Waring put it in a speech at Maralin during the home rule crisis: he did not

think the English and Scots would desert 'their own flesh and blood'.²⁸

HOME RULE: THE LOYALIST REACTION

Although the Ulster unionist campaign against home rule only became fully organised in 1886, the intensity of emotion associated with it had been steadily building up in previous years. For northern loyalists the salient fact of the nationalist land and home rule campaigns had been the surrender of British liberalism to revolutionary acts and outrages: the Phoenix Park murders, dynamite explosions in London and the continuous stream of revolutionary propaganda by nationalist orators, provided for unionists the immediate background to the 'invasion' of Ulster in the winter of 1883-4. Additionally, the events associated with the 'invasion', the adverse publicity attaching to the Orange Order and the dismissal of Lord Rossmore from the bench,²⁹ intensified the feeling, especially amongst Orangemen, that they were being abandoned by the country to which they wished to remain united.³⁰ The latter's sensibilities were, moreover, greatly aggravated by the fact that in vigorously campaigning against nationalist activities in Ulster, they believed they were merely replying in a positive way to a complaint made earlier by Gladstone in a speech at Leeds, in which he lamented the failure of "the vast multitudes of loyal citizens" to "array themselves in support, and in aid of, the law".³¹

An 'Address to Lord Rossmore' signed by Lord Arthur Hill in the name of '25,000 loyalists of Ulster' succinctly stated the feeling of northern unionists: an impotent government, by failing to deal with nationalist agitators, was kindling the worst passions amongst their misguided countrymen and sowing the seeds of 'socialism, communism, and irreligion':

These agitators, having been allowed to run riot in three provinces of Ireland, proposed to carry their desolating crusade into a loyal province. An impotent government fearing to restrain them, the sentiment and manhood of Ulster responded to the insolent challenge.

For Rossmore's services in this regard he should have received the thanks of the government, and would have done 'had our rulers been faithful to the best interests of Ireland and the integrity of the empire'. Attempts to purchase the support of the 'leaders of anarchy' by insulting Rossmore and Irish loyalists afforded but 'another striking illustration of the incapacity of a government which, in India as in Ireland - Egypt as in the Transvaal - everywhere throughout her majesty's dominions, have proved themselves the most incapable advisors of the crown that this century has seen'.³²

Unionist unease, moreover, was intensified by the changes brought about by the franchise and redistribution acts of 1884-5. The extension of the franchise and redrawing of constituency boundaries led to the extension of nationalist

influence in Ulster: small parliamentary boroughs which had been a conservative preserve lost their separate representation and were merged into revised county divisions where many Catholics were given the vote for the first time.³³ These changes were largely responsible for the dramatic Parnellite successes in Ulster at the general election of 1885, when they increased their Ulster seats from 3 to 17.³⁴ It was in this context that James Bryce, soon to be closely associated with the home rule campaign, visited Belfast, and informed Ulster liberals that home rule was coming; agreed with them that the establishment of a Dublin parliament 'would be handing over the sheep to the wolves' and was reported to have told his audience: 'take my advice and buy a revolver'.³⁵ Thomas McKnight, editor of the Northern Whig, explained the state of confusion in Ulster on political affairs in January 1886:

an utterly unexpected state of things had appeared. The attitudes of parties, the intentions of public men, the questions at issue, seemed to have changed since the new parliament had been chosen, and before it had actually met....³⁶

More exactly, Ulster unionists felt doubly threatened, since Gladstone at this time was not only being associated with home rule, but the conservative party was involved in an informal alliance with Parnellites.³⁷ Ironically, given Lord Randolph Churchill's close identification with Ulster unionists

shortly afterwards, it was the belief that he was about to 'betray' Ulster protestants over home rule that moved Colonel Saunderson to re-enter politics in 1885.³⁸ Thereafter, Ulster unionists began to organise as a separate group in parliament, and at a meeting in Dublin on 18 December 1885, Saunderson obtained support for such a move from the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union.³⁹

The first meeting of this group, attended by seven Ulster M.P.s, was held on 14 January 1886, and in William Johnston's words 'unanimously decided on action'.⁴⁰ Saunderson quickly came to the fore as the leader of the group, which, it seems, met with some disapproval by leading conservatives, wary of any development that might create disunion in their ranks. Saunderson informed his wife: 'The effort made to prevent our keeping together as a separate party will come to nothing....I am very willing to work with anyone but I feel that the Ulstermen must stick together. Otherwise they should be lost in the vortex.'⁴¹ The first action of the Ulster group was to impress on Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, the chancellor of the exchequer, that unless the government quickly suppressed the National League it would lose their support.⁴² When the National League was duly proclaimed some three days later Saunderson was confident that it was 'owing to the determined stand I made with Hicks-Beach'.⁴³ This action, however, also had the result of bringing down the tory government and the

succession to power of Gladstone's liberal administration, with a commitment to Irish autonomy. With this development the forces of Ulster unionism united to oppose home rule.⁴⁴

As was seen in the preceding chapter, in order to forestall the enactment of home rule for any part of Ireland, northern unionists not only rejected the policy but also refused to formulate a plan that would secure either special treatment for Ulster, or exclusion from the jurisdiction of a Dublin parliament. The intensity of their reaction to the home rule scheme, however, can only be appreciated properly through a wider understanding of how the nationalist campaign for home rule functioned within their total world-view. There were various elements to Ulster protestant ideology and one of the most prominent was, as appendix two illustrates, their deep-rooted, historically based, view of the catholic nationalism.

Prior to the rapid development of Victorian historical research from 1860, the Ulster loyalist view that Irish catholic nationalism was a movement representing an ethnically and religiously backward people, historically intent on persecuting protestants, was ~~one~~ shared by most sections of British political opinion; a view, as was seen, that found its two most popular exponents in Macaulay and Froude.⁴⁵ Regretting his inability to comply with an invitation to speak in the province in 1886, Froude, in an open letter to Ulster unionists, declared:

The present state of things is the inevitable consequence of all that has gone before. It will end as the 1641 business ended, or the 1690, or the 1798. The anarchy will grow until it becomes intolerable. John Bull will then pull on his boots and will do as he did before. What will happen in the interval I do not pretend to guess. You in Ulster I hope to see holding your own ground. Stand steady, whatever comes. 46

Froude's identification of the contemporary home rule campaign with previous Irish rebellions naturally struck a highly responsive chord in the Ulster protestant community, mixing both assurance as to the ultimate failure of home rule with apprehension as to 'what will happen in the interval'. Moreover, this apprehension fed on the idea that catholic aggression would not be open and direct, but cowardly and treacherous.

A not insignificant element in loyalist culture was the view that when their ancestors came to Ulster in the early seventeenth century the native catholic population was generally treated fairly by protestants, but that with the outbreak of the 1641 rebellion Ulster protestants were betrayed and attacked by these same catholics.⁴⁷ In late 1885, one correspondent, writing to congratulate Colonel Saunderson on his election to parliament, expressed confidence in him as a leader of the protestant cause and concluded: 'When a protestant thinks of their cunning deeds such as the 5 November [The gun-⁴⁸ powder plot] how could they(sic) give them their support'. More specifically, Lynn Doyle has left a revealing record of how such anxieties and impressions could be inculcated from early

childhood:

Home rulers to my childish mind were a dark, subtle, and dangerous race, outwardly genial and friendly, but inwardly meditating fearful things....and one could never tell the moment they were ready to rise, murder my uncle, possess themselves of his farm, and drive out my aunt and myself to perish on the mountains....in my aunt's stories it was on the mountains we always died....⁴⁹

Well before the introduction of Gladstone's home rule bill, rumours were circulating in Ulster that nationalists and catholic priests were already raffling protestant owned farms and properties, to be confiscated on the enactment of a scheme for Irish autonomy; their intention was 'to drive the successors of the planters and the colonists out of the country, and then to take possession of the lands they occupy in Ulster'.⁵⁰ Despite reports in the Freeman's Journal and Derry Standard, ridiculing such views, the Londonderry Sentinel refused to be convinced: 'not a bit of proof has been shown to show that it has not been taking place'.⁵¹ There is, however, no reason at all to disbelieve the denials of the nationalist press. Such rumours were simply a part of the folklore of Ulster protestantism that was likely to be widely publicised in a period of political crisis. In 1798, for instance, it was rumoured in Ulster that presbyterians among the United Irishmen would take the farms of those protestants who stayed loyal.⁵² Nevertheless, the view that the success of the home rule campaign

would entail an effective reversal of the plantation, remained a major theme in Ulster unionist propaganda⁵³ in the period up to the introduction of the home rule bill. The Belfast News-Letter ran a series detailing the atrocities perpetrated on protestants down the centuries by the catholic church.⁵⁴ The Londonderry Sentinel ran a series entitled 'The Irish St Bartholemew'—an account in gory detail of the atrocities supposedly inflicted on the northern protestant community during the 1641 rebellion.⁵⁵

Similarly, a leaflet entitled Read what was done to the protestants when the rebels had home rule, also detailed the 1641 'atrocities', emphasised the role of the priests in these activities - 'From the start it was a Romish rebellion' - and concluded: 'It is no wonder that the protestants have a dread amounting almost to terror of being ever again placed in the power of home rule'.⁵⁶ This theme was also prominent in the speeches of Colonel Saunderson, whose popularity as a protestant leader grew rapidly throughout the home rule crisis.⁵⁷ The credibility of such arguments among Ulster protestants, moreover, would have been heightened by the sheer lack of social contact generally maintained by the two communities in the north.⁵⁸ Of course social intercourse did occur to some extent and to the extent that it did it could invalidate the stereotype of Roman Catholics in protestant culture. Lynn Doyle remarked that despite their fear of home rulers in the mass

it seems strange to me that both my aunt and myself should have totally exempted from our ban those Roman Catholics - for in my youth Roman Catholics and home rulers were synonymous terms - with whom we came in contact. To me Paddy Hegarty our second ploughman, was simply Paddy Hegarty....As for my aunt, I know that in matters demanding honesty and fidelity she would have trusted Tom Brogan, her thirty years retainer, sooner than the worshipful master of an Orange lodge. Nevertheless, the unknown home ruler remained to me an object of fear and suspicion....59

Indeed, even the most determined unionists could have congenial personal relations with catholic home rulers,⁶⁰ but a frequently expressed opinion amongst unionists that overcame the contradiction between their knowledge of catholics as individuals and their stereotype of them in general, took the form of accepting that while catholics individually might be fine people, they were yet, as a group, in thrall to the political machinations and secular ambitions of their church.⁶¹ Moreover, nationalist insensitivity to Ulster unionist fears when arguing the home rule case, tended to support such apprehensions.

UNIONIST ANXIETIES AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF NATIONALIST PROPAGANDA

Notwithstanding the limitations of Gladstone's analysis of the Ulster problem, his home rule scheme, nevertheless, cannot be considered merely as a political device designed to serve the interests of southern catholic nationalism. A parliament consisting of two orders was envisaged, each broadly reflecting the balance of economic and social interests in the country;

religious endowment was specifically outlawed, while the considerable powers envisaged for the lord lieutenant could certainly prevent the passing of legislation which sought to oppress any Irish minority.⁶² It was, thus, a constitution which gave access to political power to unionist and protestant interests as well as Parnellite, and nationalists publicly declared their willingness to accept this scheme. Ulster unionists, however, were to view the safeguards provided in the scheme as illusory, and refused to believe that their interests could be safeguarded by a Dublin parliament. This conviction was based partly on their traditional suspicion of nationalists, but also, and more recently, on perceived contradictions in nationalist propaganda.

Indeed well before 1886 Colonel Saunderson produced a pamphlet emphasising this characteristic of nationalist speeches. His Two Ireland's, or loyalty versus treason, published in 1884, consisted mainly of extensive quotations from the speeches of leading Parnellites showing, how, when addressing their militant supporters in America the real revolutionary and separatist aims of the movement were propagated; how they posed in parliament merely 'as a much ill-used class, deprived of their constitutional liberties and thwarted in their lawful designs'; but most importantly, that in their appeals to Ulster protestants not a word was said about 'the protestant garrison' that was to be "driven into the sea" - a

prominent theme in their southern Irish propaganda. Emphasis was placed instead on how the agrarian struggle could procure farmers the ownership of their land and relieve them of the hated yoke of the landlord.⁶³ Similar contradictions were also apparent in nationalist writings and speeches on the home rule bill. For example, Edward Patrick Sarsfield Counsell, a nationalist candidate for one of the Trinity College seats in 1886, produced a pamphlet on Ulster Orangeism which presented an impressive array of historical evidence detailing the disreputable and blood-thirsty history of the Orange Order, and envisaged a prosperous future for 'the whole Irish people under home rule'. However, he ended his pamphlet with an appeal which presented home rule as justice to the 'four million catholics in Ireland':

There are four million catholics in Ireland - therefore deny her justice! deny her the constitution... Do not the long centuries of bitter, deadly, unnecessary persecution now plead powerfully with enlightened England for the Irish catholics, and render it almost impossible that they should be refused anything in reparation? And when it is but their right which they demand, what fear of a refusal? 64

Counsell's was a powerful statement of the catholic case for home rule. However, the identification of home rule as primarily justice to catholics could not be expected to appeal to an Ulster protestant audience whose fears of religious persecution, while undoubtedly greatly exaggerated, were

nevertheless intense. Even worse judgment in presenting the home rule case was evidenced by J. H. McCarthy, nationalist M.P. for Newry. Writing in February 1886, McCarthy argued that what self-government meant was simply a position for Ireland in relation to England similar to that which existed between a state of the union and the federal government of the United States of America. Such an arrangement could secure the empire and ensure equality and fair treatment for all religions and classes in Ireland.⁶⁵ Having proceeded in this vein McCarthy, however, concluded his article with a vision of the future Ireland couched in terms which gave expression to the historically based catholic world-view. A new day was dawning for the Irish people and 'the church' that has for so long guided the nation through darkness and the shadow of the valley of death will exercise its loftiest duty as the guardian of a regenerated race'.⁶⁶

The duality of reasoning in McCarthy's argument was fastened on by Ulster unionists, already intensely suspicious of nationalists. Reaction to McCarthy's article in the Belfast News-Letter was understandably hostile. In outlining the future role of the catholic church in Ireland he had unintentionally described the Parnellites' real objectives:

The aim of the home rulers is not merely an Irish parliament, but a universal religion. The protestants of the country must

be forced to submit to "The Church". Mr McCarthy has been incautious enough to reveal the truth, and we trust that his paper may be widely read by the English protestants...⁶⁷

That nationalists had any such intention is, needless to say, unlikely in the extreme, but the case presented by McCarthy was influential, and lost none of its menace for Ulster loyalists when the home rule bill was published. It was assumed by nationalists and liberals that the propertied first order of the home rule assembly would naturally defend minority interests, but the higher property qualification necessary for election to this order reflected more a concern for the voice of property in national affairs than for minority cultural and religious matters. Naturally this 'safeguard' was looked on as illusory and declarations by United Ireland, shortly after the introduction of the bill, to the effect that home rule would merely be 'regulating' a system of government which already was under the sway of the National League from Donegal to Cork,⁶⁸ only reinforced unionist fears.⁶⁹ Distrust was heightened, when, during the second reading of the home rule bill, no attempt was going to be made to specifically cater for Ulster unionist interests.⁷⁰ Describing the feelings of unionists in this period, T. W. Russell was to write: 'Gladstone ...proposed terms of escape for the real English garrison, the Irish landlords. But for the mass of Englishry...there was to be no release.'⁷¹

The broad spectrum of unionist anxieties was exhibited in the speeches of Ulster unionist M.P.s during the home rule debate. These focused especially on the disparity between nationalist claims and the limited autonomy offered by Gladstone's home rule scheme, and the likelihood of protestant persecution under nationalist rule.⁷² Outside parliament, the economic argument against home rule, made much of by many unionist speakers around the province, as table 9b shows, was specifically highlighted by a special meeting of the Belfast chamber of commerce on 22 April 1886. Fears were expressed about the businesses of the north, the lack of finalty in Gladstone's scheme, the future of Ulster's commercial links with Great Britain and the empire under home rule,⁷³ as well as the business acumen of nationalists.

Colour was given to Ulster unionists' fears when protestants in Sligo were attacked early in June 1886 by a nationalist mob who believed them responsible for attempting to endanger the life of the Most Rev. Lawrence Gilloly, bishop of Elphin, by dangerously unhinging the gates of his residence. The discovery that this action was the work of the leader of the nationalist mob, in order to justify attacking local protestants, was greeted by the Ulster unionist press as further evidence of the real intentions of nationalists towards the protestant minority.⁷⁴ Many Ulster protestants were already convinced that the police trying to contain the Belfast riots

had been sent from southern Ireland by John Morley, the chief secretary, with the intention of shooting protestants.⁷⁵

WILL ULSTER FIGHT?

As the political atmosphere surrounding the home rule crisis intensified in May 1886, the Ulster question and the preparations for rebellion then believed to be under way in northern Ireland, came increasingly to dominate the issue. As one political journal put it: 'The question of whether or not we are going to pass the home rule bill is becoming more and more a question as to whether we are prepared as a last resort to bombard Belfast.'⁷⁶ The belief that Ulster unionists were preparing for rebellion at this time was to become part of the tradition that they would act on in 1914, but to what extent was it accurate?

Certainly it would appear that preparations by the Orange Order for resistance going beyond mere public meetings began as early as January 1886. Colonel Waring informed a meeting of Lurgan Orangemen that in the Orange institution they had the nucleus of a good loyal army: 'They had appointed emergency secretaries all over Down, and were now in a position to set the entire Orange machinery of that county in motion in twenty-four hours'.⁷⁷ However, it was not until the end of April that an attempt was made to organise resistance on a province-wide basis following offers of support for such a

move from groups of sympathisers in Canada and Great Britain.⁷⁸ On 28 April William Johnston recorded that the Grand Orange Lodge had formed a 'provisional committee', chaired by lord Erne, to resist the repeal of the union.⁷⁹ But that preparations violently to resist home rule in Ulster were so quickly and widely publicised in Great Britain, was due, not so much to Orange actions in the province, as to the reaction to these threats by the Pall Mall Gazette - widely acknowledged as the most influential London political journal at this time.

For example, it reacted dramatically to William Johnston's claim, on 7 May 1886, that a unionist revolt in Ulster would have the support of Lord Wolseley and Lord Charles Beresford: Ulster resistance was inevitable, it claimed, when such was supported openly by Lord Randolph Churchill, and tacitly by Wolseley and Beresford - 'the leaders of the fighting services of the empire' - who allowed it to be 'openly pro-⁸⁰ claimed without contradiction that they will join the revolt'. Johnston described this reaction as 'hysterical',⁸¹ but it undoubtedly gave great publicity to his cause, which received further declarations of support on 15 May from both Lord Salisbury⁸² and Joseph Chamberlain.

The effect of these developments in Ulster was to widely increase the enthusiasm for resistance. According to Thomas McKnight: 'The word "Resist! Resist!" was on the lips, not merely of Orangemen, but of liberals, of those who by

their profession were men of peace, merchants, manufacturers, bankers, medical men, and even clergymen.⁸³ That Lord Wolseley was a descendant of one who had commanded the Enniskilleners and defeated Mountcashel at Newtownbutler and had distinguished himself at the Boyne, was well known in Ulster, and gave credibility to the belief that at the moment of supreme crisis he would act a similar part.⁸⁴ As to how far this was a realistic expectation, however, is debatable. When pressed on this question Wolseley gave an equivocal answer, simply denying knowledge of the existence of such reports. Moreover, it is highly likely that his opposition to home rule derived more from a personal detestation of Gladstone⁸⁵ and his imperial policy, than from any special concern for Ulster protestants. It is worth noting, that during the second home rule crisis in 1893 when riots appeared to be starting again in Belfast, Wolseley, then commander-in-chief of the army in Ireland, "counselled a swift descent on, and coercion of, Ulster".⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the credibility of Ulster resistance was further enhanced when the Pall Mall Gazette returned to the story at the end of May. In a leading article entitled 'Is civil war in sight?', it provided a 'muster roll' with statistics of the 'Orange Army,' consisting of a reported total membership of 73,561 men, plus a map of Ulster indicating prospective areas of operations. It was urged on the

government that they immediately tackle this problem with a view, either to calling the Orangemen's bluff, or meeting a challenge to lawful government that if allowed to develop would assume enormous proportions.⁸⁷ The following day the paper's Ulster reporter affirmed his belief that an Orange military organisation did exist in Ulster, though whether they really meant to fight could not be properly assessed.

His belief was that many hoped they would not be called on to fight; that 'when the moment of coercion comes the people of England and Scotland would not permit the Queen's troops to be sent against them'. This issue also noted, that until the publication of the muster roll of the Orange army the British public had a very hazy idea as to the existence of any organisation capable of effective resistance in the north of Ireland: 'its publication brought home to the English mind more clearly than had before been possible the existence and the power of the organisation which loyalists have established in the protestant province of Ulster'. Moreover, it published a list of fifty-one Orange M.P.s, landowners, and gentry, involved in the organisation of this army. Yet it also reported that Dublin Castle dismissed the threat of armed resistance in Ulster; the view there being that the whole enterprise existed only 'on paper' and that 'there was really nothing of which the government could take hold'.⁸⁸

There is much evidence to support the official view:

although estimates for arms shipments exist in the Saunderson papers, and support for military action came from Orangemen in Great Britain, Australia, Canada and New York, only one actual instance of drilling was reported - at Richill with 300 unarmed men.⁸⁹ Significantly, the strongly Orange paper, the Portadown and Lurgan News, while admitting that drilling was taking place, ridiculed the idea that such an army would take the field on the passage of a home rule bill; such a force would only go into action 'in the event of a direct attack on Ulster protestants'.⁹⁰

This remark provides an important clue to unionist policy on opposition to home rule: violent resistance would be contingent on the nature of the threat posed by home rule to Ulster protestants. E. S. W. De Cobain explained their policy once home rule was enacted: they would send no members to Dublin parliament and refuse to pay its taxes: they would insist upon the maintenance of the status quo:

We shall not march against anybody, nor shall we shoot anybody; we shall simply refuse to recognise in any shape or form the authority of the parliament at Dublin. Then if an attempt is made to compel us to submit, our passive resistance will become active, and you will see that the one hundred and twenty thousand who are already enrolled will be but the advance guard of the force which will rally round the standard of the empire.

De Cobain's views were endorsed by Colonel Saunderson,⁹¹ and in this context it is understandable that preparations for

armed rebellion would be in a provisional stage. Home rulers, however, refused to believe in the possibility of an Ulster rebellion under any circumstances. When advertisements for arms appeared in the Belfast News-Letter, it was seen that nationalists ridiculed them,⁹² while John Morley argued that people who wished to arm the Ulster protestants would hardly advertise for 20,000 Synder rifles.⁹³

In its final article on the subject entitled 'Will Ulster fight?', the Pall Mall Gazette gave probably the best analysis of how far Ulster unionists could resist home rule. It noted that the non-payment of taxes imposed by a Dublin parliament was the method of resistance most favoured in the north, and that many unionists believed the army to be 'honeycombed' with Orangemen and so would not march on Ulster. While conceding that the Orange Order could muster many men this report also declared that it lacked arms. Moreover, liberal unionists were most unlikely to rebel while Orangemen themselves were divided on the question, with the great majority, certainly in Belfast, contenting themselves 'with a strong verbal protest, at any rate until their property, their liberty, or their lives were directly imperilled'.⁹⁴

CHAPTER VI

GLADSTONE'S CONCEPT OF IRISH NATIONALITY AND THE MORAL CRUSADE FOR HOME RULE, 1886-92

'I had no other motive than that of promoting, what I think dangerously deficient in many places, an historical and therefore a comprehensive view of the Irish question....': so Gladstone wrote to Lord Hartington explaining his intention in encouraging a greater public awareness of the nature of the Irish problem, following his trip to Norway in the autumn of 1885.¹ As will be seen, his emphasis on the importance of an historical approach to the question provides an important key to understanding Gladstone's perception of Irish affairs and how they should be dealt with. This chapter attempts to analyse the Gladstonian concept of Irish nationality, the sources on which it was based, its relationship to what he hoped home rule would achieve, and how it influenced his view of Irish unionism.

GLADSTONE, NATIONALISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF IRISH HISTORY

Given Gladstone's preoccupation with the historical basis of the Irish question and his acceptance of the validity of the nationalist demand for home rule, it was natural he should concentrate on the historical claims put by Irish

nationalists. But Gladstone also perceived that British acceptance of nationalist claims was largely dependent on removing the historically well-established prejudice that coloured their opinions on Irish questions. Anti-Irish animus, heightened in the early 1880s by the obstructionist tactics of the Parnellite M.P.s in parliament and dynamite attacks in London,² fed, as was seen,³ on a long established tradition of anti-catholic prejudice. In the heated atmosphere surrounding the home rule crisis of 1886, this prejudice found frequent expression in unionist propaganda, especially in material intended for a working-class readership.

During a speech in Dublin on 29 November 1886, John Redmond detailed for his audience the contents of a pamphlet circulated by T. H. Sidebottom, the successful conservative candidate for Hyde at the general election of that year:

Q. Have the Irish ever had home rule, and how did they behave?

A. They murdered every Englishman and protestant they could lay their hands on in 1641. They were set on by the priests, who said that the killing of them was a meritorious act. Altogether they killed in that year 150,000 protestants - men, women and children. 4

Much of the unionist case against home rule was based on propaganda such as this, leading to the following conclusion:

Without entering into any argument upon the abstract merits

or demerits of the legislation proposed (the home rule bill), we are bound to allow that its wisdom or unwisdom, its justice or injustice, the probability or improbability of its success, depended to a very large extent upon the accurate reading of the history of the past. 5

Given the extent to which ethnocentric notions regarding the Irish prevailed in British society, it is obvious that any attempt to dislodge such ideas from the public mind was likely to be difficult; and notwithstanding the progress being made in academic circles in demolishing the view of Irish affairs propagated by Macaulay and Froude,⁶ the general public was still largely ignorant of Ireland. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was little demand for books dealing with Irish historical and political subjects. The problem was exacerbated, moreover, by the fact that anyone wishing to be impartially informed on the contemporary Irish situation would have had extreme difficulty in finding sources of information. James Bryce, professor of civil law at Oxford and a prominent home ruler, noted that part of the trouble British politicians had in dealing with the Irish question was due to their sheer ignorance of the subject and the lack of means to rectify it:

Irish history...is a blank subject to the English. In January 1886, one found scarce any politicians who had ever heard of the Irish parliament of 1782. And in that year, 1886, an Englishman anxious to discover the real state of the country did not know where to go for information. What appeared in the English newspapers, or, rather, in the one English news-

paper which keeps a standing "own correspondent" in Dublin [The Times] was (as it still is) a grossly and almost avowedly partisan report, in which opinions are skilfully mixed with so-called facts, selected, consciously or unconsciously, to support the writer's view. The nationalist press is, of course, not less strongly partisan on its own side, so that not merely an average Englishman, but even the editor of an English newspaper, who desires to ascertain the true state of matters and place it before his English readers, has had, until within the last few months, when events in Ireland began to be fully reported in Great Britain, no better means at his disposal for understanding Ireland than for understanding Bulgaria. 7

Publishers in the metropolis were reluctant to touch works dealing with these subjects as 'there was a very small market' for such studies.⁸ Even G. J. Shaw Lefevre, later Lord Eversley, who was a politician of cabinet rank, had difficulty in finding a publisher for his study of parliament's attempts to deal with the Irish question in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁹ Apologising to Gladstone for asking him to give the book a public recommendation so as to encourage sales, he remarked:

My publishers tell me that for books on Ireland there is, in the present state of opinion of the 'classes' very little demand, and that mine could not be expected to sell well.... The book has been given very favourable notices by the provincial press, but it has been ignored by the London papers, with the exception of the Saturday Review, which, to my surprise, spoke well of it though differing from its conclusion. 10

Such was Gladstone's concern with the history of the Irish question, however, that he was unlikely to be put off by such discouraging information. Indeed, despite the arguments of

both Sir Charles Gavin Duffy and R. B. O'Brien in 1885—that articles on Irish autonomy would be more relevant if they dealt with contemporary Irish politics rather than the historical background to the problem—Gladstone's view remained unchanged. His preoccupation with Irish history, though, requires some further explanation. It is true, as has been pointed out, that such an approach to the question of Irish nationalism was in keeping with the practice of the times,¹² but there were other reasons. For instance, Gladstone's historical sense, in general, was profound,¹³ especially as historical developments could be seen, as he believed, to exhibit the working out of Christian influence in world affairs.¹⁴ It will be seen that this outlook strongly influenced his perception of Irish nationalism. Moreover, as his private secretary emphasised, Gladstone was much given to finding precedents for courses of political action he wished to take ¹⁵ a penchant clearly exhibited in his emphasis on Grattan's parliament as a model for home rule. Furthermore, recent political history provided an appropriate model for the operation of the home rule campaign itself, in the Bulgarian agitation of the 1870s. 11

Here was a moral cause not dissimilar to the Irish problem, with the Disraeli government committed to the support of the corrupt Turkish empire that had perpetrated atrocities on Christian minorities. Gladstone's increasing involvement with the Bulgarian question led to his seeing the solution to the problem

in terms of national self-determination, which he earlier had espoused for Italy, and was now doing for Ireland; and it is in regard to promoting Irish self-determination¹⁶ that one of Gladstone's strongest reasons for adopting an historical approach to the problem lies—his own confessed lack of knowledge of the inner nature of nationalism in Ireland.

Historians have generally credited Gladstone with a greater breadth of vision on subject nationalities than most of his contemporaries, especially in regard to Ireland. This view is well expressed by Nicholas Mansergh: 'It was because Gladstone possessed, or rather acquired through European channels, this insight into the Irish mind, that he was the one English statesman of his epoch to make a positive contribution, so ambitious in character as to hold out hope of a final settlement of the Irish question.'¹⁷ There was, however, a limit to which insights drawn from the experience of European nationalism could be applied to Ireland. This experience provided Gladstone with a penetrating insight into the dynamics of national consciousness in subject nationalities, as a general phenomenon, as he demonstrated in his account of Jewish ethnic solidarity:

The Jew remains a Jew, and carries a peculiar stamp....Is it not probable that the stamp is monumental? That it is the surviving record of persistent mediaeval persecution, which went far below the surface and cut deep lines in character? Such experiences sharpen self-consciousness, and give fresh tension to whatever in the human being is distinctive....If

an influence has been at work, drawing closer and closer the ties that bind one Jew to another, and thus making one Jew become more to another, giving to each Jew a larger share in the being of every other Jew, has it not recorded a significant though silent protest against cruel and inveterate injury. For thus it is that the being of one human creature can be imparted to his brothers and theirs to him. 18

What is instructive here is Gladstone's recognition of the role of persecution and grievance as agencies in the formation of national consciousness and cohesion. He went on to argue that what was true of the Jews, was true of other European subject nationalities, and of the Irish: 'It is no wonder if after seven sad centuries the Irishman says of Ireland, in the words of a beautiful...Scotch song..."And she's a' the world to me".'

Penetrating as this insight was, however, it was so at a rather abstract level; while it emphasised the crucial nexus between struggle and national consciousness in general, it provided no explanation of the unique historical experience central to the growth of a specific nationality. Gladstone was aware that the circumstances in each case were different, and that for Ireland, an understanding of her nationality had to be sought in a study of the special historical processes which gave rise to the contemporary situation. Thus, while his insight into the dynamics of national consciousness might well have enabled him to perceive - as did J. S. Mill -²⁰ the existence of Ireland in terms of an alienated nationality much earlier than the 1880s,²¹ it would have provided no

specific record of how that state of national consciousness came about. Indeed, in 1888, after three years of studying the historical growth of nationalism in Ireland, Gladstone admitted that its development 'has been singular and not quite easy to trace'.²² In 1885, when he came to consider the Irish question ripe for settlement, his conception of Irish nationalism had not progressed beyond the general level of understanding indicated above. That this was so, is not surprising. As was seen,²³ he had hoped, until that time, that Irish national sentiment could be satisfied with something short of a national parliament, and only proceeded to shape a home rule scheme when he saw no alternative. Moreover, despite his considerable experience of Irish legislation since 1869, Gladstone, as shown below, regarded that experience as highly qualified in its relevance to the question of how to satisfy Irish national sentiment.

What needs to be emphasised about Gladstone's analysis of the Irish question is the sharp distinction he made between the land question and the question of nationalism. That he made extensive researches into the nature of landholding in ancient Ireland as a basis for understanding the concept of tenant-right, has been well established.²⁴ However, he did not identify these researches with the historical development of nationalist sentiment: unlike many of his contemporaries, he refused to accept that agrarian grievances or the land problem

in general was central to the question of national consciousness. This distinction between the land and national questions is apparent in his correspondence during the early stages of the home rule debate of 1886, when he informed Harcourt that the elements of the Irish question he felt most competent to deal with were 'land and finance'.²⁵ His considered judgment on the relationship between the land question and Irish nationalism was recorded in 1888.²⁶

Briefly, Gladstone, tracing its beginnings in the period of Henry II down to the era of Grattan's parliament and beyond, conceived nationalism as a spiritual essence imbued with the power of making converts, which testified to its moral worth. More exactly, in Gladstone's mind it took on the character of a religion whose history was a great moral tale of survival and regeneration through persecution and adversity; and like a religious faith it was vulnerable to debasement and corruption. There was no essential place in this conception of nationalism for anything so materialistic as the struggle for land. Gladstone declared: 'The land question so far from being its basis is an incidental, unhappy, and hampering accompaniment.' Gladstone fully recognised that a settlement of the land question was essential if a home rule scheme was to have any chance of success, but its settlement, in itself, was quite a distinct matter from that of satisfying nationalist sentiment, the source of which was to be found in Irish history.²⁷

Gladstone's belief that Irish history held the solution to the problem of nationalist sentiment, however, raises an important question. Given, as was noted above,²⁸ the scarcity of materials for a thorough and impartial study of this subject, how reliable was his understanding of Irish nationalism likely to be? Despite the enthusiasm with which Gladstone threw himself into this subject, he was always uneasy, at least in the period 1886-7, about the extent to which he had mastered the facts of Irish history. In answer to A. V. Dicey's caution that the use of Irish history for propaganda purposes would be likely to revive old feuds, best forgotten, Gladstone replied that he was aware of that danger, and while the prospect of an early settlement of the home rule question was possible he did not make a central issue of it, but such was its importance to the case for home rule that it could not be dispensed with. However, he continued: '...as to the knowledge of the historical facts. I have worked on them to the best of my ability; and harder I think than any other politician; but I am far from having mastered them.'²⁹

That this should be so, is not surprising. Lecky's historical works were the most important texts dealing with Ireland to have appeared in recent years,³⁰ and it will be seen that Gladstone's knowledge of Irish history and consequent beliefs as to the true character of Irish nationalism, drew heavily on Lecky's works, especially his treatment of the history

of Grattan's parliament.

Apart from Lecky, the works that apparently most influenced Gladstone in the early period of his study on Irish nationalism, dealt either indirectly with Irish history or abstractly with politics in general. The most import of these sources were Edmund Burke's Works³¹ and A. V. Dicey's Law of the constitution. Of these, Burke's influence was clearly the greater, as Gladstone's diary shows: 'December 18 [1885].-Read Burke; what a magazine of wisdom on Ireland and America. January 9 [1886].- Made many extracts from Burke - sometimes almost divine.³² Indeed Burke's view of nationality, centering on an organic theory of society, belief in the aristocracy as a governing class and in the state as a great spiritual entity uniting the living and the dead,³³ was virtually identical to his own. The temptation to invoke Burke's sanction on home rule was therefore great.

For the several centuries of Irish history before the eighteenth century, however, Gladstone's knowledge was to remain sketchy and largely dependent on nationalist propaganda. For example, in criticising Dicey's lack of Irish historical knowledge, Gladstone recommended O'Connell's highly propagandist history of Ireland:³⁴ 'which ought I think to be regarded as among the first elements of necessary knowledge on this subject'.³⁵ But O'Connell's book was as far from an impartial history of Ireland as it was possible to get.

Composed mainly of citations from other authorities, it was a product of the repeal campaign of the 1840s and was intended as an historical indictment of the wrong done to Ireland by England. Its spirit was aptly expressed in its motto: 'On our side is virtue and Erin, On theirs is the Saxon and guilt.' Lecky criticised it thus:

It is a choice specimen of a kind of history that is still abundantly written in Ireland - a 'history' consisting of the crimes and oppressions perpetrated by English government in Ireland, aggravated to the highest point, and a complete omission of all circumstances of provocation and palliation. It is a picture of an innocent and long-suffering people persistently crushed by almost demoniacal tyranny....in history...half-truths are the worst of falsehoods. 36

However, the very trait which Lecky condemned - the use of history to present a political and moral argument ³⁷ was that which most recommended the work to Gladstone. It sustained that sense of moral righteousness which was the driving force behind his campaign for Irish home rule. Indeed the lesson of England's injustice to Ireland, which it was the purpose of O'Connell's book to impart, had been forcefully impressed on Gladstone in 1883 by Harcourt, who described the effects of an extension of the franchise in Ireland:

When full expression is given to Irish opinion there will be declared to the world in larger print what we all know to be the case, that we hold Ireland by force and by force alone as

much today as in the days of Cromwell, only that we are obliged to hold it by a force ten times larger than he found necessaryWe never have governed and we never shall govern Ireland by the good will of its people. 38

The value of O'Connell's book was that it seemed to offer proof of the truth of this assertion. Again, the fact that O'Connell had dedicated his book to the queen, was evidence of that 'nationality with loyalty', which as shall be seen, Gladstone was inclined to define as the 'real' national sentiment of Ireland,³⁹ and which he believed had found its fullest expression in Grattan's parliament.

NATIONALITY WITH LOYALTY

Gladstone's general conception of the historical development of Irish nationalist sentiment can be divided into three sections: the beginning of the growth of national consciousness in the reign of Henry II, coming to maturity with the establishment of Grattan's parliament in 1782; from 1782 to 1795, the golden age of Irish nationalism, marked by social cohesion and demise of religious strife; from 1795 to the passing of the act of union and beyond, when the gains of the previous period were undermined by English inspired sectarianism and rebellion, and the failure of Westminster to govern Ireland efficiently and fairly.

Gladstone's assessment of what was historically significant in the development of Irish nationalism was largely

determined by the importance he attached to Lecky's work.

Comparing the latter with Carlyle and Macaulay, he declared:

Lecky has real insight into the motives of statesmen.... Carlyle...mighty as he is in flash and penetration, has no eye for motives. Macaulay too, is so caught by a picture, by colour, by surface, that he is seldom to be counted on for just account of motive. 40

However, Lecky's Irish history was heavily balanced in favour of the post-1782 period and this led Gladstone to regard the pre-eighteenth century period as barbaric and best forgotten.

In his review of Lecky's History of England in the eighteenth century, published in June 1887, Gladstone declared that Irish history before the eighteenth century had 'a dismal simplicity about it. Murder, persecution, confiscation too truly describe its general strain; and policy is on the whole subordinated to violence as the standing instrument of government.'⁴¹ It was a view which he had expressed more forcefully, some months earlier, in an article entitled Notes and queries on the Irish demands:

...in those centuries of cruelty and neglect Mr O'Connell has demonstrated, not by assertion but by citations from authority, that the policy, so far as there was a policy, was in the main a policy by no means of mere subjugation, but actually

of extirpation, for the Irish race inhabiting the island.... All these decency forbids us to defend; and we consign them to condemnation and wash our hands of such proceedings. 42

Insofar as this period had any political value for Gladstone, it lay in the fact that it provided the parliamentary seedbed from which would eventually spring the fully developed plant of Irish nationality: Grattan's parliament. For Gladstone as with Lecky, the growth of Irish national consciousness was inseparable from the development of parliamentary institutions. During his speech introducing the first home rule bill, Gladstone, led by such reasoning, declared that the ancient Irish parliament was always 'as nearly as possible on a par' with the parliament of Great Britain:

...for the parliament of Ireland had subsisted for 500 years. It had asserted its exclusive right to make laws for the people of Ireland. The right was never denied, for gentlemen ought to recollect, but all do not, perhaps, remember, that Poyning's Law was an Irish law imposed by Ireland on herself. 43

This theme recurred in his public addresses and publications in the period 1886-7. Speaking at Liverpool during the general election of 1886, he described the Irish parliament: 'The parliament of Ireland when it was extinguished was over 500 years old. It was not a gift to Ireland: it had sprung from the soil (my italics).'⁴⁴ It was within this conceptual framework that Gladstone could admit, that although that parliament represented

only a small section of the people, it contained the 'repressed principle of national life'; while it was 'corrupt, servile, selfish, cruel' and deserving of 'almost every imaginable epithet of censure', there was more to tell: 'It was alive, and it was national.'⁴⁵ But why, declared Gladstone posing a rhetorical question, did the spirit of nationality exist in an institution of which the constitution and the environment were alike intolerable? The answer, he declared, exhibiting his insight into the nexus between struggle and national consciousness, lay in the fact that 'that parliament found itself faced by a British influence which was entirely anti-national, and was thus constrained to seek for strength in the principle of nationality'.⁴⁶

The principle of nationality, according to Gladstone, once having taken root, was fundamentally irrepressible and when English violence in Ireland passed over 'into legal forms and doctrines, the Irish reaction against it followed the example. And the legal idea of Irish nationality took its rise in very humble surroundings'.⁴⁷ Thereafter it proceeded to develop by a zig-zag process, amid great difficulties and restraints, corruption and adversity: 'by a national law... there came into existence, and by degrees into steady operation, a sentiment native to Ireland and having Ireland for its vital basis'. The logic of this process was towards full autonomy and national feeling, which, Gladstone argued, was in

its final stage of being worked out with the establishment of Grattan's parliament in 1782.⁴⁸

A highly significant feature of Gladstone's theory of the development of national consciousness in Ireland before 1782 is his concern to locate its origin and growth within a strictly parliamentary framework.⁴⁹ In this respect his outlook shows a marked difference from that of his political allies, the Parnellites.

As was seen,⁵⁰ the historical vision in the Parnellite concept of nationality was both longer and wider. They argued that an Irish nationality had existed long before the coming of the Normans, and in the history of that nationality were more concerned to identify its harbingers in the leaders of the many insurrections against English rule in Ireland rather than a corrupt parliament which it was usual for them to treat with the utmost contempt; though, it is true, that when it was politically expedient during the parliamentary debate on home rule, an occasional Parnellite could be found to endorse the interpretation presented by Gladstone. But whatever their difference of analysis on the history of Irish nationalism, both found common ground on the period of Grattan's parliament.

Certainly this period lent itself more easily to the political purposes of home rulers. It had been a prominent feature of Parnellite propaganda in recent years; it afforded a

thoroughly constitutional precedent for Gladstone's proposed local parliament in Ireland; and it was, moreover, not obscured by the mists of time but had been a central feature of the most influential Irish historical work of recent years.

It is in his understanding of this period and the lessons he believed it held for the future of Irish self-government that Lecky's influence on Gladstone was most apparent. Indeed the extent to which Gladstone based his hopes for Irish home rule on the precedent of Grattan's parliament has already been demonstrated in chapter two,⁵¹ and the extent to which his reading on this period was based on Lecky's writings was clearly explained during a reception given to some Irish delegations in October 1886. Gladstone 'appealed very happily' to the historical works of Lecky and Goldwin Smith and 'dwelt on the curious circumstances that two of the strongest opponents of home rule had, as historians, said the very things which formed the foundation of the home rule bill'.⁵² More specifically, the appeal of Lecky's work for Gladstone lay, to a considerable extent, in his belief in the importance of the landed gentry as a governing class. Indeed Lecky's concept of Irish nationality, as many commentators have pointed out,⁵³ did not extend to the whole Irish people, but was restricted to the protestant and catholic landowning gentry who alone were endowed with governing capabilities. The qualities of this class he described in the first volume of his Irish history:

In every community there exists a small minority of men whose abilities, high purpose, energy of will, mark them out as in some degree leaders of men. They take the first step in every public enterprise, counteract by their example the vicious elements of the population, set the current and form the standard of public opinion....54

It was in the period of Grattan's parliament that Lecky saw these qualities expressed and being worked out most fully. Gladstone's views on the natural order of society were almost identical. In an article assessing the ties of the British people with the American, he also described their differences:

The English people are not believers in equality; they do not with the famous declaration of July 4th 1776, think it to be a self-evident truth that all men are born equal. They hold rather the reverse of the proposition...in practice, they are what I may call determined inequalitarians....Their natural tendency from the very base of British society, and through all its strongly built gradations, is to look upward; they are not apt to "untune" degree. 55

Thus, despite their differences on Irish home rule, Lecky and Gladstone agreed in their hierarchial notions of the proper ordering of society. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lecky, writing of Grattan's hopes for the Irish gentry in the late eighteenth century, was, in effect, describing Gladstone's hopes for the same class in the late nineteenth:

It was the dream of Grattan that a loyal Irish gentry of both denominations could form a governing body who would complete the work, [of finally obliterating internal Irish divisions

and making the Irish one people) and that although a protestant ascendancy would continue, it would be the modified and mitigated ascendancy which naturally belongs to the most educated section of the community and to the chief owners of property, and not an ascendancy defined by creeds and based on disqualifying laws. 56

But if Lecky's views on the natural order of society in general were almost identical to Gladstone's, his concept of nationality was far too rationalist and too well grounded in an awareness of the realities of political power, to believe, as we shall see Gladstone did, that once removed from its politically and economically dominant position in Irish society the political power of the landed gentry could ever be restored. Why did Gladstone believe that it could? The answer to this question is to be found in the properties he believed the nationalist idea to possess and the meaning he attached to the period of Grattan's parliament in terms of its lessons for political life in a future independent Ireland. In his review of Lecky's history, Lessons of Irish history in the eighteenth century, Gladstone described the influence of the nationalist idea in Grattan's parliament:

If there be such things as contradictions in the world of politics, they are to be found in nationality on the one side, and bigotry of all kinds on the other....Whatever is given to the first of these two is lost to the second. I speak of a reasonable and reasoning, not of a blind and headstrong (violent) nationality; of a nationality which has regard to circumstances and to traditions, and which only requires that all relations, of incorporation or of independence, shall

be adjusted to them according to the laws of nature's own enactment. Such a nationality was the growth of the last century in Ireland. As each Irishman began to feel that he had a country, to which he belonged and which belonged to him, he was, by a true process of nature, drawn more and more into brotherhood, and into the sense of brotherhood, with those who shared the allegiance and the property, the obligations and the heritage. And this idea of country, once well conceived presents itself as a very large idea and as a framework for most other ideas, so as to supply the basis of a common life.⁵⁷

This was a large claim to make for the power of an idea, but why would it necessarily entail the restitution of the landed classes to positions of political authority? The answer to this question Gladstone provided in his Notes and queries on the Irish demands. Governing power would devolve on the aristocracy because 'The natural condition of a healthy society is, that governing functions should be discharged by the leisured class....for the general business of government it has peculiar capacities', and however good a political system may be, 'when the leisured class is deposed as it is to a very large extent deposed in Ireland, that fact indicates that a rot has found its way into the structure of society'. He continued:

Formerly the upper class of Irishmen, whatever their faults, were Irishmen as much as the mass, and fought and won many battles for nationalism both before and after 1782. It was a nationalism combined with loyalty, as nationalism has always been combined with loyalty until driven to desperation. 58

The separation of gentry and people, Gladstone argued, had been an effect of the union which had promoted absenteeism and shifted the centre of all Ireland's special interests and placed it out of Ireland. However, once a parliament was established in Dublin

the position held by the leisured and landed classes of Ireland as towards the people, will be entirely changed. As one at least of their number to his great honour has said since this controversy began, "We shall reside, and shall form friendly relations with all other classes, and shall become the natural leaders of the people." 59

It is highly likely that Gladstone's informant here was Parnell, who, it has recently been pointed out,⁶⁰ saw eye-to-eye with Gladstone in his highly conservative vision of Ireland under home rule and who was described by one of his close colleagues as 'no democrat'.⁶¹ Indeed, there is a substantial similarity in the views of both men in this respect. Like Gladstone, Parnell both believed in the virtue of the landowning classes as social leaders and was also affectionately drawn to the working classes.⁶² Gladstone saw no reason why this preferred state of affairs should not come to pass. What kept the Parnellite party united, he argued, was their demand for home rule, which once satisfied would remove the reason for their unity.⁶³ Moreover, the Irish were a highly conservative people: 'The religion, the

character, and the old traditions of the Irish are all in favour of them leaning upon the leisured classes, and desiring to be represented by them.' They had never shown a disposition to be represented by men of low social origins.⁶⁴ Parnell, he claimed, owed his leadership of the catholic Irish as much to his social position as to his 'remarkable powers'.⁶⁵ John Morley has remarked that Gladstone's conception of the Irish problem was best expressed by Lord Salisbury, who declared that while Gladstone's land and ballot reforms may have been necessary, they nevertheless destroyed the Irish gentry's governing role while failing to supply 'any institutions' by which Ireland could be governed.⁶⁶ Gladstone's home rule scheme was to be a comprehensive experiment aimed at restoring the landed gentry to their governing position.

The beneficent influence with which Gladstone endowed the nationalist idea was twofold: in an autonomous Ireland it would be, 'according to the laws of nature's own enactment', a mechanism for restoring the hierarchical structure of society and an agent of social cohesion by dissolving religious bigotry. The evidence that these things would come to pass rested, according to Gladstone, in the history of Grattan's parliament. But how far was there a real correspondence between the Ireland of 1782 and of 1886? Despite the obvious historicism of Gladstone's approach to the Irish question, it was at the same time grossly unhistorical in its treatment of the relationship

between Ireland's past and present. His assumption that the nationalism of the 1780s could be essentially recreated in the 1880s revealed a fundamental weakness of historical perception; it failed to take account of the very different political realities and ideas in the two periods, especially the very influential imperial consciousness of the 1880s; it failed to take account of the unique social and industrial progress of Ulster since the union which marked it off from the rest of Ireland; but perhaps most importantly, it failed to recognise the important difference in the social and economic determinants of nationalism in the two periods. Concerned chiefly with the moral and political lessons of Irish history, Gladstone overlooked these conditions; such, however, was not the case with James Bryce.

Bryce, an historian of repute, fully realised the limitations of historical precedents for political policies and in the introduction to a book compiled by several authors to publicise the background to the Irish question, he outlined, in effect, the defects of Gladstone's use of history:

....the worth of history for the purposes of practical politics is...gravely overrated. History furnishes no precepts or recipes which can be directly applied to a political problem
....Situations and conjunctions of phenomena arise which seem similar to those which have gone before them, but the circumstances are always so far different that it is never possible confidently to predict similar results, or to feel sure that it is necessary either to avoid a remedy which failed, or to resort to that which succeeded on a previous occasion. 67

This point was more directly made by Lecky, who argued that 'for good or ill' Grattan's parliament was 'utterly unlike any body that could now be constituted in Ireland'.⁶⁸

The most important weakness in Gladstone's application of the nationalist model of 1782 to the contemporary Irish situation was his failure to see that the agrarian struggle, while unconnected with the flowering of nationalism in Grattan's day, was the engine which pulled the train of nationalist agitation in the 1880s. That the aristocratic nationalism of the 1780s succeeded so well as it did, was due, as Lecky was aware,⁶⁹ to the fact that a political awareness among the great mass of the Irish peasantry was largely non-existent; their grievances were agrarian, but were not conceptualised in political terms; however, this was not true of the 1880s.⁷⁰

It was essential to the internal consistency of Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality that the landlords be defined as essentially nationalists. To have accepted that agrarian struggle was a central feature of contemporary Irish nationalism would have logically entailed the admission that those who were carrying on the struggle were nationalists, while those against whom it was being waged were not. Gladstone based his belief that the Irish peasantry would support the political restoration of the Irish gentry on a view of the peasant as naturally conservative and socially deferential, and emphasised his community of interest with the landlord.

This certainly was an unrealistic view, and indeed was obviously so to liberal home rulers with any experience of Ireland.

For example, Lord Spencer, in his preface to a book promoting home rule in 1887, defined the reasons for the radical political consciousness of the Irish peasant:

The Irish peasantry still live in poor hovels, often in the same room with animals; they have few modern comforts; and yet they are in close communication with those who live at ease in the cities and farms of the United States. They are also imbued with the advanced political notions of the American republic and are sufficiently educated to read the latest political doctrines in the press which circulates among them. Their social condition at home is a hundred years behind their state of mental and political culture [my italics]. 71

Michael Davitt, in his analysis of this question, also put great emphasis on the role of Irish experience in America and how it reacted on nationalist political thought and practice in Ireland.⁷² Moreover, while Gladstone was expounding his theory of the deferential Irish peasant, the plan of campaign was at its height and William O'Brien was declaring the social and racial excommunication of landlords from the Irish nation.⁷³

How could Gladstone's view of Irish nationalism be so at odds with the facts? There were several reasons, but probably the most important was his power of self-deception - something to which he had long been prone and which became more dominant towards the end of his life.⁷⁴ Committed to a belief in the 'proper' hierarchical ordering of society Gladstone simply

refused to believe that the Irish gentry would not occupy a leading role in Irish politics when home rule was established. There were influential factors supporting this attitude. For example, his concept of nationality, as was seen, was highly spiritual; it did not allow that agrarian struggle had a central place in nationalist sentiment. Thus it contained no analytical tool with which to explain the interconnections between the two. Again, there was his simple ignorance of nationalist opinion. Apart from Parnell, who shared his outlook, 'most of the other Irish nationalist members were strangers to him'.⁷⁵ Having little practical experience of Ireland, his knowledge of Irish opinion - apart from occasional reports - was highly restricted. This was true of unionist as well as nationalist opinion.

The limitations of Gladstone's view of Ulster unionism will be considered in detail in chapter ten, but generally, his approach to all unionist arguments was determined by his identification of the evolution of Irish nationalism as the central process of Irish history. This constituted an 'objective' standard, or 'natural law', against which opposing developments and ideas were judged. Thus while he could recognise the validity of nationalist sentiments, the logic of his thinking denied the legitimacy of unionists' ideas and beliefs. To Gladstone's mind these constituted, to use a Marxian term, 'false consciousness'. It was, moreover, with this attitude of mind that Gladstone embarked on his propaganda campaign to publicise the home rule cause.

HISTORY AS PROPAGANDA AND THE HOME RULE CRUSADE

Before proceeding to discuss Gladstone's home rule campaign it is worth examining the following description of him as a propagandist, which appeared in the Pall Mall Gazette on 29 June 1886:

Mr Gladstone sees everything as in a mirage. The promised land flowing with milk and honey is always just a little ahead. With siren eloquence he allures his hearers to press onward, ever upward, in the path of justice and right. It is true, that the fascinating oasis which nerved them to such exertions vanished as they approached: but nothing daunts the Old Man's faith, or damps the fire of his enthusiasm. His speech [referring to one made the day before at Liverpool] recalls memories of the old alchemists who were always just on the point of discovering the philosopher's stone, until death came and dissolved their dreams. He is a poet, an idealist, and a prophet. The people sit at his feet as at those of one who sees visions, and discourses to them of things invisible. He keeps the great controversy on the heights, and defends every shift and wile in the political game with all the moral fervour of a Moses descending from a new Sinai. Herein lies his superiority as an electioneering force to all his competitors. He is always going to inaugurate the millennium. 76

In his forceful presentation of the historical case for home rule, Gladstone, convinced that history was on his side, took to provoking his unionist opponents. Speaking at Glasgow on 22 June 1886, he declared that unionists never 'had any regard for history at all', and at Manchester two days later: 'Our opponents will not refer to history....I think they are very wise in not touching history; at every point it condemns them.'⁷⁷ However, provocations such as Gladstone employed, inasmuch as they were designed to highlight the darker aspects of

English rule in Ireland, served also to bring into sharp relief the limitations of his use of Irish history for political purposes. This was especially clear in Gladstone's treatment of Irish history for the period before the eighteenth century.

It was seen that his concern to establish the historical development of nationalist sentiment within a constitutional framework left out of account the several Irish rebellions against English rule. This was a serious mistake in his campaign to inculcate a more realistic understanding of Irish history into British public opinion, as unionists, with considerable justification, were wont to identify the historical evolution of Irish nationalism in terms of those rebellions, rather than the constitutional framework that Gladstone provided. Moreover, given the extent to which British public opinion associated these events with 'Romish' persecution, it was unlikely that any change would be effected by Gladstone's simple exclusion of them from his account of Irish history.

Yet it must be owned that the historical period before the eighteenth century had a smaller role in Gladstone's propaganda than that which followed. Indeed, Gladstone's emphasis on Grattan's parliament and his recommendation of Lecky's work as the best available sources on that period, led to a dramatic increase in the sales of Leaders of public opinion in Ireland.

In a later edition of the book Lecky wrote:

'this book was...absolutely neglected, it certainly made no considerable impression...it lagged far behind my other books, when the conversion of Mr Gladstone to home rule took place and gave it a sudden and most unexpected popularity. Mr Gladstone in several of his speeches and writings appealed to it as a justification of his policy, and his example was followed by three or four other conspicuous members of his government.'⁷⁸ But if the period of Grattan's parliament provided him with an ideal of self-government which should be emulated, it was the act of union, the means by which it was passed, and the misgovernment which he believed to have been a consequence of it, that most fuelled the moral earnestness which is associated with Gladstone's crusade for home rule.⁷⁹

According to Gladstone, the first act in the process of abolishing Grattan's parliament was the recall of Lord Fitzwilliam in 1795:

When the critical year of 1795 opened, religious animosities were at their nadir, because the spirit of nationality was at its zenith. The protestant and landlord parliament of Ireland spoke out boldly and nobly for the Roman Catholics...on the dark day when Lord Fitzwilliam was recalled. After that fatal act it became necessary for the executive, in its headlong career, to dissolve the holy alliance, for such it was, formed between Irishmen of different churches. It was something like the ruin of the table round after the sin of Guinevere....For then came in Ireland the deplorable foundation of the Orange lodges; the gradual conversion of the United Irishmen into a society of separatists; the disarmament of the people with all its cruelties; the reign of lawlessness under the reign of law; the rebellion of 1798 with some examples of bloody retaliation; and the nameless horrors recorded by the manly shame of Lord Cornwallis. Thus was laid the train of causes which,

followed up by the act of union, has made Ireland for ninety years a sharply divided country. 80

It was to get this view across to the public that Gladstone encouraged prominent liberal figures such as G. J. Shaw Lefevre, Lord Thring and James Bryce, to produce historical works on the Irish question.⁸¹ He also wrote to the Parnellite propagandist, J. G. S. McNeill, with the same advice. By coincidence McNeill had just completed a book on exactly the lines Gladstone had suggested.⁸² His letter in reply to Gladstone offers a good impression of the effect such literature was supposed to have on the public mind:

A book...detailing the leading iniquities of the union - I mean the method of its enactment-should be distributed far and wide. The transition from hatred of the means by which the union was carried to active desire to atone for the past will be an easy one for the people of England. 83

This, essentially, was also the hoped for effect of the collective 'home rule' history, referred to above,⁸⁴ for which James Bryce wrote an introduction. Writing to Dr George Sigerson, who was to contribute a chapter on Grattan's parliament, Bryce declared:

It will of course be left to you to treat your period in the way you think best, but having regard to the ignorance of the English public about Irish history....it is of the utmost importance that the book should be from beginning to end pure history, free from even the suspicion of partisanship in any

question of current politics....We hope that by setting forth calmly how Ireland has fared at the hands of England during the last two centuries, and what the true causes of her misfortune have been, the book may tend to remove English prejudice and...conduce to an improvement in the relations between the two peoples. 85

To facilitate the writing of Sigerson's chapter, Bryce wrote again, in March 1887, speculating on how the unionist government might be forced to release the state papers for the post-1765 period; papers that would be of vital importance for the period of Grattan's parliament: 'I am sure and more impressed by the truth that...what the English public needs is a faithful narrative of facts: comments will be supplied from a hundred sides, but the facts are not yet known here, and are needed beyond anything else.'⁸⁶ Bryce's communications with Sigerson indicate the widespread confidence felt amongst home rulers that history supported their case. It is a view taken also by one recent commentator on this aspect of the home rule crusade, R. A. Cosgrove: 'the denial of Irish history lulled unionist opinion into a fundamental misapprehension of the forces in Ireland symbolised by the home rule movement'.⁸⁷

However, while it is certainly true that the sophisticated historiography of the period offered much material which could be used to support nationalist arguments, there was, nevertheless, a limit to how useful it could be; and while Dicey's influential England's case against home rule

represented the most sophisticated statement of the unionist case, taking a professedly constitutional and unhistorical approach to the home rule question, there were other unionist arguments which attempted to meet Gladstone's historical challenge.

In terms of propaganda, the weakness of Gladstone's historical argument was that while it may have been based on the highest standard of available scholarship the contemporary political conclusions to be drawn from that scholarship need not necessarily be sympathetic to home rule. For example, the recognition that the passing of the act of union was associated with corruption did not necessarily lead to the conclusion that home rule should be established in Ireland in 1886.

A. V. Dicey could inform Lecky that although his books had long ago convinced him that the act of union was a blunder, 'reflection seems to me to show that its repeal would now be a blunder of much the same kind'.⁸⁸ This point is more clearly illustrated with reference to the controversy surrounding the publication of J. D. Ingram's history of the passing of the act of union in 1887.⁸⁹

Given the scarcity of competent historians willing to undertake propaganda work for the unionist cause, Ingram's history was enthusiastically welcomed. Edward Majoribanks, later Lord Tweedmouth, sent Gladstone a copy of the book with the information that Lord Randolph Churchill was 'exceedingly

anxious that it should be brought to your notice'.⁹⁰ In a letter to 'an Irish country gentleman', John Bright praised it as 'a complete answer to the extravagant assertions of Mr Gladstone' and urged that a cheap edition of the book be quickly produced.⁹¹ Ingram's book set out to make three substantial claims about the events associated with the enacting of the union; that if Irish protestants were opposed to the union it was because it would have endangered their political supremacy; that no bribery attended the passing of the union; that the people of Ireland, protestant and catholic, were in favour of it. However, Gladstone, reviewing the book in the Nineteenth Century,⁹² effectively demolished the substance of Ingram's argument, exposing inconsistencies lack of proper references, misuse of sources and unsupported generalisations. So effective was the demolition that Ingram, in reply, could only fault him for one minor mistake and the book played no important part in unionist propaganda thereafter. Majoribanks wrote to Gladstone marvelling at the effectiveness with which he had routed Ingram: 'The article seems to me to utterly paralyse Dr Ingram'.⁹³ Even Lord Randolph Churchill admitted that 'great loss and damage' had been inflicted on Dr Ingram, 'which he would find it difficult to repair'.⁹⁴

Yet the unionist position was far from lost. Taking up the argument for the unionists, Lord Brabourne replied to Gladstone with A review of a review.⁹⁵ Brabourne's article

was an effective exposure of the weaknesses in Gladstone's use of history for propaganda purposes. Writing in defence of Ingram he wisely avoided the factual aspects of the argument, of which Gladstone had displayed a mastery, and concentrated instead on Gladstone's opinions as to the importance of Grattan's parliament for contemporary Irish nationalism.

Brabourne declared that the essential point about Grattan's parliament was that it was 'in truth the parliament of a weak country joined to a strong one...subservient to the government and parliament of Great Britain' and that Gladstone's view that it was free and working out the regeneration of Ireland was incorrect. Again, as the British government pressure on their behalf in 1793—for franchise extension—showed, Roman Catholics had more to gain from a British government than from the protestant ascendancy's parliament.⁹⁶ On the question of the union, unlike Ingram, Brabourne admitted that corruption did attend its enactment, but went on to make an important criticism of Gladstone's method of judging the historical past by the moral standards of the present: 'It is impossible to judge the morals of 1800 by the standard of 1887, and it is unjust to condemn the statesmen of the earlier period without a full consideration of the circumstances in which they were placed.'⁹⁷ He continued with an attack on Gladstone's approach to history in general:

...it was an indefensible course to adopt a policy which condemned that of all British ministers who had preceded him, upon the ground that they had misread history and misunderstood Ireland, and to adopt it with a knowledge of that history so confessedly "imperfect".... 98

It is significant that in a following letter to the editor of Blackwoods Magazine, Gladstone did not effectively meet these criticisms, but merely repeated his belief that 'the parliament of the Pale grew into the parliament of the nation and would have obtained ninety years ago a worthy constitution' had it not been for the British government. He also recommended that Brabourne read O'Connell's history of Ireland for proof of the 'cruelty and fraud' which had characterised English treatment of Ireland down the centuries.⁹⁹

However, the weaknesses Brabourne exposed in Gladstone's approach to the general history of the period had earlier been exposed in more restricted form, in a published correspondence on Edmund Burke conducted between Gladstone and the prominent Ulster Liberal unionist H. de. F. Montgomery.¹⁰⁰ The point at issue here was the unanswerable question of whether or not Burke would have approved of Gladstone's home rule scheme of 1886. Gladstone, as was seen, was strongly influenced by Burke's writings on Ireland.¹⁰¹ He argued that given Burke's support for Grattan and the parliament of 1782, and his occasional hostile references to a union between Britain and Ireland,¹⁰² it was also logical that he would have approved of

home rule. Montgomery, with greater historical sensitivity, put it that Burke's views had to be considered in their historical context ¹⁰³ and that it was unlikely, given his aristocratic political beliefs, that he would have approved of a parliament controlled by Parnellite 'Jacobins'. ¹⁰⁴ On the basis of these positions there followed a correspondence, which, given the nature of the argument, neither side would expect to gain a decisive advantage from. Yet it was not necessary for unionists to gain a decisive advantage to thwart Gladstone's purposes.

Gladstone had hoped to use the history of Grattan's parliament to establish an indictment against the existing political arrangements between Britain and Ireland. However, given the contentiousness of this period and that government records for the post - 1765 period were not available, it was logical that speculation and conjecture would figure largely in political assessments. It was also impossible to determine whether historical characters would, or would not, have approved of home rule in 1886. To be convincing Gladstone's arguments would have had to be conclusive, and given the nature of his case this was not likely; unionist as well as home rule conclusions could be drawn from substantially the same facts. Irish history was not a subject which lent itself easily as a tool of political propaganda. To the general public, unschooled in Irish history, the effect of the controversy must have

been at best confusing. Nevertheless, until 1890 Gladstone pursued his moral crusade, greatly buoyed up by the report of the special commission in that year.¹⁰⁵ It was inevitable, however, given the source of the Parnell split and the moral issues associated with it, that it would have a detrimental effect on the home rule campaign.

Certainly after 1890 there was a significant falling off in his output of the historically-based material which formed the groundwork of the moral crusade between 1886 and 1890. Moreover, Gladstone's relations with the nationalists were not improved by the wrangles over home rule finance that took place in 1893;¹⁰⁶ and it is indicative of his attitude to home rule at this time that he was prepared to retire from politics over a dispute in cabinet about an increase in naval estimates. On hearing of this, John Morley pointed out the detrimental effect in Ireland of such an action, where people would hardly believe 'that a question of half-a-dozen warships or a few billions of money more or less, could have induced you to step down from the highest undertaking of your life'.¹⁰⁷ Indeed this last was very much to the point, given Gladstone's oft-voiced view in the 1880s that he only remained in politics to implement home rule. However, he now declared that since an increase in naval expenditure would, in his judgment, make him an enemy to the peoples of Europe, the demand to stay for the sake of home rule had no force.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to explain the nature of Gladstone's concept of Irish nationality, as an ideological basis for understanding both what he hoped to achieve by his home rule schemes of 1886 and 1893, and how he thought home rule could be best promoted.

It has attempted to show that his insight into the nature of the Irish problem was, ironically, most penetrating at its most abstract; that while his insight into the relationship between struggle and national consciousness was generally incisive, his conception of Irish nationalism was based on an understanding of Irish history that was not extensive, and which depended for its validity on an historical precedent of little practical relevance. Moreover, his conceptualisation of Irish national sentiment in spiritual terms, divorced from the agrarian question and reliant on the precedent of Grattan's parliament, left him ideologically ill-equipped to take a constructive and realistic approach to Irish unionism, sustained unrealistic hopes of the re-emergence of the Irish gentry as Ireland's political leaders, and led him to believe that all that was needed to make British converts to the home rule cause was to publicise the horrors and iniquities associated with the history of Anglo-Irish relations in general, and the enacting of the union in particular.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOME RULE DEBATE 1886-92: THE SEARCH FOR

AN IRISH CONSTITUTION

DEFINING THE TERMS OF DEBATE 1886-7

On the rejection of home rule, Gladstone immediately called a general election and began his campaign in the country. In major election speeches at Edinburgh, Manchester and Liverpool, on 18, 25 and 28 June respectively, he set out the general lines of his approach to propagating the home rule cause in the period 1886-92: the rejected bill was now dead, only its principle - 'to establish a legislative body in Ireland to manage exclusively Irish affairs' - remained.¹ It would be for the acceptance of this principle, rather than specific clauses or details that he would campaign - a course of action he presumed his followers preferred.² Essentially, and despite 'ill-defined' alternatives to home rule offered by Lord Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain, the only real alternative was between either home rule or coercion.³ Gladstone publicly renounced the inseparability between his extremely unpopular land purchase scheme and home rule and put it that until home rule was conferred British reforms could not be achieved.⁴

There were two reasons for Gladstone's adoption of this rather simplistic approach to propagating the home rule cause. First, he was influenced by his reading of Daniel O'Connell,

who, during the repeal campaign of the 1840s had urged the simple repetition of a 'new proposition' to establish it in the public mind;⁵ and undoubtedly the reduction of a complex issue like home rule to a simple, easily assimilated formula for public consumption, made sense. Secondly, and more importantly, such a policy made easier the cohesion of the liberal party on a subject to which few were emotionally committed: a wide-ranging and detailed debate might have endangered the party's unity of purpose, with differing factions supporting different and probably inadequate plans for Irish autonomy; a possibility that both Wilfrid Blunt⁶ and Parnell⁷ were very much aware of. Thus it is understandable why Gladstone wanted to maintain debate on home rule at the level of a relatively few simplified propositions. Ironically, though, his energetic pursuit of the home rule campaign invited the kind of multifarious discussion that he sought to forestall.

Despite the optimism with which Gladstone took his case to the country, the result of the election delivered a massive verdict for the maintenance of the status quo. As a result of an arrangement on seats between liberal unionists and tories, only 280 liberals returned to the new parliament compared with 390 unionists. Yet Gladstone was far from disappointed: he noted that while England has given massive verdict against home rule, Scotland had approved that policy in the proportion of 3 to 2; Wales by 5 to 1; and Ireland $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 1. Moreover, in

terms of votes cast, he noted that only 76,000, or 4 per cent, separated victors and vanquished. Considering the short period in which the subject had been before the country this 'was certainly no final and irrevocable verdict'.⁸

Gladstone also claimed that the tories would not pursue coercion in Ireland and that liberal unionists objected, not to home rule, but only to the 'awkward and perverse manner in which it was handled by the late administration'.⁹ Apparently, and with considerable self-delusion, Gladstone was assuming an essential unity of view on subjects where, as will be seen, little existed. Nevertheless, the ambiguous use of terms like 'self-government', 'local government', and 'home rule', by both Gladstonian and unionist liberals, did provide a stimulus for those who believed a scheme supported by both factions was possible. Indeed, within days of the rejection of his home rule bill, Arthur Kavanagh, the seriously deformed but active Irish landlord, communicated to Gladstone a paper entitled, 'A few suggestions for consideration as to a future policy of government for Ireland'. He proposed to establish a large and yearly increasing class of yeoman proprietors, with the state providing credit for the purchase of land, and to replace the 'castle system' with a 'permanent' government, independent of party changes at Westminster, to be based on the Irish privy council with a 'representative' element introduced into it. Nothing, however, came of Kavanagh's suggestions.¹⁰ Gladstone's

bill of 1886 was - as he was later to describe it - too near the 'irreducible minimum' to admit of further amendment in the direction of limiting self-government.¹¹

A few days after this offering, Lord Powerscourt, in a letter to the Freeman's Journal, declared that many conservatives and unionists would support home rule provided imperial integrity, Westminster's supremacy and the 'administration of justice' were secured, in addition to adequate protection for property and religion. Unionists did not consider that the home rule bill of 1886 secured these objects, but since Gladstone had declared that bill to be dead, there was now room for common ground. In a new scheme, he continued, Irishmen should be allowed to fill the posts of viceroy and chief secretary, and extensive land reform enacted, since Gladstone's land purchase bill was defeated by the British taxpayer and not the Irish landlords who had little opportunity for expressing their opinions on it.¹² However, as with Kavanagh's suggestions, Powerscourt's letter was to elicit no considerable response.

By far the most significant contribution to the home rule debate at this time, though, was that of Dr R. W. Dale, an influential liberal unionist from Birmingham. In an article in the June issue of the Contemporary Review, Dale sketched out a home rule plan that sought both to unite the liberal party and diminish unionist fears of nationalist government by proposing an Irish parliament with the extent of its powers

strictly fixed - as opposed to Gladstone's defeated bill which merely defined certain subjects as outside its competence. The problem of securing the supremacy of Westminster without offering scope for Irish interference in internal British affairs, would be solved by having either a statutory parliament for Great Britain or separate assemblies for England, Scotland and Wales. The imperial parliament, with the Irish represented in it, would continue to deal with imperial affairs. In the working out of this scheme, Gladstone's bill, suitably amended, would form the Irish and first element to be implemented.¹³

Dale's ideas attracted the attention of William Walsh, archbishop of Dublin, who incorporated them, along with ideas for extensive land purchase on the basis of land value rather than rent, in two interviews given to the Freeman's Journal in August 1886; and which also appeared simultaneously 'in a leading newspaper in every great city of the United States'. The purpose of these interviews was to assist the Parnellite delegation to the Chicago convention of 1886 in pledging that body to a moderate constitutional policy,¹⁴ but they also provoked a considerable correspondence with leading public figures, including Cardinal Manning, Wilfrid Blunt and Gladstone - to whom he communicated copies of the interviews, with assurances of Irish devotion for his efforts on Ireland's behalf.¹⁵

Gladstone, however, immediately rejected Dale's proposal, considering it a 'contraction' of home rule, though he declared that he was now willing to examine, 'on a wider historical basis' than in 1886, the financial basis of a future bill, with the possibility of a favourable result for Ireland.¹⁶ Warning against unionist attempts to 'shuffle off' home rule in favour of land purchase, Gladstone also declared that Irish measures 'which could not be accepted as final but which might be tolerated as intermediate, if they contained substantial...good' would, depending on Irish opinion, 'weigh much with...the liberal party'.¹⁷ Gladstone's letter contains a brief outline of his general Irish policy in the period 1886-92: reluctant to consider an extensive revision of his own home rule ideas, apart from the financial question, he would seek to pursue 'intermediate' measures of reform.

Nevertheless, Walsh has to remain enthusiastically in favour of Dale's ideas. In further correspondence in 1887, Gladstone drew Walsh's attention to the fact that Dale had recently cited his support for his views on Irish self-government.¹⁸ Walsh confirmed that this was true and gave his reasons as follows:

It seems to me to get rid of many difficulties. 1st. It provides for a continued Irish representation in the councils of empire, free from all possibility of corrupt bidding by rival English parties for the Irish vote. I mean that in this plan the Irish vote could not be secured for the keeping in

or the turning out of an English ministry by the promise of adoption by English party leaders of a certain policy on Irish questions. Ireland could, of course, influence imperial policy, but the votes would turn on the merits of the imperial questions at issue.

2nd. It puts an end to the cry of separation.

3rd. It provides for the (necessary) amendment of the new constitution as regards working arrangements. It is inevitable that in the working of our "legislative body" in Ireland some unforeseen difficulties should crop up. If we looked, as we should look, for the removal of these, English prejudice would be cited against us. "These Irish", it would be said, "are never satisfied". I see a great advantage in a system which would give rise to a common interest in the efficient working of the various "legislative bodies".

4th. It appeals powerfully to English popular opinion by the practical removal of all obstruction in English legislation by the house of lords.

5th. It removes the "tribute" difficulty.¹⁹ And so on.²⁰

Gladstone replied rather testily that while he would not oppose any measure the Irish regarded as a 'definite' settlement, he was wary of any proposals 'which...tend to impair Irish home rule under the pretext of keeping up Ireland's interest in imperial affairs; or which may enlarge the field of the question and bring on to it a number of extraneous clogs'.²¹ Gladstone's dislike of Dale's ideas would have been greatly reinforced by information he received from John Morley in December 1886, to the effect that the prospect of Scottish home rule was 'greatly alarming' their supporters.²² Thus despite the persuasiveness of Walsh's argument, Gladstone's reply, for this and the reasons stated above,²³ were as unencouraging as the previous year. Nor is it likely that he would have been overly impressed by Walsh personally, whom Lord

Aberdeen believed both lacking in political judgment and not in Parnell's confidence.²⁴ On 1 June 1887 Gladstone wrote again condemning Dale's ideas and urging Walsh and other Irish leaders to meet and settle definitely on the kind of home rule measure they desired: 'We have then a solid point of departure and can proceed to deal with England.' Dr Dale personally may have been concerned to contribute to a solution to the Irish question, but he represented more of actual distrust than of 'contingent support'.²⁵

In noting Gladstone's view on Dale's plan, though, it is worth pointing out that he was in touch with another source of Irish opinion at this time, which suggested that nationalists were happy with his approach to home rule and ready to follow his leadership. An extensive memorandum submitted by C. S. Roundell to Gladstone in August 1886, consisted of an interview he had had with Alfred Webb, a leading Dublin protestant home ruler, on the Irish question: it confirmed everything Gladstone would have wanted to believe about existing Irish attitudes to home rule.

Webb argued that the scheme of 1886 was basically satisfactory: home rule was not wanted as an instalment of separation but as an end in itself: present Irish leaders were now older and more conservative: 'they will lead the sympathies of the people into conservatism'. On the important question of home rule finance, Webb declared that the Irish members felt

themselves weak on this subject, and, recognising Gladstone as a master of finance, they were prepared to 'leave themselves in his hands'. He was also reassuring on the willingness of tenants to pay 'fair' rents, and on the disinclination of catholics to persecute protestants.²⁶ Being a Gladstonian himself, it is hardly surprising that his own views should reflect those of his leader, and his view as to the best method of advancing the home rule cause was virtually synonymous with Gladstone's: 'patience and quiet firmness, the moderation of the demand and conduct of Ireland, the general extension of historical information, and the progress of reflection on the subject will in no long time, we may rest assured, bring about the triumph of right'.²⁷ But given that home rule could not be implemented until the defeat of the unionist government, Gladstone was, as was seen, prepared to pursue 'intermediate' measures of Irish reform, and a letter to The Times by Lord Monck provided the stimulus in this direction.

Monck noted that unionist and Gladstonian liberals were at least agreed on conferring an extensive measure of local government on Ireland, and that Parnell was committed to the acceptance of a scheme that specifically subordinated Ireland to Great Britain by limiting autonomy to internal Irish affairs. He believed that herein lay the basis for agreement between Parnell, Chamberlain and Hartington on large powers of local government being conferred on Ireland, provided these were

delegated from Westminster. Indeed the precedent for such action had already been established by the practice of conferring on municipal bodies and public companies the power to make by-laws. Monck, however, recognised that problems would arise in defining what powers an Irish assembly should have.²⁸

Whatever the merits of Monck's suggestions, they certainly did not go unnoticed by Gladstone, who viewed them, though, not as Monck would have wished - as a basis on which to settle the home rule problem - but rather as a basis for the implementation of useful short-term measures which might ease the transition to Irish self-government when it was possible to enact a home rule bill.²⁹

Parnell's attitude to this policy, however, was initially hostile; he feared it would provoke a revolt 'in his own army'.³⁰ Nevertheless, on being pressed a second time by John Morley, he declared his willingness to accept 'for what it was worth' any measure expressly limited to local government reform, provided it could not be mistaken for even a partial settlement of the home rule question. In this respect, he expressly rejected a 'central council' scheme because it would be 'an attempted substitute for a parliament'.³¹ The discussions and agreement with Parnell on short-term measures were important, as they cleared the ground for liberal participation in the Round Table talks held in January and February 1887. These discussions have been comprehensively treated by Michael Hurst,³² and the

object here will be mainly to illustrate how they clarified the different meanings Gladstonian and unionist liberals attached to terms like 'local government' and 'home rule'.

The talks were instigated by Joseph Chamberlain, under pressure from liberal unionist colleagues anxious that he should pursue a progressive Irish policy. On 23 December 1886 he made a conciliatory speech appealing to Gladstonian leaders to meet the dissentients for discussions on the enactment of extensive Irish land and local government reforms.³³ This elicited a favourable response from John Morley who saw 'some chance of daylight' if Chamberlain could be 'got to advance' and Parnell took a 'moderate' view.³⁴ But how close were the positions of the two sides?

Chamberlain hoped to enact an extensive land measure that nationalist M.P.s would have to accept: 'their constituents would stand no nonsense on this point and would not allow the question to be postponed for home rule or anything else'. This measure could easily be followed by local government reform, with a possible basis found for approaching the difficult autonomy issue: 'time and full discussion may work miracles'.³⁵ So far, such a policy had advantages for Gladstonians: in solving the land question it would remove 'the great object of discord' between Irishmen and enhance the prospects for the success of home rule, a prime object of which was to gradually eliminate the 'social alienation which is the curse of

Ireland'.³⁶ Parnell, however, felt that any conference with Chamberlain would mean a compromise on home rule and ridiculed the idea mooted by Morley that local authorities be set up as 'buffers' between the tenants and the British government to effect land purchase: 'If you give the local authorities the option of buying, they will never exercise it except at inadequately low prices. If you compel them to buy, then they won't pay the instalments.'³⁷ Gladstone understood Parnell's fears but thought them unnecessary: the 'national question for Ireland' was too big 'to play pitch and pass' with. It was another thing, though, 'to recognise the facts around us and adopt present action to them', which Parnell seemed inclined to do.³⁸

However, Gladstone's insistence on any policy of liberal reunion involving no compromise on 'the national question for Ireland' highlights the basic incompatibility between what Chamberlain would offer and Gladstonians accept. At about the same time as Gladstone was writing to Morley, Chamberlain was outlining to Harcourt his fundamental argument on the home rule question:

I did not believe in the possibility of granting an Irish parliament without endangering the union. I did not think that Ireland could be recognised as a nation without conceding separation. Ireland was a province - as Nova Scotia was a province in Canada and the cardinal difference between Mr Gladstone and myself was that he had treated the question from

the point of view of the separate nationality of Ireland, while I had regarded it from the point of view of a state or a province.

Chamberlain hoped that given the impossibility of enacting home rule immediately, agreement on subsidiary issues such as land and local government might lead to the discussion of 'any alternative plan for self-government which might be brought forward as a substitute for Mr Gladstone's bill'.³⁹

The first two meetings took place at Harcourt's house on 13 and 14 January 1887, with Morley, Harcourt and Lord Herschell for the Gladstonians, and Chamberlain and George Trevelyan for the liberal unionists. According to Chamberlain's account of these talks, his own proposals for a land scheme based on a new separate and individual valuation of estates with 'county boards' established to deal with the tenants, found substantial support. Again, he recorded that his suggestion that the imperial parliament should have the same degree of control over a future home rule legislature as the Canadian dominion parliament had over the provincial legislatures - which had specifically enumerated powers - was also widely acceptable. General agreement also existed, he claimed, on the questions of local government, public works and education. Chamberlain concluded that apart from the 'fundamental' question of Ulster,⁴⁰ 'all the other questions raised were dealt with as matters of detail to be determined by further

discussion and...did not raise question(s) of fundamental principle'.⁴¹

Chamberlain's sanguine view of the progress made at these talks, however, was far from reflecting the reality of the case. Writing to Gladstone on 15 January, Morley described Chamberlain's land proposals as 'ingenious but resting on air' and his intention of conferring on an Irish parliament the functions of a Canadian provincial legislature, as being 'launched in mid-ocean'. There was, finally, the Ulster question, on which no agreement was likely.⁴² Writing in reply a few days later, Gladstone was already expressing grave doubts about the outcome of the conference: the home rule bill of 1886 was too near 'the irreducible minimum' for a plan such as Chamberlain envisaged to be successful. Of Chamberlain's land proposals, Gladstone declared: 'No land bill as good as ours on the financial side [the bill of 1886] can properly be framed without keeping a hand on all Irish public receipts and making [the] Irish authority dependent on the surplus.'⁴³ From this point on, the hopes for an agreement between Gladstonian and liberal unionists on land and Irish autonomy fast disappeared.

Criticism of the talks from liberal radicals was severe while Parnellites declared that they would wait twenty years for a 'national' measure of home rule rather than accept Chamberlain's provincial legislature.⁴⁴ Moreover, public declarations by John Morley, to the effect that no concessions were being

made to Chamberlain except on points of insignificant detail, fuelled tory fears that too much was being conceded.⁴⁵

Chamberlain himself did not improve the prospects for a successful outcome of the talks, when, in an open letter to an American correspondent, published in The Times on 18 January 1887, he declared that while Gladstone was prepared to give 'national home rule', which was essentially 'separatist', he was not prepared to go further than provincial home rule: 'Once grant that Ireland is a nation, and not...a part of a nation, and you must follow this out to its logical conclusion and give them all the rights of a nation, including separate taxation, foreign relations and military forces.'⁴⁶

A subsequent letter by Chamberlain in the Baptist on 25 January, claiming that the Gladstonians were preventing the enactment of British reforms by concentrating only on home rule, angered Gladstone, who refused to reveal a memorandum he had prepared on the talks. In this atmosphere it was inevitable that the last scheduled meeting on 14 February 1887, which concentrated on the insuperable problem of Ulster, would fail. Subsequently, Gladstone declared that the conference could only proceed if Lord Hartington was made a party to it. However, Hartington believed that home rule based on the Canadian constitution could only work well in the case of a people who desired 'union', not in the 'opposite case of a people who have been taught to desire the largest possible

measure of separation'.⁴⁷ Thus the Round Table conference floundered and was finally buried when the Tories planned to introduce the Crimes Act of 1887.⁴⁸ Probably its most important result was to clarify the very different meanings each side attached to terms which both applied in reference to Irish autonomy, and to demonstrate, as sadly misconceived, the optimistic hopes of well-intentioned people such as Lords Powerscourt and Monck for a united liberal settlement of the home rule issue. Thereafter the public development of unionist and home rule arguments intensified, fuelled on the unionist side by leading public and professional figures concerned to provide a more intellectual basis for arguments often lacking in coherence and characterised by coarse prejudice.⁴⁹

'ENGLAND'S CASE AGAINST HOME RULE': DICEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOME RULE DEBATE

By far the most important contribution to unionist literature was A. V. Dicey's England's case against home rule, published in November 1886. Dicey, Vinerian professor of English law at Oxford, was, in fact, far from being an enthusiastic unionist: until 1886 he favoured mild constitutional reforms, involving a wide exercise of the 'perogative' of the executive government subject to the restraint of a written constitution and supreme court. However, fearful of Britain's world role in the 1880s, he believed home rule involved an abrogation of the rights of

parliament and would necessitate major constitutional changes.⁵⁰ His book offered the most authoritative statement of the unionist case and was enthusiastically received by Tories and liberal unionists alike. Dicey unashamedly argued that his perspective on Irish autonomy was an English one and set out to show that home rule under any form would be less beneficial for Great Britain than the maintenance of the union.⁵¹

Dicey argued that the Irish were merely a 'fraction' of the British nation and had no separate 'national' rights;⁵² indeed even local government was unsuitable for Ireland.⁵³ Thereafter he criticised the several methods by which home rule might be implemented: federalism, colonial independence, the restoration of Grattan's parliament and Gladstone's bill. Federalism, he argued, would cause a fundamental constitutional disruption, leading to a form of government that only succeeded in conditions such as existed in the United States, and which did not prevail in the United Kingdom. Colonial independence was successful only because the colonies were distant, prosperous, prided their connection with England and had imperial protection without contributing 'a penny of the imperial burden': it was 'impossible' that Ireland could enjoy such a relationship with Britain. Grattan's parliament, Dicey dismissed, as belonging to the past and impossible to restore. As for Gladstone's scheme, it

means an artificial combination of federalism and colonialism. Its aim is to secure the advantage of two opposite systems; its result is to combine and intensify the disadvantages of both systems. It inevitably tends towards the dissolution of the United Kingdom into a federation...it introduces into the relations between each of the different divisions of the United Kingdom elements of conflict which are all inherent in federalism; it requires that absolute deference for the judicial decisions of a federal court which if it exists anywhere can exist only among a people like the Americans, imbued with legal notions....That this sentiment cannot exist in Ireland is certain....The Gladstonian constitution again, because it contains some institutions borrowed from the colonial system without the conditions requisite for their proper working...falsifies them. The imperial supremacy of Great Britain, the imperial control over the army, the occasional interference with the Irish executive and the veto of the crown on Irish legislation, are... under the Gladstonian constitution certain to be sources of justifiable dissatisfaction. 54

Additionally, Dicey argued that Gladstone's scheme was produced in response to a temporarily prevailing sentiment rather than 'considerations of sound policy'.⁵⁵ Nor were his arguments without an appeal to anti-Irish ethnic and religious prejudice. England and Ireland were at 'different levels of civilisation' and it was 'monstrous' that during the reformation an attempt was made to impose Anglican protestantism on the Irish who 'had hardly risen to the level of Roman Catholicism'.⁵⁶ The only policy worth pursuing, Dicey concluded, was to solve the land problem and to ensure Ireland absolutely fair treatment as a member of the United Kingdom.⁵⁷

Dicey's book received a response from home rulers proportionate to its influence. Gladstone praised it for raising the level of controversy and apart from historical issues,⁵⁸

answered Dicey's claims that the home rule policy was a response to transient popular opinion by reminding him that all the great reforms of the century - e.g. the 1832 reform act and the enactment of the poor law - had been supported by the masses and opposed by the 'classes'.⁵⁹

The most penetrating liberal reaction, however, came from John Morley, who condemned Dicey's treatment of the Irish problem as a 'theorism': 'it is not a thesis to be proved but a malady to be cured'.⁶⁰ Nor was liberal action on home rule inspired by the wild doctrine that any group of people claiming to be nationalist had an inherent right to be treated as an independent community, but on J. S. Mill's view, that no intention of protecting someone else's interests justified 'tying up their own hands': it was only by their own efforts that 'any positive and durable improvement in their circumstances could be worked out'. Because extreme measures were employed by the Irish before their constitutional demand was listened to, was no indication - quite the reverse - of what they would do after home rule was granted. Irishmen did not hate the English people, only the English system of government in Ireland, and apart from 'one notorious corner [Ulster]' no hatred existed between protestants and catholics. Indeed, after the enactment of home rule the catholics would divide politically into clerical and anti-clerical forces. Morley also denied, both that the land question could be

settled without conferring self-government⁶¹ and that the fact that Gladstone's home rule scheme was based partly on the colonial system - which was essentially unlike Ireland's relations with Great Britain - rendered it unworkable. Indeed, Ireland's closeness to Great Britain and the fact that most of her markets lay there, were strong bases for union.⁶²

The Parnellite retort to Dicey was delivered by J. H. McCarthy, and was similar in many respects to Morley's. It was most notable for its emphasis on the compatibility of Irish nationalism and British imperialism; conciliating nationalist sentiment did not imply separation. Separation was 'practically impossible' because of 'geographic contiguity' and community of language: 'for all my affection for the ancient and still vital Gaelic speech, I do not believe it will, or would wisely become the vernacular of Ireland'. All Irishmen who valued Ireland's welfare would prefer her to be 'a member of a great empire upon equal terms than an independent state in the position of at the worst Andorra, at the best Belgium'. McCarthy went on to criticise Dicey for having invested the constitution with almost 'occult powers' and everything labelled with it a kind of sanctity'.⁶³

In spite of liberal and nationalist criticism, however, Dicey's work has to remain important in unionist propaganda. For example, the argument used by Joseph Chamberlain with

respect to Irish nationality, on 18 January 1887, bore the hallmarks of Dicey's thinking, while the view that the Irish people were simply a part of the United Kingdom population and not a distinct nationality, was taken up and elaborated on by leading public and professional men in March 1887.

Writing to The Times in mid-March, Sir John Lubbock argued that socially, the whole population of the British isles was made up of a mixture of Saxon, Celtic and Scandinavian peoples. Consequently, he put it that any argument in favour of home rule based on the existence of distinct nationalities fell utterly to the ground:

....if we recognise the undeniable ethnological fact [that] English, Irish and Scotch are all composed of the same elements, and in not very dissimilar proportions, it could do much to mitigate our unfortunate dissensions, and add to the strength and welfare of our common country. 65

Replying to Lubbock, James Bryce put it that he had confused races with nationalities: 'A nationality may be made up of a number of races because race is only one of the elements which go to create a nationality.'⁶⁶ Lubbock retorted: 'Does he really mean that Ulster is fused in a cohesive whole with the rest of Ireland?'⁶⁷ This query was, of course, very much to the point, and personally Bryce was at one with the unionist argument on the Ulster question,⁶⁸ but here he sided-stepped

Lubbock's challenge with the general observation that a passionate feeling of nationality existed among the great bulk of the Irish people: 'It is not a matter of race or religion only, for it is now shared by many protestants and many descendants of Englishmen and Scotchmen.' At this point, though, a number of prominent figures wrote in support of Lubbock's views: T. H. Huxley, Sir John Beddoe and the duke of Argyll.⁶⁹

IRISH POLITICS AND BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION

With the introduction of the crimes act of 1887, the publication of the 'Parnellism and crime' letters and the progress of the plan of campaign, conditions were hardly favourable for a constructive or dispassionate debate on home rule. Gladstone, in a major speech at Swansea on 4 June 1887, cited these factors as having crowded home rule out of the public mind. But there was also his own reluctance publicly to discuss any plan for Irish autonomy in detail. He declared his 'great horror of premature decisions'. On this occasion, however, he did reveal something of his current thinking on the home rule and land questions. As the land purchase bill of 1886 was rejected because of a feared massive outlay of imperial funds, he would now be prepared to consider a scheme which did not involve imperial credit. Also, he now admitted that the financial scheme of his home rule bill would require

'further consideration': Anglo-Irish financial relations since the union had been of 'extreme complexity' and the time available for consideration of the subject in 1886 was inadequate. Referring to the vexed question of Irish representation at Westminster, Gladstone refused to commit himself to a 'specific plan', declaring that it was 'a choice of difficulties'.⁷⁰

Apparently he wished to retain public attention on the principle of home rule rather than its possibly divisive content, at a time when he believed the effect of coercion in Ireland would create converts to home rule in England.⁷¹ Thus when Joseph Chamberlain declared his willingness to consider another plan for Irish autonomy which might entail liberal reunion, Gladstone preferred instead to 'wait and see', believing negotiations would only be worthwhile if they included Hartington. For Chamberlain's part, he was informed by Lord Hartington, supported by Lord Randolph Churchill, that even a modified scheme of home rule based on the Canadian constitution would probably mean the break-up of the unionist alliance.⁷² Thereafter the chances of an agreed liberal scheme of Irish self-government disappeared completely.

But events in Ireland did not all work to the liberals' advantage. Parnell certainly had now bought his views on the linkage between the land and home rule questions into line with those of Morley and Gladstone. Believing that the land purchase scheme of 1886 had been the cause of the home rule

bill's rejection, Parnell had subsequently thought it best for the prospects of self-government to forgo any large scale solution to the land question and to rely instead on amendments to the land acts of 1881 and 1885.⁷³ However, he now accepted Gladstone's and Morley's view that this problem had to be solved concurrently with home rule. Parnell also stressed the 'sovereign importance of a favourable financial arrangement' and was reassured on this point by Morley.⁷⁴

What worried Morley and Gladstone, however, was the impetus given to extreme nationalism by the effects of coercion in Ireland. In particular, they noted that at the annual convention of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Thurles on 9 November 1887, the fenian or 'extreme' element 'carried the day against the priests and constitutional party'.⁷⁵ Morley declared that unless liberals showed in a marked way that 'we are not daunted and not holding back', extremists would take the lead in nationalist politics.⁷⁶ Consequently, a great demonstration in Dublin, attended by liberals,⁷⁷ took place at the beginning of 1888. Nevertheless, the tendency of the agrarian struggle in Ireland to produce hardline expressions of opinion by nationalists had reverberations in Great Britain that could hardly have helped the liberal argument that home rule did not mean separation.

For example, in July 1887 the unionist Graphic described how the Irish held aloof from a great demonstration in London

to mark the queen's jubilee and attempted to detract from the Irish visit of Prince Albert Victor and Prince George. Such behaviour suggested that they really wanted a republic not mere home rule. Respect could be shown for the crown without departing 'a hair's breadth from their acknowledged principles', but if they displayed 'what seems to others plain manifestations of disloyalty....they must have it said of them they they cherish desires very different from those...they openly avow'.⁷⁸ Similar incidents, small in themselves, but hardly helpful to a 'union of hearts' policy, continued to be cited thereafter.⁷⁹

However, at least one significant attempt was made to induce nationalists to adopt a more sensitive attitude to British public opinion. Lady Aberdeen has recorded how readily members of the National League of Great Britain followed her husband's advice to declare their energetic promotion of the home rule cause not inconsistent with "loyalty to the queen as sovereign of Great Britain and Ireland".⁸⁰ But if the agrarian struggle in Ireland had an adverse effect on home rule propoganda in Great Britain, to a greater extent would it detrimentally affect any attempt to find agreement among different sections of Irishmen on the home rule issue; and just such an attempt was made in 1887.

A FAIR CONSTITUTION FOR IRELAND

While political conditions in Ireland in 1887 were hardly propitious for the discussion of any home rule scheme, it is nevertheless true that if an Irish contribution to the debate was to be made few Irishmen would have been as well qualified to undertake it as Sir Charles Gavan Duffy. A leading member of the Young Ireland movement of the 1840's and founder of the Irish tenant league of the 1850s - which sought to unite protestants and catholics in political action - he had emigrated to Australia, become prime minister of Victoria and was subsequently knighted. Thus both his nationalist activities and his involvement in the political life of the empire gave him credentials for impartiality that few other contemporary Irishmen possessed. Duffy saw clearly the need to rethink the whole question of home rule in the post - 1886 period: unless Irish agreement on Irish autonomy could be obtained, any plan would ultimately fail.⁸¹ In 1887 he declared that a new constitution was needed, and must be based on a recognition of the fact

that the Irish nation is not homogeneous; that it is composed of various races, creeds, and interests each of which has an absolutely equal claim to the protection of the law and the enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of citizens; that we must constantly acknowledge and act upon the principle that in all public affairs, from the parish to the parliament, it is the highest interest of the country that the majority and minority should be fully representative, and neither of them suppressed nor overborne. ⁸²

The conceptual distinction between Duffy's view of the Irish people and Gladstone's, was that, whereas the latter viewed Irish internal religious and class alienation as merely temporary manifestations of an unnatural social state that would disappear once home rule was established and protestants accepted their true role in the Irish nation,⁸³ Duffy recognised the depth of those divisions and the need to cater properly for the fears arising from them. Thus, whereas Gladstone's scheme of 1886 merely implied the protection of protestant interests in the constitution of the proposed propertied first order, Duffy insisted that a new Irish constitution must involve the minority in its making and must provide explicit safeguards for their interests. A gathering such as the Round Table conference, however well intentioned, could never completely achieve what was properly a task for Irishmen themselves:⁸⁴

If Irishmen cannot frame a constitution for their native country, what security is there that they can administer effectively a constitution framed by other hands? They must prove their fitness for self-government in the same manner that all committees of civilised men have done before them. In the history of constitutional liberty there is not so far as I know, a single case where the fundamental statute was not the work of the people whose right it was designed to establish.

Neither France, Italy or Belgium would have accepted a ready-made constitution devised by an external party, in the way Parnellites had accepted Gladstone's scheme, and certainly

not Australia or Canada.⁸⁵

Duffy criticised the manner in which Gladstonian home rule had been sprung on the country and argued that a necessary prelude to the formation of a home rule constitution should have been a royal commission, sitting alternatively in Belfast and Dublin, 'to ascertain the will of the people with certainty'. For the future, he envisaged a commission composed equally of Irish conservatives and nationalists with an impartial English chairman. In the meantime, he proposed a thorough discussion in the Irish press on what a proper home rule scheme should consist of.

The first priority of a new Irish constitution would be 'to make the substitution of Celtic or catholic ascendancy for the protestant ascendancy...impossible'.⁸⁶ Appeals to the past conduct of catholics as security for protestant interests were inadequate; as were Gladstone's provisions in the 1886 scheme to limit the functions of the Irish legislature and executive: 'to make them powerless to do much good in order that they may be able to do no wrong'.⁸⁷ This policy had satisfied no one and in a new home rule scheme the 'fundamental security for sober, ordered liberty must lie in the character of the legislature'.⁸⁸

Duffy, who was to edit Thomas Davis's history of the 1689 parliament—in which the actions of a generally just and impartial catholic administration were marred by an insuffic-

ient regard for protestant interests ⁸⁹ argued for 'solid and adequate' guarantees. He advocated a two-chamber assembly, with minority representation guaranteed by proportional representation at constituency level, with provision for it to elect about one-third of M.P.s in parliament. It was also necessary to ensure that an opposition in parliament existed that would have a real possibility of forming an alternative government, and that procedures were established to prevent the enacting of oppressive legislation.⁹⁰ He proposed also a nominated senate with ecclesiastical representation and retention of the crown veto. Duffy continued with an attack on one of the most important symbols in nationalist ideology—Grattan's parliament:

The minority would detest the parliament, which, instead of being national in the true sense, would be monopolised by one section of the nation; and who can wonder or blame them? Wolfe Tone, Lord Edward, John Keogh, and the nationalists of their day detested Grattan's parliament for the same reason. And in the end Grattan himself detested it, so natural is it to revolt against foul play. 91

Moreover, in providing an outline of the unfair taxation imposed in Ireland since the union, Duffy drew on the recent work of Robert Giffen⁹² to demonstrate the unfair imperial burden paid by Ireland and urged an immediate inquiry by a royal commission of competent men into the financial relations between the two countries.⁹³ As for the land question,

he thought Gladstone's scheme of 1886 'substantially just' except for the 'humiliating' provision for putting in an imperial receiver on behalf of the imperial government; it would bring the credit of the country at the outset into undeserved contempt: 'the record of Irish farmers did not justify it'.⁹⁴

Duffy's intention, on the publication of his article, was to instigate 'a searching and public discussion' on the home rule question as might gradually make its elements familiar to the entire people. E. D. Gray copied the article into the Freeman's Journal unabridged, and offered to open the columns of the paper to controversy on all questions requiring further elucidation. At first it seemed that the time was right for such an initiative. One Irish unionist peer wrote privately to Duffy in terms which appeared to reflect widespread unionist opinion: "We do not think we are going to be beaten, or that there will be any need for an Irish constitution, but, if there were need, your plan is a fair and satisfactory one". The Dublin Daily Express, the most 'authentic' voice of southern landlord opinion, went further, and having specified some conditions for the settlement of the land question stated that when this issue was settled, "you will find the conservative party, English and Irish we believe, ready to join with him and them [nationalists] in striking out some modus vivendi, as regards the international question, and the degree of self-government which may be awarded to the country

consistent...with the preservation of imperial and internal unity". The Dublin Evening Mail expressed itself in similar terms, while the Northern Whig admitted that it was "substantially just and adequate".⁹⁵

However, unionists predicted that though the plan was a good one, it would be unacceptable to the nationalist party, and if such was the case it would be purely academic.⁹⁶ To obviate just this difficulty Duffy took the trouble, before his article was published, to submit his ideas on an Irish constitution to leading nationalists, including Parnell, Archbishops Croke and Walsh, and the protestant home rulers Alfred Webb and Rev. J. A. Galbraith. It met with general approval: 'principles were applauded, and details reserved for further consideration'.

John Dillon submitted the essay to Parnell who agreed with its main provisions, especially the two chambers and the necessity of a revision of the financial scheme for home rule.⁹⁷ Galbraith welcomed the scheme, though with doubts as to the desirability of proportional representation; this, however, Alfred Webb thought to be one of the scheme's best aspects. A similar range of views as expressed by other nationalists⁹⁸ and by prominent British home rulers. Cardinal Manning considered the plan 'the most adequate and safely guarded outline that I have seen', though he disagreed with Archbishop Walsh on the desirability of ecclesiastical representation in the

senate. He disliked the idea of the clergy being entangled in a 'political state' when they could exercise most influence by 'reason'. Manning also thought the financial argument was very strong; if worked up in a separate article it would make an 'irresistable' argument for reparation to Ireland. It was an argument 'unknown to Englishmen, and is thoroughly English',⁹⁹ meaning, presumably, that Englishmen would readily agree to deal with the issue of Irish overtaxation by means of a royal commission. Of leading liberals, Gladstone, significantly, declined to express any opinion though some of his colleagues gave the plan a frank and cordial acceptance. Four of these considered Duffy's proposals and gave it 'as large an assent as a minister usually obtains from his colleagues for the heads of a new reform bill when it is first submitted to them'.¹⁰⁰

Subsequently Duffy published the scheme as an appeal to public opinion and more than eight English and Scottish journals criticised it, 'generally with keen insight, and generous appreciation'.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the existing political climate made the possibility of agreement by all parties on his home rule ideas very unlikely. Most disappointingly, conditions in Ireland and a poor nationalist response generally, rendered the kind of discussion Duffy sought impossible, just as these factors had killed a proposal earlier in the year by Archbishop Walsh for Irish landlords and tenants to meet in an Irish 'Round Table' conference to solve the land question.¹⁰²

In a mood of some desperation Duffy wrote to Dr George Sigerson, who had sought to explain his lack of success by arguing that few people in Ireland studied constitutions. Duffy, however, replied that since that was true 'there is more need that those who do speak out. The Freeman invites controversy, and it would be surely well that you stated your objections and your assent in order to foster the leading points in the public mind. It is a searching controversy which is necessary to make the obscure familiar and the indistinct clear.'¹⁰³ Yet depressing as Duffy found the immediate prospects for debate, as will be seen in chapter ten, his ideas on special minority representation in a two chamber legislature would be incorporated in the memorandum on which the second home rule bill was largely based.

DIVERGENT STRATEGIES 1888-92

The year 1888 marks a watershed in the home rule debate: the attempts to find a united liberal solution to the Irish problem had completely failed and the emphasis in both home rule and unionist camps was for existing political alignments to become more firmly established, and for separate solutions to the Irish problem to be more actively pursued.

Certainly on the home rule side the propaganda effort in Great Britain was to be pursued with greater organisation and depth than had been the case hitherto. Despite

Parnell's initial misgivings that Irishmen would be unable to influence English opinion on home rule,¹⁰⁴ the party expended £13,000 on propaganda in Great Britain in the period 1886-90.¹⁰⁵ At the same time liberal activists engaged in an extensive propaganda campaign in the constituencies¹⁰⁶ while the liberal party was to gain twelve by-election successes in the same period.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is by no means clear that these successes indicated increased popular support for home rule. In a revealing article published in 1888, a liberal constituency worker contrasted the political zeal of middle-class activists with the apathy of working class voters on issues that did not materially affect them: 'The things they grumble about are connected chiefly with house rents, local rates, the price and quality of food, and the demands of labour. All these are studied within the limits of the court [immediate neighbourhood]...the broad truths of political economy are not known, whilst the narrower local interests are all powerful.'¹⁰⁸ Liberal by-election successes probably had more to do with the usual unpopularity of the party in office, and Gladstone's personal popularity, than with any great concern for Ireland.

However the 'union of hearts' between liberals and nationalists received a boost in 1888 when the report of a number of liberal deputations to Ireland in 1887 was published. Predictably, their findings endorsed party propaganda on home rule: Irish demands for land reform and autonomy were 'extra-

ordinarily' moderate: only aggressive action by the authorities endangered the peace while the National League was the chief agency for the maintenance of law and order: Ulster would ultimately support home rule: when home rule was enacted many people of 'special culture and qualification who had formerly held aloof would become involved in politics: the present system of Irish government was 'the most heavy and unnecessary burden' on British taxpayers.¹⁰⁹ Such findings, of course, would have delighted Gladstone, as they both confirmed informal reports such as C. S. Roundell's¹¹⁰ and endorsed his own publicly expressed views.

Gladstone made his first important contribution to the home rule campaign in 1888 with an article in the Contemporary Review, in which he unambiguously endorsed the nationalist argument that the share of the national debt levied on Ireland under the act of union had led to her being 'fleeced' by England.¹¹¹ Gladstone's admission on this score was taken up immediately by nationalists. W. J. O'Neill Daunt wrote, pressing the point that Ireland had been deliberately overtaxed by the act of union, and, as an aid to establishing fair fiscal provisions in a future home rule bill and a test of Ireland's taxable capacity, added information showing that over the period 1860-63 Irish wealth was 'only the 25th part of British wealth'.¹¹² Gladstone replied immediately, stating that since October 1886 he was increasingly convinced that

the question of finance between England and Ireland would require to be made the subject of 'a careful and impartial examination'.¹¹³ Thus encouraged, Daunt supplemented his original letter to Gladstone with a detailed statistical argument bearing on the subject.¹¹⁴ Indeed Daunt's argument as to relative wealth did prove to be a good guide; the royal commission which studied this question in 1894 estimated, that as regards wealth, Ireland stood in relation to Great Britain in the proportion of 1 to 21.¹¹⁵

Gladstone also met Parnell at this time to discuss home rule and future political tactics. Their conversation was based on five points drawn up by the liberal leader: to keep the administration of the coercion [1887 crimes] act before the country and parliament by speeches and statistics: to remain detached and in a condition to accept a settlement from the tories if such was forthcoming: acceptance without prejudice of measures, good in themselves, but insufficient as a final settlement of the home rule question: the promotion of non-Irish legislation: to inquire whether or not 'the idea' of the American union offered a practical point of departure in the formulation of a home rule scheme.¹¹⁶ Parnell, apparently, was prepared to follow Gladstone's lead on all points and agreed that non-Irish legislation should also be promoted.

Indeed, he not only accepted Gladstone's suggestion that the

American political system provided 'a possible basis of a plan of home rule'...but 'did not wholly repel even the idea of parliamentary intervention to stop extreme and violent proceedings in Dublin....Undoubtedly as a whole his tone was very conservative.'¹¹⁷ Thereafter, and until the split of 1890, Parnell's views on home rule were virtually synonymous with Gladstone's. His increasing moderation was notably exhibited in his talks with Cecil Rhodes in July 1888.

The main outlines of this episode are well known and briefly put, consisted in Rhodes donating £10,000 to Irish party funds in return for a pledge by Parnell that a future home rule scheme should contain a clause retaining Irish members in the imperial parliament. As Dr Lyons remarks, this move suited Parnell at this time for two reasons: first, it could serve to demonstrate that the Irish demand for home rule per se was genuine and not the thin wedge of separation, and secondly, if certain important subjects such as the land, police and the judiciary, were to be held over by the imperial parliament after a Dublin assembly was established, it would be necessary to have the Irish represented there.¹¹⁸

After the Rhodes meeting, Parnell, publicly at least, took an interest in imperial federation¹¹⁹ and in particular, conveyed a message through J. G. S. McNeill to the Indian National Congress in 1888, arguing that it should use whatever limited powers of self-government it possessed as a means of education

for a more extended system of home rule, as well as attempting to elect Indians to the house of commons to air their grievances.¹²⁰ But while both the increasing compatibility between Parnell's and Gladstone's ideas on Irish autonomy and the possibility of adverse public reaction to the crimes act, seemed to augur well for the home rule case, Tories - especially Balfour - also thought their policies were succeeding. Balfour, in fact, was greatly encouraged by the 'comparative' failure of liberals to prevent the 'vigorous' working of the crimes act in Ireland by 'raising a storm in England',¹²¹ and also believed that the success of the crimes act enabled many Catholics who had hitherto sat 'on the fence' to come down on the government's side: 'the result is satisfactory'.¹²² Nevertheless, as Joseph Chamberlain recognised, it was also important for Unionists to offer a constructive alternative to home rule.

Thus when Parnell introduced a bill for the reduction of rent arrears in Ireland, Chamberlain objected to it as being too large and proposed instead a bill that would really aid tenants by not only reducing their rent arrears but other debts to usurers and shopkeepers. Parnellites, however, vetoed this idea. Again, when Gladstone sought to link Irish local government with the English and Scotch measure then under consideration, Chamberlain objected that two bills on such complex issues could not be dealt with in one session of parliament, though he also objected to undue delay in Ireland's case.¹²³

In 1888 Chamberlain also made proposals for Irish reform based on his Round Table ideas of 1887; land purchase, provincial councils and public works for congested districts. These he sought to have made official government policy but received no assistance from Lord Hartington, who even persuaded him to publish them anonymously: they appeared under the title A unionist policy for Ireland. Nevertheless, Chamberlain's ideas had considerable influence on subsequent government policies, especially those regarding land purchase and congested districts, and as such they were warmly commended by Gladstone.¹²⁴ At a more propagandist level Chamberlain cleverly employed nationalist terminology to argue that Ireland was only part of a wider British nationality; her association with past British glories, geographical position, common interests with Britain and the security of both countries, necessitated one parliament to 'bear supreme and unquestioned authority in the United Kingdom'.¹²⁵

The most significant legislative enactment for Ireland in 1888 was an amended act to the 1885 Ashborne act, providing the sum of £5 millions to the original figure of the same amount to facilitate further land purchases. Gladstone's reaction to this measure was to repeat his criticism of the original 1885 act; that as compared with his proposed land bill of 1886 the Ashbourne act left no 'intermediate party' to ensure the payment of instalments to the government: the British exchequer

would be 'the direct uncovered creditor of an indefinite number of men paying £4, £5, £10, £20 a year in Ireland, and has to take its chance of the recovery of these sums'.¹²⁶ He was apparently oblivious to the impression this argument created - that he was exhibiting the kind of distrust of the Irish with regard to land purchase that he accused the unionists of in regard to home rule. Some elements in the liberal party, though, particularly R. B. Haldane, took the view that it was wise to support additions to the Ashbourne act, 'on the ground that the more landlords are bought out, the less will be the difficulty when the time comes [for home rule]'.¹²⁷

In 1889 the nature of a future home rule bill began to be more concretely debated in the liberal party. Lord Rosebery argued unsuccessfully in mid-January that a future home rule bill should be constructed by a commission of jurists and civil servants.¹²⁸ Later in the year Gladstone and Parnell met again and the former's notes for this meeting provide a useful indication of his thinking on home rule at this time. On the land question there were now three options; an 'Irish guarantee' as in 1886, compulsory purchase as advocated by T. W. Russell, liberal unionist M.P. for South Tyrone, or to leave this question for settlement by a Dublin parliament. Other subjects listed, included, the question of contracts and whether or not the Irish parliament should be prevented from voting laws against them in the same manner as American states were restrained; whether a

future home rule bill should include a clause explicitly stating the imperial parliament's supremacy over the Irish body in common with the rest of the empire; whether or not imperial questions should be enumerated and whether delegated powers should be fixed by enumeration.

On the question of Irish representation at Westminster, Gladstone noted that they would be retained in some form if public opinion at the 'proper time' required it: he would prefer that initial legislation in this respect be tentative, as experience might dictate changes.¹²⁹ The most important question for the viability of a home rule parliament, though, was that dealing with finance. In compliance with his recent statements on the question, Gladstone noted that the relative amount of financial burden in respect of imperial charges would be considered by a commission and estimated with reference to 'capacity and history' for the decision of government and parliament. Also, as in 1886, the imperial charge would be 'a first charge on all Irish receipts'. Gladstone also attached the utmost value to retaining the imperial receiver, 'into whose hands all Irish receipts would be paid'. The reason was 'for British opinion now and the Irish credit hereafter'. The problem of what 'items of charge' were imperial would be settled by the commission, which would also deal with the issue, present in 1886, of items charged in one country though consumed in the other. It would also deal with the question of

whether Ireland had any financial claim in respect of 'bygone transactions'. Finally, the imperial parliament would tax Ireland only on customs and excise, leaving 'direct and mixed taxation' to the Irish legislature.¹³⁰ The meeting with Parnell was all Gladstone could have hoped for, and while no concrete decisions were taken on the specific details of a home rule bill, he was left with the clear impression that his ideas would prevail.¹³¹ He was also, undoubtedly, greatly encouraged by subsequent speeches of the Irish leader emphasising faith in himself and the strength accruing to the empire by the conferring of home rule.¹³²

In 1890 the prospects for home rule could not have been better, following the exposure of the Pigott forgeries and the consequent vindication of Parnell. Moreover, Balfour's proposed Irish land bill of this year, which provided £33 millions to extend land purchases, was seen by certain liberals, nationalists and unionists, as an agency through which elected local government could be conferred on Ireland.

Joseph Chamberlain, in particular, was strongly of this opinion. In a letter to Lord Hartington he argued: 'It is not decent to mortgage the rates and the contributions from the exchequer without giving the local authorities some voice in the matter. I feel that the question is urgent and this is the psychological moment for dealing with it.' He also declared, however, that if the government was against his

advice he would regard his duty to it as discharged, apart from doing nothing to bring about its downfall.¹³³

The belief that local government and land purchase should be interconnected, moreover, was supported by Parnell, though for very different reasons. Like Spencer and Morley, he believed that the land question had to be settled concurrently with home rule. To this end, he desired that the £33 millions to be made available under Balfour's land bill, be used 'as wisely as possible'. By this he meant that it was not used for purchasing large holdings - which largely gave no trouble to landlords or the tory government. Thus he sought to limit the size of holdings to be purchased, and most importantly - given his rejection of this proposal in early 1887 - for the establishment of local authorities to conduct land purchases; they could exercise a veto on the purchase of holdings and thus ensure 'that the money went in the right way'. As to local government in general, he had moved considerably from his first position in late 1886,¹³⁴ and now thought that it was a step nearer home rule; that it should be accepted, if offered, as it could be changed as desired when home rule was established.¹³⁵

There was never any chance, however, that Balfour would agree to do as Parnell desired. His thinking on the relationship between land purchase and Irish local government was clearly expressed earlier in the year, in correspondence with A. V. Dicey, who advised strongly against Chamberlain's suggestions

on making the working of the land purchase act dependent upon local authorities.¹³⁶ Balfour agreed with Dicey's views: 'no improvement in local administration' could be expected from Chamberlain's ideas. Nevertheless, their party had been committed to the establishment of Irish local government since 1886 and undoubtedly that policy could not be repudiated without splitting the unionist party. However, he continued:

The answer to this question turns on whether or not it be the fact that county councils in Ireland would be used as an effective means for the oppression of the minority, or as an important instrument for effecting the dissolution of the United Kingdom. I myself am disposed to think that a bill framed upon the proper lines would steer clear of both these dangers, and that such a measure if not effective for good, would, at all events, be powerless for evil. But under no circumstances would I consent (until Ireland is in a very changed condition) to giving any control over the machinery of land purchase to locally elected bodies.¹³⁷

This letter, in fact, provides a very accurate indication of the nature of the Irish local government bill Balfour was to introduce in 1892: this measure was so hampered by petty restrictions, including special minority representation,¹³⁸ that it was laughed at by Irish M.P.s. Indeed Balfour's defence in introducing it was: 'there are very great advantages in doing a stupid thing which has been done before, instead of doing a wise thing that has never been done before'. The bill never got beyond its second reading.¹³⁹ Before this eventuality, though, the prospects of home rulers had

diminished dismally with the divorce court revelations. The general effects of the crisis on the home rule cause were succinctly detailed by John Morley: '(1)...We have no longer an authoritative spokesman to deal with: (2) faction in Ireland has revived old English misgivings as to Irish fitness for self-government: (3) England will be more adverse than ever to a wide measure of home rule, and the Irish less ready to accept a narrow measure: (4)...dependancy...of...nationalists on the catholic clergy will worsen our case in Great Britain, to say nothing of Ulster'.¹⁴⁰ The details of this crisis have been covered extensively elsewhere and its importance here is only in its implications for home rule. As is known, Parnell's consent to relinquish **the** leadership of the parliamentary party could only be obtained if the party could persuade Gladstone to give definite assurances as to the settlement of the land question and Irish control of the constabulary in a future home rule scheme.

Gladstone, however, refused to become involved in the dispute and merely declared that the only guarantee that mattered was that which all liberals accepted: no scheme worth having could be carried without 'the support of the Irish nation as declared by their representatives in parliament'.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, as Conor Cruise O'Brien points out, a nationalist party no longer led by Parnell and which would overthrow him at Gladstone's bidding, 'would stand in a new and humbler

relation to the liberal party'.¹⁴² Gladstone, though, was to relent, and, taking pity on the nationalists, did give assurances that in a future home rule bill provision would be made for the conversion of the R.I.C. from an armed military-style force into a civilian body, and that the imperial parliament would deal with the land question within three years of enacting home rule, or alternatively, let the Irish legislature deal with it.¹⁴³ However, the breakdown of the Boulogne negotiations with which these assurances were linked, the subsequent break-up of the Parnellite party into opposing factions, and a public dispute about the extent to which they had accepted, as a final settlement, the 1886 home rule bill - all provided unionists with damaging propaganda material in the period up to Gladstone's final accession to office.



