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'THE GROVES OF ACADEMUS':

A Study of Hedge Schools and their Reading Books

1694-1831

Volume 1

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**Volume 1**

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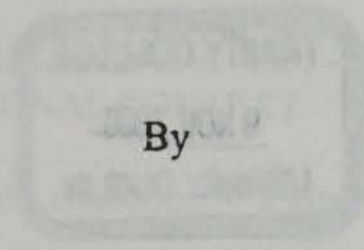
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By Antonia McManus

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
Trinity College

THE GROVES OF ACADEMUS!  
A Study of Hedge Schools and their Reading Books 1694-1831

Volume 1



*Thesis*  
5881.1

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## SUMMARY

This thesis examines the historical and educational background to the setting up of a clandestine network of mainly catholic schools in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, known as hedge schools, which were forced underground due to the strictures of the penal laws (1695-1782). It notes that the catholic church had a keen interest in education also, having established its own network of parish schools throughout Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It illustrates the co-operative nature of the relationship between the catholic church and the hedge schoolmasters throughout the period of the protestant religious revival or 'Second Reformation' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the masters assisted the priests in the work of catechesis voluntarily and free of charge. The livelihood of the masters depended on the approval of the priests who could easily have had their fee paying schools closed down. Their relationship was therefore one of mutual co-operation. In the 1820's Daniel O'Connell alerted catholic bishops to an anomaly in education provision in Ireland – the fact that a protestant education society, known as the Kildare Place Society, which was in receipt of state aid to supply education, was not educating the majority of catholic children and he urged them to look for state aid for catholic education, which they did. This thesis argues that in the battle for the control of Irish education (1820-1831), the hedge schools were used as pawns by the catholic church in its campaign against the Kildare Place Society, in order to gain a share of state aid for catholic education. The church became openly critical of the hedge schoolmasters, while the latter couldn't afford to retaliate.

The first book published on hedge schools dates back to 1932 when P.J. Dowling produced his pioneering work *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, and it remains the most comprehensive study still easily accessible to the modern reader. This thesis supports Dowling's claim that the curriculum in the hedge school was broad and liberal, but depended on the qualifications of the master, and that many academic subjects were taught to a high standard, especially Mathematics and Latin. It also supports his view that the reading books used had at least the merit of diversity, being supplied by parents, that many of them were harmless romances, and were the cheapest parents could purchase, but this thesis establishes that they were much more than that. It points out that a distinction has to be drawn between the chapbook fairy tales, criminal biographies and chivalric romances which children read and the advanced reading books of more mature

students, which was an eclectic mix of the popular reading material of the time. It consisted of the romantic epistolary novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, elegant Augustan prose, utilitarian letter manuals, conduct books, realistic novels, re-prints of the novels of the four major English novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the intellectually demanding gothic novels of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis gives a detailed analysis of a selected sample of the most controversial chapbooks of the time, some of which were wrongly categorised as children's literature. It concludes that the chapbooks did not deserve the bitter words of condemnation expressed by those opposed to children reading works of fiction but recognises that many of the chapbooks would have given children a taste for reading and an appreciation of imaginative works. The advanced reading books show that a high standard of literacy prevailed, which was surprising considering that English was the second language of most hedge school pupils. It notes also that the Irish had a preference for fictional works and re-prints of novels of literary merit, rather than factual, utilitarian works. This conclusion is supported by a study of the library books of the Kildare Place Society, most of which promoted utilitarian values and supplied factual information and which were placed on the market in an effort to supplant the chapbooks but failed to do so. A further study, this time on the lesson books of the national commissioners of education of 1831, which likewise promoted utilitarian values, shows how it took six years before the commissioners finally succeeded in removing all chapbooks from national schools.

This thesis argues that Dowling and later Rev. Martin Brenan in his book *The Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835* (1935) were wrong in their assessment that the censure of hedge school chapbooks by successive commissioners of education from the 1780's onwards was prompted by a desire to discredit the hedge schools and their masters, in a bid to have them replaced by 'loyal' masters. This thesis concludes that while there can be little doubt that the commissioners wished to gain control of education from the masters their condemnation of the reading books merely reflected the prejudice of the age, against works of the imagination, fantasy and fairy lore. They were simply men of their time.

This thesis is based on extensive research on the original chapbooks and advanced reading books of the hedge schools, the textbooks and library readers of the Kildare Place Society and the lesson books of the national commissioners of education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A considerable number of manuscripts transcribed by two hedge schoolmasters – Peter Gallegan (1792-1860) of Kells, Co. Meath and Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin (1766-1837) of Co. Cork have been examined. The social setting has been drawn from fifteen accounts of travellers to Ireland between 1764 and 1799, and twenty accounts in the post-union period 1806 to 1846 as well as twenty three statistical surveys carried out between 1801 and 1834 by protestant landlords and clergymen, commissioned by the Dublin Society (1731).

This research was also informed by contemporary pamphlets, newspapers, documentary evidence of past pupils recorded in journals and primary source material on the hedge schools of the dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin (Brenan, 1935), and Breiffne (O’Connell, 1942), as well as more recent research on the hedge schools of Tyrone and Monaghan (Johnston, 1969) and Roscommon (Hoban, 1983).

My thanks go to Mr. Lane Donohy, who typed this thesis, for her professional work and good-humoured forbearance.

A number of colleges and libraries have facilitated this research. I would like to thank the staff of the following: Trinity College Library; the National Library of Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy; Marsh’s Library; the Royal Dublin Society Library; the National Archives; the Russell Library; Carlow County Library; the Lincolns’ Library; Queen’s University Library; Ulster Folk and Transport Museum; Belfast City Library; and the Church of Ireland College of Education.

As most of my research was carried out in the National Library of Ireland and in the library of Early Printed Books in Trinity College, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the efficient and courteous service received in both these institutions during this time.

I value greatly the generous assistance I have received from the following historical and archaeological societies: the Meath Archaeological & Historical Society; North Meath Archaeological & Historical Society; the Old Dublin Society; Old New Society;

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Ms Valerie Coughlan, librarian in the Church of Ireland College of Education, for her courteous assistance and to Dr Harold Hislop, the former librarian, for his help and permission to view his unpublished doctoral thesis.

Ms Liane Donnelly, who typed this thesis, for her professional work and good-humoured forbearance.

A number of colleges and libraries have facilitated this research. I would like to thank the staffs of the following: Trinity College Library; the National Library of Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy; Marsh's Library; the Royal Dublin Society Library; the National Archives; the Russell Library; Carlow County Library; the Linenhall Library; Queen's University Library; Ulster Folk and Transport Museum; Belfast City Library; and the Church of Ireland College of Education.

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Wicklow Historical Society; Roscommon Historical & Archaeological Society; Kildare Archaeological Society; Laois Heritage Society; Old Athlone Society; Armagh Historical Society; Belfast Historical Society, West; and the Mid-Antrim Historical Group.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable support of my family, especially that of my son Kenneth, whose undergraduate years at Trinity College coincided with my postgraduate ones. To him I remain ever grateful for his encouragement, enthusiasm and youthful good humour. Finally I wish to thank my husband, Ken, to whom this work is dedicated.

I agree that the Library may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

*Antonia McManus*

Antonia McManus.

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## DECLARATION

In accordance with the regulations governing Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees, I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other university.

Antonia McManus

Antonia McManus

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## PREFACE

My interest in hedge schoolmasters and their books was stimulated while a student on the M.Ed. programme at Trinity College. Having read P.J. Dowling's book *The Hedge Schools of Ireland* (1932), I found that my interest in the Irish poets of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was re-kindled once more. As an undergraduate their poetry had laid a profound impression on me, especially the 'aisling' or 'vision' poetry of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784). I was impressed by the tenacity of the poets who rose above their miserable social conditions to write such poetic works and by the fact that their poetry was remarkably free of bitterness despite the fact that their patrons, the Gaelic chieftains, had been dispossessed of their lands following the Elizabethan wars (1601) and later the Williamite wars (1689-91). I was no doubt influenced by Daniel Corkery's lyrical defence of 18<sup>th</sup> century Munster poets in his book *The Hidden Ireland* (1924), while recognising that his claims were somewhat exaggerated. However, it was Vivien Mercier's book *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962) which helped to shape my view that whatever the poets lacked in poetic ability, they more than adequately compensated for in their spirited approach to life, when they resorted to satire and humour in order to poke fun at the new land owners, and in order to entertain their own people during very difficult times.

Having read Dowling's book I learnt that almost every Irish poet of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was also a hedge schoolmaster. This came as little surprise to me because I believed that their creative ability, coupled with their generosity of spirit and liberal outlook on life, equipped them well for a life in the teaching profession. However, I was keen to learn more about the social conditions of the period, the historical background which forced the hedge schoolmasters to operate underground for almost ninety years and how they succeeded in becoming the dominant educators in Ireland for well over a century.

I was also interested to learn more about the curriculum in the hedge schools, which was more extensive and liberal than the utilitarian curriculum which was available to the poor in England or indeed in the rival educational institutions in Ireland.



Finally, I was greatly surprised by the quantity and diversity of the reading books read in the hedge schools, considering the poverty of the children who attended them. Contemporary writers and conservative elements in Irish society, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, were deeply critical of a small number of these books, claiming that they had either a subversive sub-text or were immoral in content and were therefore unsuitable matter for children to read. I was keen to explore the possibility that there was some basis for these concerns and I felt that a detailed study of a selected sample of the most controversial books as well as a representative sample of the range of other books read, merited an indepth analysis. I was therefore very pleased to be allowed the privilege and pleasure of undertaking research in these areas of educational history.

## INTRODUCTION

The eighty seven years, from 1695 when catholic education in Ireland had been proscribed by the imposition of the penal laws, up until 1782, when these laws were repealed, catholic teachers were forced to go underground and teach in a clandestine network of schools, known as hedge schools. For the next one hundred and thirty six years the hedge schoolmasters were the primary educators of the majority of school going children in Ireland. It is therefore surprising that so little research has been undertaken in this area. The foundation work in this field was done by the Rev. Professor Timothy J. Corcoran, S.J. Professor of the Theory and Practice of Education in University College Dublin, in 1916, with the publication of his book *State Policy in Irish Education A.D. 1513-1816, Exemplified in Documents for Lectures to Postgraduate Classes*.<sup>1</sup> This is a useful reference book in educational historiography. Corcoran's second book *Education Systems in Ireland from the close of the Middle Ages Selected Texts with Introduction*<sup>2</sup> which followed twelve years later is somewhat repetitive of his earlier work and relies heavily on a limited number of travel writers' accounts for the period 1764 to 1816, as primary source material on hedge schools. Furthermore, research by James C. Deegan (1984)<sup>3</sup> revealed evidence that Corcoran falsified documentary source material, from the account of the travels of Sir John Carr in *The Stranger in Ireland* (1805)<sup>4</sup> in order to highlight the admirable qualities of the hedge schools.

Corcoran's antipathy towards the main voluntary education society, the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor of Ireland, better known as the Kildare Place Society, was no secret. It was clearly evident from his many writings especially from December 1931 to November 1932. The society had been established in 1811 by philanthropic protestant business and professional men, who wished to provide education for the poor without religious interference. In 1815 state aid was granted to the society to provide non-denominational elementary education, but in this it failed. However, the singular achievements of the society in providing graded textbooks, an impressive range

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Corcoran. *State Policy in Irish Education; 1513-1816, Exemplified in Documents*. (Dublin, Fallon, 1916).

<sup>2</sup> *Education Systems in Ireland from the close of the Middle Ages*. (University College Dublin, Department of Education, 1928).

<sup>3</sup> James G. Deegan. 'An Assessment of Rev. Professor Timothy J. Corcoran's Major Works in the Field of Irish Educational Historiography'. In *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1984), pp. 91-94.

<sup>4</sup> Sir John Carr. *The Stranger in Ireland*. (London: Gillet, 1805).

of library books, model schools for training teachers and an efficient inspectorate, were never acknowledged by Corcoran in his contributions to *The Irish Monthly*<sup>5</sup> periodical, in which he consistently attacked the Kildare Place Society. It is noteworthy also that he referred to Dr. James Warren Doyle<sup>6</sup>, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (1786-1834) as '*the great Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin*'<sup>7</sup> even though he was one of the most vocal critics of hedge schools.

Corcoran was undoubtedly an influential teacher as three of his post-graduate students proceeded to write books on hedge schools. The first one of these and the most objective, was Patrick J. Dowling, the future historian and vice-principal of St. Mary's College of Education, Strawberry Hill, Middlesex, whose scholarly work *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*<sup>8</sup> appeared in 1932 and has been re-printed continuously ever since. It was Dowling's account which stimulated the interest of the writer but while it is a historically accurate, detailed account of hedge schools and their masters, it is nonetheless non-critical and has a tendency to eulogise on the unquestionable merits and achievements of the masters while at the same time understating their shortcomings. There was no acknowledgement of their involvement in the secret oath bound society of Whiteboys (1760-1780), an agrarian movement involved in rural violence mainly perpetrated against tithe proctors and landlords. No reference was made to the fact that the first leader of the sectarian revolutionary movement of Defenders (1790's) to be hanged in September 1795 was a hedge school master called Lawrence O'Connor from Gallow, Summerhill, Co. Meath. The known involvement of several high profile hedge schoolmasters in the Society of United Irishmen and in the rebellion of 1798 was also ignored in Dowling's account.

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Corcoran. '*Education Policy After the Union*'. In *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. lix. (November 1931), pp. 686-690.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*The Kildare Place Education Society*', Vol. lix. (December 1931), pp. 746-752.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*Financing the Kildare Place Schools*', Vol. lx (January 1932), pp. 808-812.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*The Kildare Place Schools: their purposes defined*', Vol. lx. (March 1932), pp. 160-165.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*The Proselytising Schools 1800-1830*', Vol. lx. (July 1932), pp. 427-433.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*O'Connell and Kildare Place*', Vol. lx. (August 1932), pp. 457-462.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*Organising against Kildare Place 1820-1824: an example of Catholic action*', Vol. lx. (October 1932, pp. 603-610.

\_\_\_\_\_ '*The End of the Kildare Place*', Vol. lx. (November 1932), pp. 649-653.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. James Warren Doyle, hereafter referred to as Dr. Doyle or Doyle.

<sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ '*Catholic Popular Action in Ireland*', Vol. lx. (September 1932), p. 538.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*. (Dublin, The Talbot Press, 1932).

Dowling was also too ready to dismiss the genuine concerns of conservative members of society such as the commissioners of education of 1806 and 1825, bible society members and supporters and contemporary writers with evangelical leanings, who were horrified by the reading books supplied by parents to their children who attended the hedge schools. The offending books were those listed by Hely Dutton in his *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare* (1808), as follows:

*History of the Seven Champions of Christendom*  
*Irish Rogues and Rapparees*  
*Frenay, a notorious robber, teaching the most dextrous mode of robbing*  
*History of Fair Rosamond and Jane Shore, Two Prostitutes.*  
*Moll Flanders*<sup>9</sup>

Dowling ignored the fact that had these books been found in the state sponsored schools – the parish, diocesan, royal or charter schools, the afore mentioned would have been equally condemnatory of them.

A second student of Corcoran's and one who shared many of his tutor's opinions, was the future Maynooth Professor of Education, the Rev. Martin Brenan, whose book *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835*<sup>10</sup> appeared in 1935. In it Brenan re-produced important primary source material in the form of parochial returns for counties Carlow, Offaly, Kildare, Laoighis, Kilkenny, Wicklow and Wexford, which comprised the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. These had been requested by the commissioners of education of 1825, when they ordered a nationwide survey of schools to be undertaken (1824), when protestant and catholic clergymen were called on to complete returns detailing the numbers of schools in their parishes and the books in use in them. It is clear from the returns that a vast range of reading material was read in the hedge schools, much of which was of a high literary value, as well as many books on religion, history, mathematics and related subjects. Brenan's own account was very evidently biased against the Kildare Place Society and strongly supportive of the indigenous schools. But the most remarkable feature of this book was its slight reference to the opposition of Dr. Doyle to the hedge schools and their masters, a reference so fleeting that only the keen reader

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<sup>9</sup> Hely Dutton. *A Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*. (Dublin, Graisberry & Campbell, 10 Back Lane, 1808), pp. 236-237.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835*. (M.H. Gill & Son Ltd., 1935).

would have detected it. Yet Brennan couldn't fail to have been aware of this opposition from the many pamphlets Doyle wrote on this topic between the years 1820 and 1831.

Corcoran's third student was Philip O'Connell, a future principal of the Central Technical School Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, who published his book *The Schools and Scholars of Breiffne*<sup>11</sup> (1942), a work he dedicated to his cousin and patron, His Eminence William Cardinal O'Connell, Archbishop of Boston and Dean of the American Hierarchy. This is a most interesting account of the hedge schools which dotted an area which stretched from Donegal Bay to Cavan, north west Leitrim and small sections of counties Meath, Fermanagh, and Sligo, which comprised O'Connell's native Breiffne. Like its predecessors it tends towards the glorification of the native schools and their masters. O'Connell made no effort to disguise his abhorrence of those he considered to be enemies of hedge schools – establishment figures such as '*tyrannical landlords and fanatical parsons*'<sup>12</sup>. He never credited the patriotic 'improving' landlords who were members of the Dublin Society (1731), or the humanitarian protestant bishops and clergymen of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, who worked tirelessly for the improvement of the working conditions of tenant farmers and for the landless cottiers' families. Like Brennan, O'Connell was severely critical of Anthony R. Blake, the only catholic member of the commissioners of education of 1824-1827, as he worked for the establishment and held adverse views on hedge schoolmasters. O'Connell described Blake as '*a contemptible specimen of a 'Castle Catholic', a weak-kneed and cringing sycophant and a consistent opponent of the claims of the catholic schools*'<sup>13</sup>. Outbursts such as this deprived his account of the impartiality and balanced reporting one expects from the objective historian.

Two local studies of hedge schools were carried out in recent times, the first one by I.D. Johnston entitled '*Hedge Schools of Tyrone and Monaghan*'<sup>14</sup> (1969) and the second one by James Hoban on the hedge schools of his native Roscommon, which he called '*The*

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<sup>11</sup> Philip O'Connell. *The Schools and Scholars of Breiffne*. (Browne and Nolan Ltd., 1942).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 358.

<sup>14</sup> I.D. Johnston. '*Hedge Schools of Tyrone and Monaghan*'. In *Clogher Record* (1969), pp. 34-35.

*Survival of the Hedge Schools – A Local Study*<sup>15</sup> (1983). Both of these studies have informed this research.

The present study attempts to place the masters and their schools in their educational and historical context in order to understand why parents, who were impoverished, were still prepared to pay for a hedge school education for their children. It examines the co-operative nature of the relationship between the parish priest and the master and analyses why Dr. Doyle, writing on behalf of the catholic hierarchy, saw fit to do all in his power to discredit the masters in the 1820's, just as the struggle for the control of Irish education peaked and the catholic church was demanding its fair share of the state grant which was being channelled through the Kildare Place Society.

This study also provides a critical appraisal of a selection of the most controversial chapbooks which were the source of much criticism by the more conservative elements in Irish society at this time. A separate analysis is done of the advanced reading books of the hedge schools, as many students attended who were preparing for the entrance examination to the Irish colleges in Salamanca and Louvain, or for service in the foreign armies or trade on the continent or at home, and they required a higher level of reading competency.

The close relationship between the hedge schoolmaster and the people will be compared to the relationship which existed between the priest and his flock, a relationship which gradually deteriorated throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the catholic church excommunicated members of illegal organisations and revolutionary movements. This relationship deteriorated still further in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the catholic church withdrew from participating in the cultural and religious festivities of the people because of the unacceptable practices and irreverent behaviour, which ran counter to the edicts of a church in the throes of ecclesiastical reform.

In chapter one the historical and educational background to the setting up of the hedge schools is dealt with, and chapter two outlines the social setting. In chapter three attention is drawn to the broad curriculum in the hedge schools and the fact that the poor

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<sup>15</sup> James Hoban. *'The Survival of the Hedge Schools – A Local Study'*. In *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1983), pp. 21-34.

were not satisfied with a utilitarian education but required a child-centred approach in a school in which a happy, homely atmosphere prevailed. It was parents who decided what their children should be taught and a special rate of payment was charged for each subject. The curriculum therefore was only as broad and liberal as the qualifications of the masters allowed and the budget of the parents permitted.

Chapter four contains a history of juvenile literature (1671-1851) which helps to explain why the hedge schools were unique in allowing children to read fairy tales, and works of fantasy especially in an age where even the radical philosophers John Locke (1632-1704) and his French counterpart Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) regarded imaginative works with the deepest suspicion. A selection of criminal biographies, books of entertainment, and chivalric romances will be examined, to ascertain their suitability as reading material for children or whether or not they could have been read by children as many of these books were never intended for a juvenile readership. A selective sample of the moral tales of the evangelical writer Hannah More (1745-1833) is scrutinised as an example of the edifying material which contemporary critics failed to mention, but which was enjoyed by children in the hedge schools.

Hedge schoolmasters allowed complete liberty of reading in their schools, and therefore there could have been as many reading books in a hedge school as there were students who read. In chapter five a wide ranging sample of the contrasting styles of books is discussed from the romantic epistolary novels to the elegant Augustan prose, utilitarian letter manuals and conduct books to reprints of the novels of the four major English novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the gothic novels of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, to show that the hedge schools managed to stay abreast of the most modern and innovative literary developments of the period, and that their pupils acquired sufficient proficiency in English reading to understand a diverse range of materials.

Three separate attempts were made in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to either supplant or suppress the offensive chapbooks. The first attempt was made by a bible society, later to become an education society, called the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion (1792), which came into being as a result of the protestant revival or 'Second Reformation' which swept through England at this time and eventually had its effects in Ireland. The Association had close

links with Hannah More who became a member in the 1790's, and who decided to enter into competition with the chapbooks in England which were spreading dangerous French revolutionary principles, by producing her own chapbooks. In March 1795 she wrote a long series of moral tales and ballads, known collectively as the Cheap Repository Tracts, which she produced in such a way as to resemble the chapbooks they were intended to supersede. By March 1796 two million copies of her tracts had sold in England alone, which was an unprecedented success in the history of English book sales.<sup>16</sup> Her tracts were issued simultaneously in London and Dublin, with 120,000<sup>17</sup> copies being distributed in Ireland in the first year, and by 1829 the Association claimed to have distributed altogether 1.3 million books and tracts.<sup>18</sup>

The second attempt to supplant chapbooks was done by the Kildare Place Society book subcommittee, who even went so far as to purchase 37 [Table 11.1] of the offending books in order to model their own replacements on them, just as Hannah More had succeeded in doing in England, but they failed in their endeavour. The third attempt was successful. This was undertaken by the commissioners of national education in 1831. However it took the commissioners six years to achieve this and they only managed to do so when they decided to issue free sets of textbooks and when they made the use of their lesson books compulsory in all but name. They applied compulsion by reserving the right of refusal of any books they considered unsuitable and by making teachers' promotion conditional upon their passing an examination on the contents of the lesson books.<sup>19</sup>

The hedge schools and the parents who supported them must therefore be given credit for liberal and progressive thinking by satisfying the yearning of the young mind for works of the imagination, despite the fact that it ran counter to the utilitarian philosophy of the age.

In chapter six the textbooks and a sample of the library readers produced by the Kildare Place Society book subcommittee is examined, to establish why they failed to find favour with readers in the hedge schools. A critical look is also taken at the national education commissioners' lesson books, which contained a great deal of factual and useful

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<sup>16</sup> Richard D. Altick. *The English Common Reader*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> J. Warburton, Rev. J. Whitelaw and Rev. Robert Walsh. *History of the City of Dublin Vol II*. (London, W. Bulmer & Co., Cleveland Row, St. James's, 1818), p. 891.

<sup>18</sup> Niall Ó Ciosáin. *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850*. (MacMillan Press Ltd., Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS, 1997), p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Report from the Commissioners of Primary Education (Irl.), 1870. Powis, p. 119.



information and which endorsed the prevailing political and social structures of Irish society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the early books neglected to include references to Irish history, literature or culture, nationalists such as the Young Irelanders were deeply offended and expressed their displeasure in their newspaper *The Nation* (1842).<sup>20</sup> The adoption of this strong imperial orientation in the books was very much in line with the cultural assimilation policies typically pursued by colonial powers.<sup>21</sup> However by the 1850's when Ireland was recovering from the impact of the Famine, a literary revival took place, in which the Young Irelanders were actively involved and which relied mainly on the Gaelic tradition for its inspiration. At this time also the Ossanic Society (1854) came into being and published Fenian lays and romances and other classical pieces of Irish literature.<sup>22</sup> The compilers of the National Board's reading books were not unaffected by these developments and when they came to revise the contents of the books in the 1870's they included prose passages from Irish writers and titles such as '*Lament of an Irish Emigrant*', '*Dear Harp of my Country*' and '*Cushla ma Chree*'.<sup>23</sup>

The hedge school reading books on the other hand, consisted of imaginative works of great variety. Children could enjoy the magic of fairy tales and the grandeur and adventure of chivalric romances and criminal biographies, while advanced students were stimulated by the challenging and complex novels which flooded the Irish re-print market of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, books cheap enough for parents to afford, and ones they supplied to their adolescent sons and daughters who attended the hedge schools.

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<sup>20</sup> Lorcan Walsh. '*The Social, Political and Economic Content of Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks*'. In *Oideas* 33. (Fómhar, 1988), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Aodh de Blácam. *Gaelic Literature Surveyed*. (The Talbot Press, Dublin, 1973), p. 374. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1929.

<sup>23</sup> Lorcan Walsh. '*The Social, Political and Economic Content of Nineteenth Century Schoolbooks*', p. 48.

## Chapter 10

The Hedge Schools of Ireland - the Protestant and Catholic Schools

1800-1850

### Introduction

The education of the children of Ireland from 1800 until the mid-nineteenth century was the domain of the established church - the Anglican church in the north and the Roman Catholic Church in the south. It was the duty of both the Irish and English governments to provide the maintenance of Protestant churches and of the education of their children according to principles which were based on the principles of the English and Scottish schools.

**“What was Plato himself but a hedge schoolmaster?”**

During the period from 1800 to 1850 the education of the children of Ireland was the domain of the established church - the Anglican church in the north and the Roman Catholic Church in the south. It was the duty of both the Irish and English governments to provide the maintenance of Protestant churches and of the education of their children according to principles which were based on the principles of the English and Scottish schools.

**WM. Carleton. *The Hedge School*, 1843.**

It is proposed to show how the Irish education system was developed during the period from 1800 to 1850. The education of the children of Ireland was the domain of the established church - the Anglican church in the north and the Roman Catholic Church in the south. It was the duty of both the Irish and English governments to provide the maintenance of Protestant churches and of the education of their children according to principles which were based on the principles of the English and Scottish schools.

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1. See Maria Lavinia, *History of the Education of the People of Ireland*, 1851, pp. 10-11. (London: George Routledge, 1851.)

# Chapter One

## The Hedge Schools of Ireland - the Historical and Educational Context (1695-1831)

### Introduction

The education of the children of Ireland from 1695-1831 was the legal responsibility of the clergymen of the established church – the state church in Ireland. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the desire of both the Irish and English parliaments that schools under the management of protestant clergymen should be conducted along loyal, protestant principles, with the aim of converting catholics to the protestant religion. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century penal laws were introduced proscribing catholic teachers and their schools, and prohibiting catholic parents from sending their children abroad to be educated. By cutting off all avenues to catholic education, the Irish parliament expected that thousands of catholic children would attend protestant schools. Contrary to expectations catholic teachers took the initiative and opened a network of clandestine schools, known as hedge schools, which took root in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were destined to educate the majority of children for the next one hundred and thirty six years.

It is proposed to show how resilient these indigenous schools were, despite the fact that they operated as private enterprises, and were proscribed by law until 1782, they still fended off opposition from the rival protestant parish, diocesan, royal and charter schools, many of them heavily subscribed to by the state. They also outnumbered the catholic parish schools, which were subsidised from diocesan funds and by parishioners. For the most part, the hedge schoolmaster worked in close co-operation with the local parish priest, being either appointed or sanctioned by him,<sup>1</sup> the parish priest having a general

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835*. (M.H. Gill and Son Ltd., 1935), p. 62.

duty of supervision and a right to visit the hedge school to see that the children knew their catechism.<sup>2</sup>

The hedge schoolmasters worked voluntarily and gratuitously as members of the catholic revival movement known as the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, instructing the children in catechism every Sunday.<sup>3</sup> This work of catechisis took on an added importance in the 1820's when the protestant revival movement, called the Second Reformation resulted in the growth of several education societies whose primary aim was the conversion of catholics from the 'errors of popery'. The catholic church could hardly have coped with the challenge these societies presented had it not been for the hedge schoolmasters' assistance, because there was a severe shortage of priests during this period and those who were available, were 'overwhelmed with other duties of their calling'.<sup>4</sup> There was one education society which stood out from the others. This was the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland, otherwise known as the Kildare Place Society, (1811), which alone was founded for purely educational purposes – to educate the poor, without religious interference. It was to this Society that the government entrusted a substantial grant, in 1815, for the provision of non-denominational education.<sup>5</sup> For the first eight years it attracted support from catholic priests and parents but at its annual meeting in 1819 the catholic barrister Daniel O'Connell, who was a member of the Society, first voiced his concern at their bible reading rule which insisted that the bible should be read 'without note or comment'. The following year his attack was repeated only this time he had the support of the catholic prelates, and all the proof he needed of the discriminatory nature of the scripture reading rule as far as catholics were concerned. He alerted the catholic bishops to the privileged position enjoyed by the Society which received generous state aid but who failed to provide an education suitable to catholics.<sup>6</sup> From that moment until the national system of education was introduced in 1831, the catholic hierarchy, under the leadership of their spokesman on education, Dr. Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, did all in their power to get a share of the Kildare Place Society grant for the education of catholic

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey*. (Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1985), p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education*. (Four Courts Press, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8, 1999), p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education History and Structure*. (Institute of Public Administration, 57-61 Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4, 1981), p. 11.

children. This campaign, conducted mainly through letters to the newspapers, pastorals and petitions to government, was sometimes acrimonious, as in the public letter written by Doyle to Daniel O'Connell accusing the Kildare Place Society of fraud with regard to the numbers they alleged to have had in their schools, for his diocese. Doyle wrongly accused the Society<sup>7</sup> just as he wrongly alleged that the hedge schoolmasters were ignorant, incompetent and that they were members of the secret society of Ribbonmen, who were active in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He did this no doubt, in an effort to enhance the catholic church's chances of attaining a share in the grant for Irish education.<sup>8</sup>

The two main interested parties in catholic education were the hedge schoolmasters and the catholic hierarchy, the latter who proved to be unfailingly loyal to the state, while some leading members of the teaching profession were known to the authorities as being subversive and guilty of treason. The catholic church was ably represented in the political sphere, throughout the 1770's and 1780's by the astute Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Thomas Troy, who negotiated secretly with Luke Gardiner, M.P., for Co. Dublin, for repeal of certain penal laws affecting the catholic church, while at the same time playing a role as an active member of the Catholic Committee, an association which had been founded in the 1760's to agitate for repeal of the penal laws.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Troy was a regular visitor to Dublin Castle and he was consulted by the government on important matters of state. Through many pastorals expressing loyalty to the crown and through innumerable excommunications of secret society members and rebel insurgents the good faith of the catholic church was never in doubt by the government. Little wonder then that the lord lieutenant, the Earl of Camden conceded to Troy's request for a catholic seminary, which was founded in Maynooth, Co. Kildare in 1795.<sup>10</sup> Some of the hedge schoolmasters on the other hand proved to be decidedly disloyal to the state, for instance Lawrence O'Connor, who was a leading member of the sectarian nationalist Defender movement. Camden personally ordered his hanging in 1795 and that he be decapitated and his head impaled on a spike in front of Naas Gaol.<sup>11</sup> These two contrasting approaches to the government of the time will be looked at and

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200-205.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1992), p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

how the masters abandoned subversive movements in favour of democracy and the politics of Daniel O'Connell.

It became clear in the 1760's that some hedge schoolmasters were involved in secret oath bound societies and it was also evident that many of the Church of Ireland clergymen were lax in their duties particularly with regard to education provision. In the light of these developments the government felt compelled to instigate a series of education inquiries in 1787-1788; 1791 and 1799. In the post-union period the education question took on an added urgency as social and economic conditions worsened and secret societies abounded. It is proposed to outline the recommendations of these education inquiries, the level of their success and how eventually the national education system was arrived at in 1831. It will be shown how Daniel O'Connell used the education question to win over all the catholic bishops to support his main political ambition which was catholic emancipation,<sup>12</sup> and when he had done so, how he was prepared to leave the bishops to deal with the government on the catholic education issue.<sup>13</sup> It will be shown also how the catholic hierarchy, under the stewardship of Doyle and spurred on by the success of O'Connell's catholic emancipation campaign, finally won the battle for the control of Irish education when power slipped from the hands of the Church of Ireland clergymen to those of the catholic clergy and when the hedge schoolmasters no longer reigned supreme in the field of catholic education.

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<sup>12</sup> H. Kingsmill Moore. *An Unwritten Chapter in the History of Education, being the history of the Society for promoting the education of the poor of Ireland, generally known as the Kildare Place Society.* (London, 1904), p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Fergus O'Ferrall. *Catholic Emancipation, Daniel O'Connell and the birth of Democracy 1820-1830.* (Gill and MacMillan, Humanities Press International Inc., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1985), pp. 61-62.

(i) **Eighteenth Century Catholic Education ‘a kind of guerilla war’**

The hedge schools of Ireland had their nascent period during the Commonwealth when Oliver Cromwell (1619-1658) was Lord Protector, and when, according to Cromwellian records dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 1655

**severall popish schoolmasters doe reside in severall parts of the Counties of Meath and Lowth, and teach the Irish youth, trayning them up in superstition, idolatory and the evill customs of this Nacion.<sup>14</sup>**

The hedge schools really only took root at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, due to the strictures of the penal laws, which forced catholic teachers to work underground. It was in the aftermath of the Williamite wars (1689-1691), fought between the supporters of the catholic King James II and the protestant supporters of Queen Mary's Dutch husband William of Orange, for the right to the throne of England, that the penal laws were considered necessary by the Irish parliament. Even though the Jacobites lost the war and some of their lands had been confiscated, protestants still felt vulnerable as they were a minority group in Irish society. Their fears were added to by the terms of the Treaty of Limerick (1691) which concluded the wars and which left catholics in a stronger position than they had expected.<sup>15</sup> The catholic landed interest had been left largely intact by the Treaty and as land lay at the base of all political power, the harshest of the penal enactments were directed against catholic property.<sup>16</sup> This was a reflection of protestant insecurity, evidenced also by the fact that parliament made presbyterians, their church rivals, subject to some of the penal laws, as well as making them liable, along with catholics, for the payment of tithes to the established church, the state church in Ireland.

Among the first of the penal laws to be enacted in 1695, during the reign of King William (1689-1702) were those against catholic education. The title of the measure was ‘An act to restrain foreign education’. No doubt the purpose of this act was to limit contact between Irish catholics and their continental allies. There was also a domestic provision

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<sup>14</sup> Commonwealth Records, P.R.O. Ireland, A. 5.99, Dublin, March 19, 1655. Cited in Corcoran. *Education Systems of Ireland*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*. (The Four Courts Press, Kill Lane, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. (Helicon Ltd., 1981), p. 74.

added on, forbidding any 'person whatsoever of the popish religion to publicly teach school or instruct youth in learning.'

Queen Anne's reign saw the continuation of the Williamite tradition of suppression of catholics' education. In 1703, an act entitled '*An act to prevent the further growth of popery*', (2 Anne c.6) stated;

**... and if any person or persons being a papist, or professing the popish religion ... willingly suffer to be sent or conveyed, any child under the age of one and twenty years ... into France or any other parts beyond the seas ... shall incur the pains, penalties and forfeitures mentioned in an act made in the seventh year of his late majesty, King William, entitled *An act to restrain foreign education*.<sup>17</sup>**

It would appear that protestant schoolmasters colluded with their catholic counterparts by allowing them to take up positions as ushers, under-masters and assistants in protestant schools so that in 1709, during the eight year of the reign of Queen Anne, a further act was introduced called '*An act for explaining and emending an act entitled An act to prevent the further growth of popery*', (8 Anne c.3) which warned

**Whatsoever person of the popish religion shall publicly teach school, or shall instruct youth in learning in any private house within this realm, or shall be entertained to instruct youth in learning as usher, under-master, or assistant by any protestant schoolmaster, he shall be esteemed and taken to be a popish regular clergyman, and to be prosecuted as such.<sup>18</sup>**

The purpose of these acts was not so much to reduce catholics to a state of ignorance and servitude, as claimed by contemporary historians and writers such as W.E.H. Lecky and Edmund Burke but rather to leave catholic children with no other option but to avail of the protestant education already on offer, which was guaranteed to train them up to be loyal protestant subjects. This didn't happen as the initiative was taken by catholic masters who ignored the law by conducting what P.J. Dowling, in his pioneering work on hedge schools in 1932, described as 'a kind of guerilla war' in education, where the teacher was constantly evading the law officers.<sup>19</sup> Teaching was done surreptitiously and

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<sup>17</sup> Áine Hyland and Kenneth Milne (eds.. *Irish Educational Documents. Vol. 1* (C.I.C.E., Rathmines, Dublin 6, 1987).

\_\_\_\_\_ Harold Hislop. '*Voluntary effort and official enquiry*', p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 48.



schools were hidden away from public gaze. The safest area was considered to be beneath the sunny side of a hedge, and it was from this location they derived their name. A pupil was usually placed on sentry duty to warn the master if a suspicious looking stranger was approaching. Appropriate arrangements were then made to reconvene at another location on the following day. During the winter months or periods of inclement weather, the master knew he could rely on the hospitality of the people, as he moved from one location to the next 'earning a little perhaps by turning his hand to farm work, or, when he dared, by teaching the children of his host.'<sup>20</sup>

The masters taught at considerable risk to their own personal liberty as there is ample evidence to show that prosecutions were brought against them, particularly during politically sensitive periods, such as the Jacobite scare of 1714.<sup>21</sup> Timothy Corcoran in his study in 1928, of the penal era, listed nineteen indictments against popish schoolmasters brought before the Limerick grand jury alone, between 1711 and 1722. A schoolmaster who contravened the penal laws was liable to three months imprisonment and a fine of £20. He could be banished to the Barbadoes, and if he returned to Ireland, the death penalty awaited him. A £10 reward was offered for his arrest and a reward of £10 for information against anyone harbouring him.<sup>22</sup> The 1709 amendment to the 'Act to prevent the further growth of popery' (8Anne c.3.) mentioned 'a penalty of £10 for every such offence – a moiety to go to the informer,' whereas section xx of the same act offered rewards for the detection of teachers 'the sum of ten pounds sterl. for each popish schoolmaster to be levied on the popish inhabitants.'" Section xxxi outlined the procedure to be adopted with teachers discovered;

**All and every ... popish schoolmaster shall within three months be transmitted by order of the justices of the assize: or by order of the justices of the peace ... to the common jail of the next seaport town where he... shall remain without bail or mainprize until transported.**<sup>23</sup>

When the Irish parliament introduced the penal laws, it did so with the limited powers of a colonial parliament. It was hampered by the old Poyning's Law of 1494 which required that all proposed bills should be submitted to the British parliament at Westminster before

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> William P. Burke. *The Irish Priests in the Penal Times(1600-1760)*. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), p. 387.

<sup>22</sup> P.J. Dowling. *Patrick Lynch, Schoolmaster 1754-1818*. In *Studies* Vol. xx, (1931), p. 461.

a licence to summon parliament was issued. It was hampered also by an act of 1720, known as the Sixth of George the First (6 George 1 c.5) which gave Westminster the right to legislate for Ireland.<sup>24</sup> The British parliament could therefore exercise the power to repeal these laws, when they wished, irrespective of the wishes of the Irish parliament. Corruption and bribery were common practices in both parliaments and through a crude system of pensions, preferments and political jobbery Westminster's lord lieutenant in Ireland, could force through any act in the Irish parliament.<sup>25</sup> However the lord lieutenant spent only one winter in every two years in this country until 1767. During his long periods of absence the Irish parliament was ruled by two or three Lord Justices, one of whom represented the British interest, by a disreputable system of management, whereby votes were bought from the great Irish borough owners, known as 'undertakers', who, in return for a large share of the patronage of the crown 'undertook to carry the king's business through parliament.'<sup>26</sup> The formidable ascendancy figure Hugh Boulter, Archbishop of Armagh, 'a pure bred Englishman', was Lord Justice of Ireland thirteen times between 1724 and 1742,<sup>27</sup> while Ireland was ruled by English born prelates up to 1764.<sup>28</sup>

The established church occupied a privileged position in Irish society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was 'a handmaid of the state' as the higher positions in the church 'were reserved for the members of such families as the government wished particularly to reward.' Both the British government and Irish parliament regarded the Church of Ireland as a prime source of government patronage. It has been calculated that of the 340 episcopal appointments and translations during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 239 went to Englishmen and 101 went to Irishmen thus lowering the morale and commitment of Irish bishops. While the purpose of the penal laws as they related to religion in particular, was supposedly the elimination of catholicism and the conversion of the catholic population to protestantism, few historians to-day would agree that clergymen of the Church of Ireland, at the time, were in a position to engage in such a campaign of mass conversion or indeed that they even

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<sup>23</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*. (London, Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Sean Duffy (ed.). *Atlas of Irish History*. (Gill & MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8 (1997).  
James Kelly. 'The Government of Ireland', p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. (Longman's, Green & Co, 39 Paternoster Row, London, 1913), p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Curtis. *A History of Ireland*. (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 11, New Fetter Lane, London E.C.4, 1968), p. 294.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

wished to. The main reason why this was so was because of the status of the church of Ireland as the state church of a colony, its first duty was to secure British political ends and as Thomas Bartlett observed in his book *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, the 'history of the Church of Ireland during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century is studded with glaring examples of non-residence, pluralities, ... Churches were in an acute state of disrepair, glebe houses lacking and tithe collection irregular.'<sup>29</sup> Besides lay protestants didn't support their clergymen, a fact the bishops openly acknowledged. Bishop Woodward of Cloyne wrote that many protestants 'discountenanced all religion by entirely neglecting public worship. Archbishop King of Dublin admitted that protestants didn't want mass conversion of catholics:

**It is plain to me by the methods which have been taken since the Reformation, and which are yet pursued by both the civil and ecclesiastical powers, that there never was or is any design that all should be catholics.**<sup>30</sup>

Just as the protestant laity had no desire for mass conversions, neither had the protestant propertied or professional class, as Maureen Wall remarked in her article '*The Age of the Penal Laws 1690-1778*' 'few of the protestant propertied or professional class in Ireland wished to see the masses of the people converted to protestantism, since it was to the material advantage of the ruling class to keep the privileged circle small'.<sup>31</sup>

It was the clergymen of the established church who had a legal responsibility for education provision in Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and they fulfilled their legal obligations through a network of parish, diocesan and royal schools, which had been created in peacemeal fashion, by successive parliamentary measures, spanning the Tudor and Stuart eras. Like the penal laws, their aim was primarily one of conversion of catholics to protestantism and the problems which caused the failure of the penal laws in this regard rendered much of the legislation on education equally fruitless. The parish schools which were initiated during the reformation, in the reign of Henry VIII, were intended to provide mass elementary education, supervised by the established church clergymen. In

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience. A Historical Survey*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1985), p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (eds.). *The Course of Irish History*. (Mercier Press, 16 Hume Street, Dublin 2, 1994). 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1967.

an act of 1537 entitled 'An Act for the English Order, Habit and Language' they were required, on appointment to a benefice to take an oath that they would 'keepe or cause to be kept within the Place, Terratorie, or Paroch where he shall have Rule, Benefice or Promotion, a Schoole for to learne English.' The expected conversions to protestantism as envisaged in the Tudor legislation didn't take place.<sup>32</sup> The extent of their failure is well illustrated in an investigation carried out in the 1780's, which revealed that there were only 361 operative parish schools teaching 11,000 children from a population of some four million.<sup>33</sup>

Next followed the diocesan schools which were introduced in the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) (12 Elizabeth c 1), by an act passed in 1570 directing that a 'Free School' should be set up in every diocese. 'The Schoolmaster' was to be 'an Englishman, or of the English birth of this realm'. These were grammar schools intended to provide education for the middle classes, just as the parish schools were to have catered for 'the lower classes'.<sup>34</sup> The diocesan schools made little progress despite specific legislation passed in 1725 and 1755, aimed at encouraging the Church of Ireland clergymen and the grand juries to improve the system. By the late 1780's there were only 18 schools for 34 dioceses, catering for as few as 324 pupils. The third category consisted of the Free Schools of Royal Foundation, set up during the reign of the Stuart kings James I (1603-1625) and subsequently that of his son Charles I (1625-1649), in order to anglicise the plantation counties of Ulster and elsewhere. James introduced them in Tyrone, Derry, Fermanagh, Cavan, Armagh and Donegal, while Charles introduced them in Banagher, King's County, Carysfort, Co. Wicklow as well as Clogher, Co. Tyrone. By the 1780's they had no more than 211 pupils. Their influence was therefore hardly felt.<sup>35</sup>

In 1731 a House of Lords committee was appointed under Archbishop Hugh Boulter, a man who was strongly committed to the idea of conversion, in order to inquire into 'The Present State of Popery'.<sup>36</sup> He was to be greatly disheartened by the findings of this

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Maureen Wall. *The Age of the Penal Laws (1691-1778)*, p. 226.

<sup>32</sup> Harold J. Hislop. *The Kildare Place Society 1811-1831. An Irish experiment in popular education.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. (Dublin: University of Dublin, Trinity College, 1990), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment.* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 24. Citing *Report from the Commissioners of the board of education in Ireland: eleventh report, parish schools*, p. 273.

<sup>34</sup> P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 36.

report which revealed that the number of illegal schools or hedge schools was as high as 549, with as many as 45 in Dublin alone.<sup>37</sup> Wexford was unusual in that there was no 'popish schoolmaster' in or near the town, whereas the protestant Bishop of Killala stated in the report that in his diocese 'the popish schools are so numerous, that a protestant Schoolmaster cannot get bread'<sup>38</sup>. Returns from Armagh showed that there were 157 catholic schools in existence, which must have caused some surprise, coming from 'that part of Ireland which is best planted with protestants and where popery is thought to be in the most languishing condition'<sup>39</sup>. The mayor of Cork, in his reply said that he failed to ascertain the number of catholic hedge schools or popish schoolmasters because there was such an abundance of them. When Archbishop Boulter submitted his own report, he stated that from Clonfert there was a hedge school in every parish.<sup>40</sup> The report drew attention to the fact that there were more catholic schools in operation but they proved impossible to identify as they were illegal.

Archbishop Boulter's response to the alarming success of the hedge schools, despite being proscribed by law, was to mobilise support among the leading members of the ascendancy, both lay and clerical, to petition the British government to set up a suitable education system in Ireland, to instruct 'the children of the Irish Natives ... in the English tongue and the Fundamental Principles of the true Religion'<sup>41</sup>. The lord lieutenant Dorset forwarded the petition to King George 11 (1727-1760) and in February 1733 the charter was granted and the Incorporated Society in Dublin for Promoting English Schools in Ireland came into existence, later to be known simply as the charter schools. The charter was signed by many powerful and influential ascendancy figures such as the Lord Primate, the Lord Chancellor, the archbishops of Dublin, Cashel and Tuam, six earls, five viscounts, twelve bishops, six barons and by over a hundred gentlemen and beneficed clergy.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> M.G. Jones. *The Charity School Movement*. (Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 232.

<sup>38</sup> Rev. Edward Cahill. 'The Native Schools of Ireland in the Penal Era'. In *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol. LV (Jan-June), Fifth Series (1940), p. 121.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Kennedy. 'Popular Education and Gaelic Tradition in North East Ulster'. In *Studies* Vol. XXX, (1941), p. 274.

<sup>40</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>41</sup> Report made by His Grace, the Lord Primate to the House of Lords Committee, pp. 226-227. Cited in M.G. Jones. *The Charity School Movement*.

<sup>42</sup> M.G. Jones. *The Charity School Movement*, p. 235.

This marked the last serious attempt by the protestant hierarchy at conversion. The society aimed to train the children to be thrifty and hard working by giving them a practical education, and by so doing, they expected to 'rescue the souls of thousands of popish children from the dangers of superstition and idolatry and their bodies from the miseries of idleness and begging'<sup>43</sup>. The children were set to do manual labour in the charter schools, as part of their educational training 'the boys in husbandry and agriculture ... and the girls in knitting, spinning, dairying and domestic work. In both cases they were to be put out to apprenticeship or service with a protestant master or mistress at the society's expense'<sup>44</sup>. But the greatest emphasis was placed on religious instruction, and inducements were offered to deter catholics from lapsing back into the 'errors of popery', for instance 'from 1748 a premium of £5 was given to those who completed apprenticeships and married a protestant'<sup>45</sup>. The conversion policy was taken to extreme lengths however when a decision was taken to adopt a system of transplanting catholic children to schools many miles from their homes, in order to eliminate parental influence and temptation.<sup>46</sup> This policy continued for over a century and caused deep resentment among catholics. The charter schools failed, mainly because of a complex and inefficient administrative structure, lack of supervision, negligence of local committees and the dishonesty of many who taught in the schools. A litany of abuses was well documented by eminent visitors to the schools who were horrified by what they saw, people such as John Wesley (1703-1791) the founder of Methodism and John Howard the philanthropist, who found the children in the hedge schools 'much forwarder than those of the same age in the charter schools'<sup>47</sup>. Sir Jeremiah Fitzpatrick, Inspector-General of Prisons visited 28 charter schools in the year 1786-1787, and he too recorded that children were under-nourished, poorly-clad, unhealthy and their instruction very much neglected.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the charter schools were practically deserted by catholics. In 1776 the society maintained that its schools were responsible for 1,935 children and its provincial nurseries for 400 more. In 1786 the number cited was

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<sup>43</sup> *op. cit.*,

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Milne. 'The Irish Charter Schools'. 'The Grand Design in Principle and Practice'. In *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 1, (1984), p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>47</sup> P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>48</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825 (400), (xii), Appendix, p. 25.

1,710, but when a parliamentary authorized investigation was carried out two years later, the society's claim that it was responsible for 2,100 pupils proved unsustainable.<sup>49</sup> According to the figures published by the commissioners of education for the years 1806-1812 and 1824-1827, the charter schools lost pupils to the hedge schools in very large numbers. One example would be the charter school at Newport, which was built to accommodate 40 children, but which by 1824, contained only 12 pupils, as parents sent their children to the local hedge school, despite the fact that it was overcrowded. There were 96 children attending this hedge school, 38 of whom were protestants.<sup>50</sup> Some 34 schools were in operation by the Incorporated Society in 1824, enrolling over 2,150 children but numbers continued to plummet so that by 1825 this number had fallen to 1,099 and by 1830 the number was as low as 834.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the charter schools, the numbers in the hedge schools rose at an impressive rate. In his diocesan report of 1790 Bishop Patrick Plunkett of Meath noted 240 hedge schools in his diocese, a number which was not far short of what the general survey conducted in 1824 by the 1825 education commissioners revealed, namely an average of 6 schools in each rural parish, with far more in the towns.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, in 1807, Dr. Coppinger, Bishop of Cloyne and Ross drew up a list of 316 hedge schools in his diocese, which catered for 21,892 children, and this also came to an average of 6 schools in each parish.<sup>53</sup>

Nineteenth century historians were harshly critical of the charter schools. W.E.H. Lecky contended that they left a legacy of 'bitterness hardly equalled by any portion of the Penal Code'<sup>54</sup>, while James A Froude called them 'a conspicuous and monstrous failure'<sup>55</sup>. Modern historians such as D.H. Akenson described the elaborate central administration of the charter schools as 'a Taj Mahal built on quicksand'<sup>56</sup> and Kenneth Milne considered that 'the charter schools were never intended to be places of horror, the prototypes of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry 1806-12. Fourteenth Report, p. 342.

<sup>51</sup> D.H. Akenson.. *The Irish Educational Experiment*, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 164

<sup>53</sup> P.J. Corish (ed.). *A History of Irish Catholicism. The Church Since Emancipation. Vol. V.* (Gill and MacMillan, 1971).

\_\_\_\_\_ Ignatius Murphy. 'Primary Education', p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Vol. I*, p. 234.

<sup>55</sup> James A. Froude. *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century. Vol. II.* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1872-74), p. 492.

<sup>56</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 33.

Dotheboy's Hall, that they so frequently became' but that it happened because the society was 'insufficiently aware of the existence within its own system of those very phenomena central to its purpose: the frailty of human nature and the prevalence of Original Sin'.<sup>57</sup>

Despite damning statistical data first gathered against the charter schools in 1787-1788, the Irish parliament failed to hold the Church of Ireland responsible for their failure to supply mass elementary education and the parliament continued to provide state aid to the Incorporated Society from 1733 to 1831, to the tune of 'over one million and a quarter sterling in public parliamentary grants'.<sup>58</sup> It would take a powerful pressure group in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to change the status quo and force parliamentary change in Irish education, and the main contributors to it would be the catholic hierarchy, a body set to grow in strength and influence throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century despite being proscribed by the penal laws for most of the century.

(ii) **The catholic church, the penal laws and catholic parish schools.**

The only penal laws, which were rigorously enforced, were those against catholic land ownership. Penal measures against the catholic clergy and catholic worship were contained in the Banishment Act of 1697 (9 William 111, c2.), the 1704 act 'to prevent the further growth of popery' and the Registration Act of the same year (2 Anne c7).<sup>59</sup> The Banishment Act ordered all regular clergy and all clergy exercising jurisdiction to leave Ireland by 1<sup>st</sup> May 1698. The great majority went and the few who remained found protection in the provisions of the Registration Act. This act ordered all diocesan clergy to register with the civil authorities, to indicate the parish or parishes where they ministered and to provide two sureties of £50 each for their continuing good behaviour. This had the effect of granting legal recognition to the catholic diocesan clergy, and far from leading to the extinction of the church actually facilitated its re-emergence. Many regulars – members of religious orders registered as diocesan clergy and bishops as parish priests. The thriving state of the catholic church was clear from the return made in the

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Milne. *The Irish Charter Schools 1730-1830*. (Four Courts Press, 55 Prussia Street, Dublin 7, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 111-112.



1731 Report on the State of Popery which showed that almost every diocese had a bishop, clerical numbers had risen and mass houses continued to be built.<sup>60</sup>

The catholic church had a keen interest in education, not just because of the conversion ambitions of the established church but because it was controlled mainly by hedge schoolmasters who operated private pay schools, whose existence depended on their financial viability. The clergy kept a careful watch over what was happening in these hedge schools, while at the same time attempting to establish their own system of catholic parish schools. As early as 1730 the Roman Catholic Diocesan Statutes of Dublin required every parish to have a schoolmaster in his parish to teach catholic doctrine.<sup>61</sup> However, it was only when the charter schools were established that the clergy really began to systematise their schooling. In 1742, John Kent in his Report on the State of the Irish Mission recommended the establishment of a fund from which a sum could be paid annually to each bishop for the purpose of catholic education. This suggestion was quickly acted upon by Rome and by the second half of the century, there was an effective parish school system over much of the country, controlled by the catholic clergy.<sup>62</sup>

Detailed accounts of the diocesan visitations for Cashel in the 1750's show that in that town there were at least 73 schoolmasters teaching catechism. Records also show that in 1775 Cloyne had 117 parish schools and in 1787 Dublin had 40 with 1,770 pupils, while Ferns in 1796 had schools in each parish, under the direction of the parish priest.<sup>63</sup> The episcopal visitations in Archbishop Butler's reports on Cashel show clearly the priority given to the school and the important role the schoolmaster played in parish life. In three instances it was stated that the school was held in the mass-house, showing the close co-operation between the priest and the master. In any event the Archbishop regarded the 'schoolmaster as an object of his visitation equally with the priest. He was expected to teach the Catechism' and as the historian P.J. Corish observed 'If he did not he was carpeted; if he could not he was instructed.'<sup>64</sup> In the case of hedge schoolmasters, the

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<sup>59</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 125.

<sup>60</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds.). *A New History of Ireland, Vol. IV: Eighteenth Century Ireland 1691-1800*. (Oxford, 1986).

J.L. McCracken. 'The Ecclesiastical Structure, 1714-1760', p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 36.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Catholic Community*, p. 102.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

ecclesiastical regulations for Cashel (1810) and Dublin (1831), the parish priest had a general duty of supervision, with the right to visit the school, to see that the children knew the catechism and that the teachers taught it, and the right to ensure that the master was a man of good moral life.<sup>65</sup> Hedge schoolmasters needed the approval of the parish priest if they expected to survive in a competitive market, as Corish remarked 'The private schoolmaster may not have needed his permission to open, but his disapproval might well have closed him down.'<sup>66</sup> [Ch. 2.] Writing in 1935 the Rev. Martin Brennan, who conducted research on the schools of Kildare and Leighlin, (1775-1835) based on an examination of the parochial returns compiled for this diocese in 1824, established 'that the teachers either were appointed directly by the Priests – sometimes in conjunction with the parishioners – or where they set up Schools of their own accord, they taught with the sanction and approbation of the Priests, who visited the Schools and superintended the instruction of the children.'<sup>67</sup> The returns show clearly that of a total of 657 schools mentioned, some 161 were subject to some degree of patronage or control at the hands of the local clergy, and in virtually all cases the school was a pay school.<sup>68</sup>

The catholic church had little option but to avail of the professional services of the hedge schoolmasters because of the shortage of priests at this time, a situation which was exacerbated by a rapid increase in population. The population had risen by 80% between 1731 and 1800, but the number of priests only rose by 12%. There were 1,587 catholics to every one priest in 1731, compared to 2,627 catholics at the end of the century.<sup>69</sup> With every single protestant school hoping to win over converts from the catholic religion and with so many weaknesses in institutional structures and lax practices in the catholic church, following the penal laws, catechesis became the church's main priority.<sup>70</sup> Their main allies in this missionary work were the hedge schoolmasters who placed special emphasis on the teaching of religion in their schools, no doubt at the request of parents and priests. According to the parochial returns submitted to the education commissioners of 1825 by the various church clergymen, after the commissioners had conducted a

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<sup>65</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ The Irish Catholic Experience, p. 164.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>67</sup> Rev. Martin Brennan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> A. Cosgrave and D. McCarthy (eds.). *Studies in Irish History*. (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1979).

\_\_\_\_\_ Mary Daly. 'The Development of the National School System, 1831-1840', p. 152.

<sup>69</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1982), pp. 32-33.

<sup>70</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 15.

nationwide survey in 1824, there were 16 catechisms in all, used in the hedge schools of Counties Kildare, Donegal, Galway, and Kerry.<sup>71</sup> The parochial returns for the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin alone showed that there were 25 different religion books in use as well as 26 doctrinal and devotional books.<sup>72</sup>

The masters also played an important role in the catholic revival movement known as The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which had its origin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but which was re-established in most dioceses in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> Its members were expected to attend chapel every Sunday to instruct the children in catechism. Evidence was given before the education commissioners in 1825 that

**Several Roman Catholic Schoolmasters are frequently employed for this purpose, under the direction of the Roman Catholic Clergymen. The Instruction is exclusively Catechetical... In the City of Limerick it occurred to one of the Commissioners to witness on one Sunday upwards of 4,000 Children collected in Four Chapels for this Purpose, and in several Parishes similar Instruction is given on Saturdays as well as on Sundays.**<sup>74</sup>

Dr. Kelly, the Archbishop of Tuam testified that such Sunday schools were widespread in Connaught.<sup>75</sup> and Dr. Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin proudly boasted 'I am sure that there is no part of Ireland in which Sunday Schools are more diligently attended to than in my diocese.'<sup>76</sup> The parochial returns for his diocese would bear this out as well as the fact that hedge schoolmasters were members of the Confraternity, who gave of their services gratuitously, possibly in an effort to stay on friendly terms with the parish priest.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry 1825 (XII). App. No. 221, p. 553.

<sup>72</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry 1825, p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, App. p. 792.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>77</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 43-45.

(iii) Catholic bishops and native schoolmasters – the loyal and the disloyal.

The two main players in the field of catholic education – the catholic church and the hedge schoolmasters, adopted opposite political stances in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The church decided to win favour with the government of the day, to remain consistently loyal to the English crown by working covertly with Dublin Castle, the seat of parliamentary power in Ireland. Some hedge schoolmasters, on the other hand, found loyalty to the king at variance with their nationalist views and their sense of grievance at the inequities in the law, and opted therefore for a more combative approach and later a subversive one.

A number of hedge schoolmasters had convictions for being active members of the Whiteboy agrarian movement. This was a secret oath bound society which originated in Co. Tipperary in 1761, in protest against the enclosure of common land. The Whiteboys or Levellers as they were sometimes called, from the practice they engaged in of levelling fences, spread throughout much of Munster and south Leinster, where they opposed high rates of rent, evictions, and above all the hated tithes paid to the established church.<sup>78</sup> The defining characteristic of the society was a predilection for oaths binding their members to secrecy. According to Professor J.S. Donnelly, Jr. in his article entitled '*The Whiteboy Movement 1761-1765*' 'country schoolmasters were prominent as organisers and penmen of secret societies.'<sup>79</sup> Although reliable evidence is scarce for the early part of the century one execution of a hedge schoolmaster was reported in Faulkner's Dublin Journal in 1763 for a Whiteboy crime committed by 'Fames Fogarty, alias Captain Fearnot' who was 'executed at Clonmel in June 1763 for levelling the deerpark wall of the Tipperary squire John Chardin'<sup>80</sup>. The second wave of Whiteboy activity lasted seven years from 1769-1776. In late March 1770, John Quin who kept a school near Kilkenny city was executed for engaging in acts of violence and for seriously wounding Patrick and William Shee of Thomastown. Another schoolmaster, William O'Neill of Borris 'was committed to gaol in November 1771 and charged with being a notorious Whiteboy.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> James S. Donnelly. '*The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-1765*'. In *Irish Historical Studies*. Vol. xxi, No. 81, (March 1978), p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> James S. Donnelly. '*Irish Agrarian Rebellion: The Whiteboys of 1769-1776*'. In *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. Vol. 83, C. No. 12, (1983), p. 316.

The catholic church, of which most of them were members, cast a very unfavourable eye on their activities. As Maureen Wall observed 'Frequent excommunications of Whiteboys and members of other secret societies' served as 'proof of their sincerity.'<sup>82</sup> The bishops of Munster denounced the Whiteboys in a series of pastorals in the 1760's. In 1764 Bishop Burke of Ossory ordered his clergy to read on three successive Sundays and to explain in Irish, an instruction which, among other things counselled the Whiteboys

**If they think themselves grieved in any respect, they might be redressed by lawful ways and means. They ought to be amenable to the laws of the nation, and not provoke the government, which is mild beyond expression.**<sup>83</sup>

This temperate admonition is in contrast to Bishop Troy of Ossory's 'Gothic excommunication of Whiteboys' in 1775, in which he condemned them to:

**Everlasting Hell... When they shall be judged, may they be condemned... may their posterity be cut off in one generation. Let their children be carried about as vagabonds and beg and let them be cast out of their dwellings. May the usurers search all their substance and let strangers plunder their labours. May there be none to help them, nor none to pity their fatherless offspring. May their names be blotted out... and let their memory perish from the earth. Let all the congregation say Amen, Amen Amen.**<sup>84</sup>

The catholic church's political policy was, on occasions, guided as much by pragmatism as by diplomacy. This was evident in the decision taken by Archbishop O'Reilly of Armagh and six other bishops to address a letter to the catholic clergy in 1759 asking them to pray for the king and royal family at every mass, and on the first Sunday of every quarter to read a declaration denying the pope's deposing power and certain other 'odious tenets' imputed to catholics. The prelates were hoping to ward off a threat to impose the penal code more firmly by the British government because of its vulnerability after the outbreak of the Seven Years War between England and France<sup>85</sup> (1756-1763). Bishop Troy of Ossory became Archbishop of Dublin in 1786 and he was set to become the church's representative in the political life of the country, a task he conducted with

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<sup>82</sup> Maureen Wall. *The Penal Laws 1691-1760*. (Dundalk Press, 1967), p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 24.

considerable skill and success. He took his place on the newly formed Catholic Committee (1760) along with the Irish gentry Lords Kenmare and Fingall to campaign for repeal of the penal laws.<sup>86</sup> For the first twenty years of its existence the Committee confined itself to making repeated declarations of loyalty to the British crown. However, in private discussions held in the early 1770's Troy was perfectly capable of negotiating with Luke Gardiner for repeal of certain ecclesiastical and religious sections of the penal laws. Troy swore the papal nuncio to secrecy regarding these negotiations, on the grounds that he 'would not wish anyone to suspect that they treated of such things with a Catholic bishop.'<sup>87</sup> By the end of the century catholic bishops, and Troy in particular, were to have regular contact with Dublin Castle and were to become accustomed to being consulted by the government.<sup>88</sup>

#### (iv) Repeal of the Penal Laws and the Rise of the Catholic Church.

The penal laws against catholic education were repealed by Gardiner's Second Relief Act of 1782 in spite of the wishes of the Irish parliament. It was done for two reasons, firstly because England was approaching the end of a war with France, Ireland's traditional ally, and secondly, to discourage catholics from finding common cause with the Volunteers,<sup>89</sup> an armed force set up in 1778 for the defence of the country and now politically active, championing reforms that included catholic relief.<sup>90</sup> The catholic education relief act was entitled 'An act to allow persons professing the popish religion to teach school in this kingdom, and for regulating the education of papists, and also to repeal parts of certain laws relative to the guardianship of their children'<sup>91</sup> (21 and 22 Geo. 111, c62) and in it came an admission of their failure

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<sup>85</sup> op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>86</sup> Maureen Wall. *The Age of the Penal Laws*, p. 227.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, p. 98.

<sup>88</sup> T.P. Power and Kevin Whelan (eds.). *Endurance and Emergence*. (Irish Academic Press, Kill Lane, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1990).

\_\_\_\_\_ Thomas Bartlett. *The Origins and Progress of the Catholic Question in Ireland*, p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>91</sup> Harold Hislop. *Voluntary effort and official enquiry*, p. 59.

**Whereas several of the laws made in this kingdom, relative to the education of papists, or persons professing the popish religion are considered as too severe and have not answered the desired effect.<sup>92</sup>**

It allowed the establishment of catholic schools, on receipt of a licence from the protestant ordinary, but endowment of such schools was forbidden.<sup>93</sup> As P.J. Dowling observed 'This was not a charter of liberty to teach. The schoolmaster was free to educate, but only on certain conditions,<sup>94</sup> while D.H. Akenson called it 'a new penal educational element' because 'no popish university or college' could be endowed and neither could catholic schools.<sup>95</sup>

Troy's secret negotiations with Gardiner now bore fruit under this act, as all secular clergy were allowed to perform ecclesiastical functions, though they were still prohibited from assuming ecclesiastical rank or titles, or to minister in a church with a steeple or bell. The catholic church was now a legal body.<sup>96</sup>

Further relief measures would not be introduced for another eleven years, when English domestic politics made it expedient and necessary to do so. In the meantime the French revolution of 1789 had a profound effect on the political situation in Ireland. Reform movements north and south took inspiration from it. In July 1790 the Volunteers revived and marched to celebrate the fall of the Bastille and in Belfast 'there was much talk of new clubs and alliances.'<sup>97</sup> Lord Lieutenant Westmorland was aware that an alliance was being proposed between catholics and dissenters in Belfast and this was confirmed for him by events which took place in the summer of 1791.<sup>98</sup> The first phase of the alliance was brought about after the Belfast Volunteer Bastille Day celebrations of the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1791 when three resolutions were put forward by Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), a young protestant barrister and whig pamphleteer from Co. Kildare. The third one of Tone's resolutions called for the inclusion of catholics in the political life of the country and while it was rejected at the time, the setback was only temporary.<sup>99</sup> Tone then published

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 26.

<sup>95</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>99</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*. (MacMillan Press Ltd., London, 1998). First ed. 1992, p. 56.

his 'masterpiece of journalistic propaganda'<sup>100</sup> a pamphlet entitled *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, in which he pointed out that it was only through a reform of parliament that England's stranglehold on Irish affairs could be broken, and that this parliamentary reform could only be won if Irish Catholics and Protestant dissenters united to bring about a reform programme that included Catholic emancipation.<sup>101</sup> These views won wide acceptance among the Presbyterians and the radical thinkers of Belfast and Dublin, where numerous debating societies flourished. As a result Tone was invited to Belfast where in October 1791 he, along with Rowan Hamilton founded the Society of United Irishmen. A month later the Dublin Society of the United Irishmen came into existence. The aims of the movement reflected the influence of the French revolutionary principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*,<sup>102</sup> only the United Irishmen hoped to achieve their aims by peaceful means and by uniting all Irishmen in a just cause, which was 'to abolish all unnatural religious distinctions and to unite all Irishmen against the unjust influence of Great Britain and to secure their just representation in a national parliament.'<sup>103</sup>

It wasn't long before members of the Catholic Committee had dual membership with the newly established radical society of United Irishmen, much to the alarm of the conservative wing of the Committee. Lord Kenmare and Archbishop Troy were prompted to secede from the Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1791, thus leaving the merchant class members of Keogh, McCormick and Byrne free to take a more forward line with the government, for the repeal of the remaining penal laws.<sup>104</sup> It was widely believed at this time that the Prime Minister, William Pitt, and his colleagues in government were willing to make concessions to Catholics, partly because of the political climate for change which had been created by the French revolution, by the Pope's persecution by the revolutionaries and the Catholic Church's strong condemnation of them. The British government also wished to lessen the 'prospect of the Catholics and the dissenters making common cause together', especially as war with France was a distinct possibility in 1792.<sup>105</sup> Westmorland was opposed to the granting of concessions to Catholics and he was supported by other members of the Dublin Castle administration

<sup>100</sup> Marianne Elliott. *Partners in Revolution*. (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1982), p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (eds.). *The Course of Irish History*.

R.B. McDowell. 'The Protestant Nation', p. 238.

<sup>102</sup> R.B. McDowell. 'The Personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, 1791-1794'. In *Irish Historical Studies*. Vol. II, No. 5, (March 1940), p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Edmund Curtis. *A History of Ireland*, p. 330.

<sup>104</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 60.



such as John Foster, the speaker in the House of Commons, and John Fitzgibbon, the Irish Lord Chancellor.<sup>106</sup> Pitt responded by granting the Relief Act of 1792, which allowed minor concessions to Catholics, and was a far cry from the Catholic emancipation which they had expected. The act dealt mainly with the admission of Catholics to the legal profession but from the educational perspective it removed 'The obsolete act against foreign education, and the equally obsolete clause of the act of 1782, which made the licence of the ordinary necessary for Catholic schools.'<sup>107</sup>

The Catholic Committee was insulted by these paltry concessions and responded quickly to the offensive remarks made by members of the Irish parliament that the Catholic Committee was not representative of the Catholic body as a whole. They put plans in place to convene a Catholic Convention – (an ominous title in which the French influence was clearly evident), in order to pressurise the British government to secure more relief.<sup>108</sup> Westmorland and his allies were staunchly opposed to any such concessions but Pitt could hardly refuse a Catholic petition as England and France nudged closer to war – a war which was eventually declared in February 1793.<sup>109</sup>

In order to present a united front, when the Committee would send its delegation to London, it was hoped to effect a reconciliation with the disaffected members of the Committee, Lords Kenmare, Fingall and Archbishop Troy. Troy was politically astute and while he valued his close contacts with Dublin Castle he also wanted to have influence as a member of the increasingly powerful Catholic Committee. As McNally (1976) observed in his study Troy

**was anxious lest he lose all his influence with the Catholic Committee and exercising what he called 'grandissima circospezione', he agreed to support the Committee's declaration of Catholic principles and to urge his fellow-Bishops to facilitate new elections to it.<sup>110</sup>**

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *'The Origins and Progress of the Catholic Question in Ireland'*, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 242.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 143.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>110</sup> Vincent McNally. *'Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland 1787-1817'*. Ph.D. Thesis. (Dublin: University of Dublin, Trinity College, 1976), pp. 107-108. Cited in Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise*, p. 149.

By November 1792 some 25 counties along with the main Irish towns and cities returned 233 delegates to the Catholic Convention which was held from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1792, when it was decided to bypass Dublin Castle by sending five delegates, led by Tone, who was the assistant secretary of the Committee, to present a petition to King George III.<sup>111</sup> The petition was presented to the king in January 1793 and Hobart's Relief Act followed. Hobart proposed to give Catholics the franchise both in town and in country on exactly the same terms as Protestants and 'To repeal the laws... to authorise them to endow colleges, universities, and schools, and to obtain degrees in Dublin university.' This did not give the Catholic Committee or the United Irishmen what they were really looking for which was Catholic emancipation, that would have allowed Catholics to take seats in parliament.<sup>112</sup> Had that happened perhaps the rebellion of 1798 would never have occurred.

However with regard to Irish Catholic education the future looked more promising. The Catholic Church could now set about building its diocesan schools and seminaries. One year after the passing of the Relief Act of 1782, the first Catholic diocesan school was opened at St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny. By 1793 the college assumed the responsibility of educating candidates for the priesthood for all the dioceses of Ireland. Similarly at Carlow, where St. Patrick's College was founded as a secondary school in 1793, it too opened a seminary department soon afterwards. The growing confidence of the Catholic Church was obvious from its foundation of schools for the upper classes as well as for the poor. Apart from the institutions of Carlow and Kilkenny the Church could boast of ten further foundations before Catholic emancipation was conceded.<sup>113</sup> Catholic educational endeavours continued to expand rapidly, and by 1796 there were at least 15 Catholic charity schools in Dublin. In 1797 the Bishop of Waterford, Dr. Hussey maintained a free school in each of the principal towns of his diocese.<sup>114</sup> The closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the Presentation Sisters, founded by Nano Nagle in Cork in 1775, open a school in Killarney in 1793, and in 1794 they began their work in George's Hill, Dublin and in Waterford in 1798.<sup>115</sup> Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice and his Congregation of Christian Brothers founded their first school in Waterford in 1802 and by 1820 the

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 151.

<sup>112</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 252.

<sup>113</sup> Norman Atkinson. *Irish Education*. (Dublin: Allen Figgis & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 58.

<sup>114</sup> Ignatius Murphy. 'Primary Education', p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 75.

Christian Brothers had 10 separate establishments in 5 dioceses.<sup>116</sup> In 1825 the nuns had 46 schools in the towns and the brothers had 24.<sup>117</sup> Yet for the vast majority of catholic children the fee paying hedge school continued to be the main source of their education, a situation which was set to continue well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the latter years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the number of hedge schools increased rapidly so that by the turn of the century, it was estimated that there were over 7,000 hedge schools accommodating as many as 400,000 pupils.<sup>118</sup> According to the Fourteenth report of the commissioners of education inquiry 1806-1812, there were 3,700 pay schools in the dioceses which made returns to the Board.<sup>119</sup>

The catholic church was now facing an acute manpower shortage following the closure of the French seminaries, during the French revolution. In November 1793 Troy met Hobart at Dublin Castle to urge the necessity 'of domestic education' for catholic priests 'subject only to their own ecclesiastical superiors'.<sup>120</sup> The following month an address of loyalty was delivered to the lord lieutenant, from the hierarchy, extolling the merits of 'the best of constitutions' under which they lived and giving thanks for the Relief Act of 1793. Clearly this was not the position adopted by the Catholic Committee but this was a risk Troy was prepared to take.<sup>121</sup> Political circumstances favoured the hierarchy on this occasion, as the war against France led to the formation of a coalition government in England in July 1794. It consisted of Pitt and his tory party and Lord Portland and the whigs. Westmorland was replaced by the whig Earl Fitzwilliam, who was known to favour catholic emancipation. Catholic expectations ran high but unfortunately Fitzwilliam exceeded his instructions when he arrived in Ireland by unseating John Beresford (1760-1805) the Commissioner of the Revenue and Pitt's adviser. This reckless action resulted in his swift recall in late February 1795.<sup>122</sup>

Following Fitzwilliam's departure tension mounted as rural disturbances escalated and the United Irishmen, banned since May 1794, had sought French assistance and were now organising themselves along military lines. Under such trying circumstances the new lord

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<sup>116</sup> Ignatius Murphy. *'Primary Education'*, p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 164.

<sup>118</sup> Rev. Edward Cahill. *'The Native Schools'*, p. 191.

<sup>119</sup> Fourteenth Report of the Board of Education, p. 330.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*,

lieutenant Earl Camden, even though he was under instructions from Pitt 'to rally protestants'<sup>123</sup> and to avoid giving concessions to catholics nonetheless decided to make a major gesture to the bishops by agreeing to the establishment of a catholic seminary at Maynooth in 1795. Troy was well pleased and declared that he would 'very easily be able to negotiate' with the new administration. The proposed seminary was seen in London and Dublin as an acceptable substitute for emancipation, but few catholics saw it that way.<sup>124</sup>

The situation was now so volatile that within the space of three years it would lead to a bloody civil war during which Camden would require the support of the catholic hierarchy when he would have to implement harsh law and order policies. A very appreciative clergy had no difficulty giving Camden the support he expected. Troy gave the lead by issuing a pastoral advising catholics to maintain 'a peaceable demeanour and respectful obedience to the laws.'<sup>125</sup>

(v) **'Ministers of Treason': the hedge schoolmasters.**

Involvement of hedge schoolmasters in the Whiteboys was clear for all to see by the number of convictions obtained against a small number of them. It would be reasonable to assume that they participated in other such secret societies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, ones that closely resembled the Whiteboys with regard to aims and tactics employed. Take for instance the Hearts of Steel or Steelboys, who were active from 1769-1772, and whose activities were primarily aimed at the great south Antrim estate of the fifth Earl of Donegall, they too agitated against rents, the demand for renewal of fines and local cess.<sup>126</sup> Between 1770 and 1772 large areas of rural Ulster were rendered ungovernable by the activities of the Steelboys.<sup>127</sup> The parallels between the southern Whiteboys and the Steelboys were obvious, both employed threatening letters and nocturnal raids to

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<sup>122</sup> David Dickson. *New foundations Ireland 1660-1800*. (Helicon Ltd., Ballymount Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12, 1987), p. 180.

<sup>123</sup> Kevin Whelan. *The Tree of Liberty*. (Cork University Press, U.C.C., Cork, 1996), p. 112.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 209.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>126</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 36.

<sup>127</sup> W.A. Maguire. 'Lord Donegall and the Hearts of Steel'. In *Irish Historical Studies*. Vol. xxi, No. 84, (September 1979), p. 351.

pursue their objectives.<sup>128</sup> But the movement in which hedge schoolmasters were most likely to have been involved was the well organised, and confident Rightboy movement which originated in Cork in 1785 and which spread throughout Munster and south Leinster over a three year period.<sup>129</sup> Their grievances were not new - tithes, cess, hearth tax, high rents, catholic church fees and priests' dues, but the manner in which they laid down what they considered an acceptable schedule of tithes, rates and rents was new, so too was the assertive manner in which they challenged the catholic church and their bishops.<sup>130</sup>

The movement was unique also insofar as it had the support of some of the protestant gentry, who were resentful of the payment of tithes to the protestant clergymen. It was the practice for the Rightboys to seek public support for their schedule of rates by placing tables 'at the chapel doors with books laid on them' and 'to swear all the mass-goers to adopt a publicly displayed schedule of tithes and priests' dues.<sup>131</sup> There was one bishop however who outwitted the Rightboys, this was the redoubtable Bishop of Troy, soon to be promoted as archbishop of Dublin, who on hearing that the Rightboys intended to administer their oaths in the chapels of the country, immediately ordered all the chapels of his diocese to be closed, thus leaving the population of Kilkenny without mass.<sup>132</sup> Eventually the Rightboys successfully managed to get the clergy to agree to a schedule of rates. Only educated men with organisational ability and good communication skills could have brought this about. It would therefore seem highly probable that hedge schoolmasters had an input into the Rightboy movement. Apart from the gentry, the precise social status of leading members was, according to Professor Donnelly 'almost never mentioned in newspapers accounts of their committal'.<sup>133</sup>

The level of violence used by these movements was limited and in the case of the Whiteboys, historians generally agree that the movement was 'unpolitical and unsectarian'.<sup>134</sup> The same could not be said of the Defender movement of the 1790's, in which hedge schoolmasters were known to have played a role. The Defenders had

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<sup>128</sup> James S. Donnelly, Jr. 'Hearts of Oak, Hearts of Steel'. In *Studia Hibernica*. No. 21, (1981), p. 72.

<sup>129</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 36.

<sup>130</sup> James S. Donnelly. 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1785-1788'. In *Studia Hibernica* Nos 17-18, (1978), p. 132.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>132</sup> Daire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 25.

<sup>133</sup> James S. Donnelly. 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1785-1788', p. 149.

originated in Armagh in the 1780's as a non-denominational movement, formed to defend catholics from attacks by militant protestant groups such as the Nappach Fleet and the Peep O'Day Boys, who were in competition with them for land.<sup>135</sup> In 1792 this competition became acute because of the trade slump and protestant attacks were revived in Armagh. However, it was as a sectarian catholic body that Defenderism spread through 14 different counties between the years 1792-1794. Most worrying for the authorities was the fact that as early as 1792, it was widely believed that the Defenders had made contact with French agents in London, with the intention of seeking help for a rebellion and that they had adopted a crude version of republican ideology independent of, and antedating the United Irishmen movement.<sup>136</sup>

Camden was so alarmed by these events that he had a digest of material drawn up on their activities. It contained a list of Dublin Defenders, who were mainly tradesmen, but for other parts of the country, the Defenders were described as 'poor, ignorant labouring men and in many places it was noticeable that 'papist country schoolmasters' were prominent among them'. They were characterised by a militant catholicism or aggressive anti-protestantism and a distinct anti-English and anti-settler ethos.<sup>137</sup> In Camden's digest it was recorded that the Defenders swore to 'quell all nations, dethrone all kings, and plant all true religion that was lost since the Reformation'. The digest also revealed their strong millenarian beliefs because their oaths and catechisms were filled with messianic and millennial hopes.<sup>138</sup>

The Defenders were also capable of acts of great savagery such as the one recorded of 11 revenue commissioners in Leitrim being cut to pieces by the local Defenders as they fled from a barn which was subsequently set ablaze.<sup>139</sup> The government met the challenge presented by the Defenders by implementing counter-terror measures such as the show-trials of 1794-1795. Moreover, it was no coincidence that the noted Defender leader Lawrence O'Connor was apprehended on 12 July 1795. O'Connor was a hedge schoolmaster who taught at Gallow, near Summerhill, Co. Meath, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1795 he was tried by Justice Finucane and found guilty of treason. He was

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<sup>134</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 35.

<sup>135</sup> Marianne Elliott. *Partners in Revolution*, p. 40.

<sup>136</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. (Penguin Books, London W8 5TZ, England, 1989), p. 272.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

then sentenced to be 'hanged, disembowelled, drawn and quartered'.<sup>140</sup> On Camden's orders his head was cut off and impaled on an iron spike in front of Naas prison.<sup>141</sup> Camden's decision was no doubt prompted by the information supplied to him by imprisoned Defenders and government agents such as the barrister Leonard McNally (J.W.).<sup>142</sup>

As early as December 1793 when Troy and the catholic hierarchy submitted their address of loyalty to Westmorland, they 'expressed approval of the manner in which Defenderism had been suppressed.'<sup>143</sup> The ever vigilant Troy was well aware that Lawrence O'Connor had filled the role of parish clerk in the Co. Meath village, and he therefore took it upon himself to write to the Bishop of Meath Dr. Plunkett to express his concern that the church should be seen to be associated with such a traitor and he advised Plunkett that 'by more caution in future on the part of the priests, the like surmises may be prevented.'<sup>144</sup> The show trials proved to be counter-productive and Camden was forced to admit that 'the speedy execution of offenders' and exemplary punishments made 'little impression on the multitudes', certainly O'Connor's execution had not the desired intimidatory effect judging from McNally's report that 'O'Connor's sufferings are considered a martyrdom'.<sup>145</sup>

A number of hedge schoolmasters were arrested during disturbances in Connaught in 1795 and were suspected by the authorities of acting as 'the principal Defender-makers.'<sup>146</sup> Meantime a west Ulster regional organiser of the Defenders earned something of a national reputation for himself in 1795-1796. This was Arthur Donnelly, known as 'Switcher Donnelly', a dancing teacher from Tyrone, who was a Defender commander at the Battle of the Diamond,<sup>147</sup> a battle which took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1795, at the crossroads near Loughgall, Co. Armagh, when the Peep O'Day Boys and others killed some 30 Defenders and afterwards formed themselves into Orange

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>140</sup> Rev. John Brady. 'Lawrence O'Connor: A Meath Schoolmaster'. In Irish Ecclesiastical Record. Vol. xlix (Jan-June 1957), p. 286.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Bartlett. 'Select Documents XXXVIII: Defenders and Defenderism in 1795'. In Irish Historical Studies XXIV, No. 95, (May 1985), p. 377.

<sup>142</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ The Fall and Rise, p. 226.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>144</sup> Rev. John Brady. 'Lawrence O'Connor: A Meath Schoolmaster', p. 282.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 214.

<sup>146</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 115.

Society.<sup>148</sup> According to a report in the Dublin Evening Post for the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1795, Donnelly was capable of circulating like 'quicksilver' through the northern counties of Donegal, Tyrone, Antrim and Derry.<sup>149</sup>

Unlawful measures were resorted to by Lord Carhampton, the commander-in-chief of the armed force dispatched by Camden to curb Defender activities in Connaught. Camden was aware of the fact that Carhampton authorised the seizure of over 300 Defenders without charge or trial and dispatched them to serve in the navy as a means of quelling disturbances.<sup>150</sup> He knew also that these methods failed to eliminate Defenderism and that stiffer measures would have to be resorted to. On top of that, sectarian tensions reached boiling point in north Armagh. Following the victory of the Orangemen at the Battle of the Diamond, they engaged in a series of attacks and nightly raids on the catholics of Armagh, and Co. Down. Seven hundred catholics were driven out of Armagh alone and went to live in Connaught.<sup>151</sup> Between 1795-1796 several thousand catholics from Armagh, Tyrone, Down, and Fermanagh were driven from their homes. As Thomas Bartlett observed 'It was on the anvil of these expulsions that the alliance between the Defenders and the United Irishmen was forged as early as 1796'.<sup>152</sup>

In September 1795 Camden was in despair as Defenderism spread rapidly in the wake of the Armagh expulsions. By 1796 he felt compelled to seek British cabinet approval for a draconian law – the Insurrection Act,<sup>153</sup> which empowered him to proclaim any district, and place it under martial law. He also ensured that an Indemnity Act<sup>154</sup> was put through parliament in early 1796 to legalise Carhampton's transgression, and by the end of the year he had the Habeas Corpus Act<sup>155</sup> suspended throughout all Ireland. Reinforcements arrived from Britain and Camden sanctioned the formation of a Yeomanry auxiliary force in October 1796, an almost exclusively protestant force, officered by government

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 216.

<sup>149</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Man of No Property*, p. 115.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>151</sup> Nancy J. Curtin. 'The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-1796'. In *Irish Historical Studies* Vol. XXIV, No. 96, (Nov., 1985), p. 485.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Bartlett. 'Defenders and Defenderism', p. 375.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>154</sup> Nancy J. Curtin. 'The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen', p. 380.

<sup>155</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh. *Ireland before the Famine 1798-1848*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 15/17 Eden Quay, Dublin 1, 1979), p. 16. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1972.



approved gentry, with wide discretionary powers.<sup>156</sup> He hoped it might provide a focus for loyalist energies hitherto wasted in sectarian feuding in Armagh, and elsewhere in the north.<sup>157</sup>

Events took a downward turn with the attempted landing of a French invasion force at Bantry Bay over Christmas 1796, and made Camden more determined than ever to rule by martial law, and in so doing to use the Yeomanry corps to drive a sectarian wedge between the Orange order and the United Irishmen. Orangemen were allowed to enlist en masse in the Yeomanry corps and were subsequently used to search catholic areas in the north, under the pretext of looking for unregistered arms, thus increasing the friction between the Orangemen and the United Irishmen.<sup>158</sup> Camden also gave General Lake his consent to disarm the inhabitants of Ulster selectively, with the intention of terrorising the United Irishmen and turning a blind eye to the activities of the Orangemen.<sup>159</sup>

During the summer and autumn of 1797 and into 1798 the reign of officially sanctioned lawlessness continued. There can be no doubt that the rebellion was precipitated by the government's excessive counter-terrorist measures. Even the Irish Commander-in-Chief General Ralph Abercromby, when he took over command from Lord Carhampton in February 1798, frankly admitted that the Irish army was 'in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to everyone but the enemy'.<sup>160</sup> Not surprisingly he was forced to hand over command to 'the heavy-handed English general' Lieut-Gen Sir Gerard Lake, a man who believed in 'prompt punishment' and 'salutary shocks'. The tactics he used in Ulster, he now applied to the rest of the country, in a virtual reign of terror.<sup>161</sup> As England was at war with France this was the only course of action either government was prepared to countenance at this time. Catholic resentment and fury at this sectarian repression and at the lack of concessions, led to the armed rebellion which broke out in May 1798.

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<sup>156</sup> David Dickson. *New Foundations Ireland 1660-1800*. (Helicon Ltd., Ballymount Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12, 1987), p. 189.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 215.

<sup>158</sup> Kevin Whelan. *The Tree of Liberty*. (Cork University Press, U.C.C., Cork, 1996), pp. 119-120.

<sup>159</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh. *Ireland Before the Famine*, p. 17.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas Pakenham. *The Year of Liberty*. (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., London E.C.4, 1969). pp. 33-34.

<sup>161</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (abr.) Toby Buchanan. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1997), p. 50.

The catholic hierarchy both before and during the rebellion had been unremitting in its condemnation of the United Irishmen and the Defenders. Bishops Lanigan of Ossory, Dillon of Kilmacduagh and Moylan of Cork issued pastorals and addresses warning their flocks against insurrection and enjoining them to obey the laws of the land. In fact Portland was so impressed with Moylan's pastoral instructions that he recommended that they be translated into Irish and disseminated widely. Archbishop Troy had no hesitation in excommunicating all catholics who took part in the rebellion. He also expelled 19 seminarians from Maynooth College whose loyalty to the state was in doubt.<sup>162</sup>

The loyalty of some hedge schoolmasters to the state was equally doubtful. Many contemporary writers including T. Crofton Croker, the antiquarian and folklorist, Edward Wakefield, Rev. Wm. Shaw Mason [Ch. 2] were of this opinion, so too was Judge Robert Day, who claimed that the United Irishman's 'army of advocates' included 'neglected apprentices, needy journeymen, seditious masters hoping to rule in the whirlwind' who 'familiarily discoursed on rebellion as the sacred birthright of the people'.<sup>163</sup> An anonymous pamphleteer, writing in 1799 referred to the disguise employed by some masters to spread the principles of the United Irishmen, or simply to pass on information. He claimed that 'Rebellion was planted and cherished by means of active, artful emissaries dispersed throughout the land, who worked in disguise and spread their doctrines in darkness and secrecy'.<sup>164</sup> There is more than a grain of truth in this claim, as the Cork scribe and hedge schoolmaster Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (1766-1839), who joined the United Irishmen in Cork in 1797, assumed the disguise of a Poor Scholar or student teacher, travelling Ireland with his satchel of books under his arm, when he acted as a courier for the United Irishmen.<sup>165</sup>

Contemporary writers such as Whitley Stokes were critical of the pernicious effects of the popular literature read in the hedge schools, for example chapbooks that romanticised the exploits of highwaymen and robbers, which Stokes alleged had a subversive sub-text.<sup>166</sup> Robert Bell, writing in 1806, considered the effect of 'rapparee literature' extremely

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<sup>162</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*, p. 237.

<sup>163</sup> Kevin Whelan. *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 77.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>165</sup> Tadhg Ó Donnchadha. 'Micheál Óg Ó Longáin'. In *Journal of the Ivernian Society* Vol. I, (July 1908 - June 1909), pp. 223-233.

<sup>166</sup> Kevin Whelan. *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 82.

dangerous, because he believed that 'the transition from theory to practice was but short'<sup>167</sup> but the popularity of the genre was merely a symptom rather than a cause of the lawlessness of the time. These books had been read in hedge schools for over twenty years prior to the 1798 rebellion, and the fact that they were still popular might suggest the prevalence of attitudes favourable to Whiteboys or Defenders or United Irishmen.

A notable feature of the hedge schoolmasters who were involved in the United Irishmen was the calibre of master who enlisted. Without exception they were highly respected in the teaching profession. Richard MacElligott<sup>168</sup> (1756-1818) was an eminent Celtic scholar from Limerick who was arrested in 1798. The Belmullet, Co. Mayo poet, linguist and hedge schoolmaster Riocárd Báiréad<sup>169</sup> (1739-1819) was imprisoned for his membership of the United Irishmen. James Baggott<sup>170</sup> (1771-1806), called James O'Baggott as a mark of respect for his considerable ability as a mathematician, was a Limerick hedge schoolmaster who was actively involved in the United Irishmen at the highest level. He was a personal friend of one of the leaders of the 1798 rebellion Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who used Baggott's hedge school, during his tour of the revolutionary centres in the area. Other masters who offered the benefits of their learning and organisational skills to the movement were happy to remain anonymous and so avoid the risk of being hanged, excommunicated or banished from their parishes.

The main reason why so many hedge schoolmasters became involved in radical political organisations was firstly because they were sufficiently well educated to understand the radical writings of Paine, Rousseau and Godwin, and their relevance to the Irish political situation. [Ch. 4] According to the government informer Leonard McNally the works of Thomas Paine were in the hands of 'almost every schoolmaster'.<sup>171</sup> This would correspond with the evidence given by the presbyterian Moderator, Rev. Henry Cooke before the 1825 commissioners of education that 'the works of Tom Paine and such writers were extensively put into the hands of the people. Paine's Rights of Man, a political work, and Age of Reason, a deistical one, were 'industriously circulated'. He

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<sup>167</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 41.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Herbert. 'Four Limerick Hedge Schoolmasters'. In *The Irish Monthly*. Seventy-Second Yearly Vol. (1944), pp. 48-53.

<sup>169</sup> T.F. O'Reilly. 'A Song by Richard Barret'. In *Gadelica: A Journal of Modern Irish Studies* Vol. 1, (1912-1913), pp. 112-12.

<sup>170</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>171</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 115.

added 'I am also inclined to believe that not a few of the schoolmasters were men of bad principles, who preferred any book to the Bible'.<sup>172</sup>

Secondly, hedge schoolmasters were independent of state control and to a certain extent of church control and while both bodies strongly disapproved of revolutionary activity, they had no authority over the schoolmasters who selected that course of action. It is likely that the masters were motivated to participate in the United Irishmen or the Defenders because of the sense of resentment and affront they felt at perceived inequalities, being the inheritors of a proud cultural and educational tradition as the descendants of the older learned class of scribes and poets who lived by the patronage of the old Gaelic chiefs. As P.J. Corish noted 'Some of the poets had been schoolmasters at an earlier date, when the learned classes still had a measure of patronage',<sup>173</sup> and in fact very many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century hedge schoolmasters were also Gaelic poets. [Ch. 3] Another historian Louis Cullen described them as the inheritors of 'the resentments of the leaders of the old Gaelic landed class'.<sup>174</sup> These ancient resentments easily fused with democratic French doctrines, which the United Irishmen had done so much to disseminate.

The United Irishmen were defeated in the 1798 rebellion but there was one area where they could claim victory and that was in the paper propaganda war. They made exceptionally good use of the written word, not only through a vast distribution network of radical literature, pamphlets, handbills and newspapers, but also through the publication of popular ballads during the year 1795-1796, in such books as *Paddy's Resource* and *The Irish Harp New Strung*.<sup>175</sup> They succeeded in politicising the people or as one member, Thomas Addis Emmet explained, the United Irishmen sought to 'make every man a politician'.<sup>176</sup> However, this would have been impossible unless the people had the levels of literacy required to read such works and to sign petitions and elect delegates, all of this was directly attributable to the education they received in the hedge schools. Proof of high literacy levels are not scarce for the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1790's there were 50 printers in Dublin alone, 34 provincial presses and at least 40 newspapers.

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<sup>172</sup> The First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry 1825 Examination of the Rev. Henry Cooke, 5 Corish January 1825, p. 820.

<sup>173</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 165.

<sup>174</sup> Louis M. Cullen. *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600-1900*. (London, 1981), p. 236.

<sup>175</sup> Jim Smyth. *The Men of No Property*, p. 162.

The strength of the Dublin and country book selling and publishing industry is borne out by the surge<sup>177</sup> in devotional literature in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, both of which testify to the existence of a substantial literate population. More concrete evidence of literacy is provided by the 1841 census figures which reveal that 54% of catholics could read and that 35% could both read and write. The age structure of the literate indicates that the percentage of the catholic population which could read and write in the 1790's was lower - less than 50% but that it was steadily rising.<sup>178</sup>

(vi) **Irish education in the age of the Enlightenment.**

After twenty years of agrarian violence in which hedge schoolmasters were known to have been involved, and in the wake of the French revolution which stimulated a rebellion in which hedge schoolmasters were known to have participated, it was to be expected that state control of Irish education would be moved close to the top of the political agenda. Besides the established church clergymen were failing in their duty to provide an acceptable education for the majority of the population as neither the parish, diocesan, royal or charter schools were attracting catholic pupils.

Just as the chief secretary Thomas Orde (1746-1807) set himself the difficult task of unravelling the complexities of the anglican school structure in Ireland, a 'massive intellectual movement ... known as the Enlightenment' began to dominate European educational thought.<sup>179</sup> The writings of the revolutionary French philosophers Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Helvétius and the writing of the English philosopher John Locke (1612-1704) had a major impact on political and social thought in Britain. Like Helvétius, Locke expressed the view in his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), that all social classes were born with a mind that was blank and they eventually became what education made them.<sup>180</sup> Education, they said should be open to all because educational advance was essential to the attainment of social ideals. This liberal philosophy fitted well with the laissez-faire economics of Adam Smith (1723-

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>177</sup> Kevin Whelan. *The Tree of Liberty*, p. 63.

<sup>178</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland*, p. 28, p. 77.

<sup>179</sup> Norman Atkinson. *Irish Education*, p. 64.

1790) and the utilitarian social philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). The social philosophy of Smith and Bentham held that a more just and orderly society was best achieved by the interplay of free forces and they demanded education for all, to make them useful members of society.<sup>181</sup> Such a philosophy was anathema to conservative evangelicals such as Hannah More (1745-1833) and Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) who were involved in the establishment and running of Sunday Schools in England. They had no wish to change the class structure of society and they believed that libertarian doctrines would threaten social stability.<sup>182</sup> Both the liberal and conservative philosophies would have a significant effect on official education policy in Ireland from 1787 to 1812, when elementary education provision would be put under close scrutiny through a succession of education inquiries.

Orde was the first chief secretary in Ireland to face the educational challenge, when he instigated an official investigation into educational provision in 1786. Educational reform had been suggested to him prior to his departure for Ireland, by his old political mentor, the enlightened politician Lord Shelbourne, when he urged the establishment of 'public schools'.<sup>183</sup> Orde was fortunate to have John Hely-Hutchinson, the Provost of Trinity College, a man with a deep interest in education, even if his views were necessarily subjective. He did a great deal of preparatory work in 1785 and presented Orde with his 'plan for a great school' along with a very important assessment of the deficiencies in the existing system, all of which came as a surprise to Orde. He informed Orde that the royal and diocesan schools required financial assistance, the charter schools needed 'looking into' and the parochial system could be greatly promoted by 'obliging every parish clergyman to keep such a school pursuant to ..statute'.<sup>184</sup> Before he could reform the education system Orde needed detailed information, so he set about gathering it on a limited scale in 1786 and by April 1786 he had enough data on the free schools of royal foundation to enable him to bring the matter before parliament. He informed the House of Commons that masters in the endowed schools were motivated by self-interest and he recommended that in future, schools should be endowed in such a way as to assist the

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<sup>180</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver. *A Social History of Education in England*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 11 New Fetter Lane, 1973), p. 229.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>182</sup> G.M. Trevelyan. *English Social History*. (Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1972).

<sup>183</sup> James Kelly. 'The Context and Course of Thomas Orde's Plan of Education of 1787'. In *The Irish Journal of Education*. Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2, (1986), p. 4.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

pupils as well as the masters. He received approval for the establishment of endowed schools and resolutions for the collection of detailed information on royal, diocesan and other schools in all dioceses.<sup>185</sup>

The latter took place during the summer of 1786 and the findings made grim reading as it was now clear that lax practices were prevalent in all areas of education. Parish clergy were remiss in their duty to provide schools although they were in receipt of funds for doing so. Most damning of all was the fact that the charter schools, which protestant clergymen like the Bishop of Cloyne, Richard Woodward took such pride in, were shown to be in a 'wretched state'. Orde was kept well informed by Jeremiah Fitzpatrick, who visited him in February to impress upon him the level of his dissatisfaction with the schools he had examined.<sup>186</sup>

Orde presented his plan of education to parliament on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1787 but before he did so he outlined the underlying philosophy behind his scheme. It was clear from this that he belonged to the conservative school of thought which urged the use of education for the maintenance of social stability and for the pacification of Ireland. The education to be provided was to be a 'superior' protestant education. In a speech which took three hours to deliver, he attributed 'all the violent and atrocious acts which had too often disgraced this nation' to a 'want of education'. He saw education as a means of infusing 'the balm of information into the wound of ignorance' and he argued that the voluntary participation of catholics in such schools would disperse 'the mists of ignorance' and encourage their appreciation 'of the superiority of our own (protestant) doctrines'.<sup>187</sup>

Orde viewed the education system as a whole and recommended a much more active role for the state in education provision, as well as an efficient system of inspection. Catholics were to be given equality of treatment and admitted indiscriminately into the schools but the schoolmasters would be protestants. It was expected that in exchange for the benefits such a system would bring the established church, that its clergymen would now fulfil the educational duties, they had so long neglected.<sup>188</sup> Orde considered the abolition of the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>187</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 59.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

charter schools to make funds available for a more satisfactory system.<sup>189</sup> He hoped also to breathe new life into the parish schools already in existence 'by requiring incumbents to make the prescribed educational donations'.<sup>190</sup> He wished to create provincial schools and to introduce new branches of education in the form of provincial and collegiate colleges. He proposed doubling the university sector, a suggestion which was rejected by the secretary of state on the grounds that Trinity College was legally 'the sole university of Ireland', however he seconded Orde's resolutions and called on parliament to implement them in the 1788 session.

This never happened. The three churches opposed Orde's plan and the strongest objections came from the established church. They objected, not just because of the burden of cost the church was expected to carry but because of the proposed abolition of the charter schools, and the more active role envisaged for the state in education supply. Many clergymen saw this as an attack on the established church's rights in regard to education provision and control. The presbyterians objected because they had been campaigning for a presbyterian university in Belfast for some time, and the catholic church objected also but didn't comment publicly throughout 1787, as they were 'reluctant to be seen to be critical of a chief secretary, not least one who harboured suspicions of catholics'.<sup>191</sup>

In February 1788 Archbishop Troy sought to elicit the responses of his fellow bishops and the replies he received were mainly hostile to Orde's plan. Archbishop Boetius Egan of Tuam replied on behalf of the prelates of his province that it was 'a deep laid and hostile plan against the interests of the catholic religion'. He wanted to see control of catholic education in catholic hands as he believed that this proposed system was an attempt to strengthen protestantism by establishing an 'exclusively protestant education system and it was vital that catholics should respond with their own scheme if they were to survive'.<sup>192</sup>

Orde's plan was never implemented and the chief secretary left office in October 1787. The Irish parliament never discussed Orde's proposals possibly because of the Regency

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<sup>189</sup> Norman Atkinson. *Irish Education*, p. 65.

<sup>190</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 65.

<sup>191</sup> James Kelly. 'The Context and Course of Thomas Orde's Plan of Education, 1787', pp. 17-21.



Crisis (1788) when George III suffered from a temporary fit of insanity,<sup>193</sup> and the impact of the French revolution, along with the churches strong opposition to them. Orde's successor as chief secretary, Alleyne Fitzherbert, faced with such strong church opposition adopted a sensible holding position by appointing a commission of inquiry to examine the various officially sponsored schools in greater detail. Even though there were seven commissioners appointed including Fitzherbert himself and John Hely-Hutchinson, no report was published. A draft was reputedly ready in late 1788 or early 1789, but no copy has survived. The commission's warrant was extended until they could complete their work in 1791. This report was never published either but later education commissioners had access to it.<sup>194</sup>

Unlike Orde's plan, the 1791 report and a third one which issued following an education inquiry in 1799, showed clear signs of liberal enlightenment thought on education. The 1791 report was also critical of the inefficient way the parish schools were run and for the fact that they failed to provide for the education of the poor. The commissioners then proposed a non-denominational system of education, similar in many respects to the national system of education introduced in 1831. This report recommended, as Orde's did, that all students be admitted indiscriminately to the educational institutions and that the system be treated as a whole. Schools were to be administered by a central board of control made up of a number of commissioners with power to oversee the efficient running of schools. This would include the right to direct the plan of education to be pursued, and the right to obtain progress reports and the right to visit and inspect the schools. The most remarkable proposals made by the commissioners referred to a power sharing approach in education to include members of the catholic hierarchy and lay catholics. The governing body of each school was to consist of the local incumbent, churchwardens and four laymen, two protestants and two catholics. The incumbent was to share his formerly exclusive control over the parish school with a board of laymen, two of whom were to be catholics. More importantly the radical suggestion was made that the local catholic priest was to have the right to visit the schools to instruct the children of his flock on religion, a right heretofore enjoyed by his protestant counterpart only.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>193</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>194</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 70.

The commissioners were not quite so generously disposed towards hedge schoolmasters. They intended that masters who were involved in violent movements and who taught from chapbooks with an alleged subversive content, would not be allowed in any new system. They desired that masters would have to undergo examination, receive certificates of morals and ability and be licensed annually. They required also that the books they used would be subject to inspection. The report was never published however and nothing ever came of the scheme. One reason suggested for the suppression of the report was that its findings, especially those in respect of the charter schools, were too damaging to be made public.<sup>196</sup>

Eight years lapsed before the next education inquiry took place, during which time the remaining catholic education disabilities had been removed in 1792 and 1793. A catholic seminary at Maynooth had been established in 1795 and from 1796 to 1798 the country was in a state of smothered civil war which eventually exploded into the rebellion of 1798. The government was pre-occupied with its administrative difficulties but the education question was re-opened by Richard Lovell Edgeworth, a known supporter of Rousseau's liberal philosophy of child-centred education. He did so firstly by attracting attention to the subject of education by the publication in the autumn of 1798 of the three volume work entitled *Practical Education* and secondly by requesting the lord lieutenant Westmorland on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1799, that the 1791 report be laid before the House. Following on this request, a select committee was appointed, with Edgeworth as chairman. They reported back expeditiously on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February and he introduced a bill to effect its recommendations on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1799.<sup>197</sup>

Edgeworth's report didn't add any new thinking on educational structures. It put forward a system of denominational education but with some favouritism to be shown to the established church. It proposed that in schools attended by protestants only or by protestants and catholics, the master would be a protestant but where schools consisted entirely of catholics, a catholic master would be appointed. This report acknowledged the right of catholic children to a state aided system of education, which would see state grants for catholic schools and catholic religious education. The bill was given a first

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<sup>195</sup> Report of the Education Commissioners, 1791, pp. 343-344.

<sup>196</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>197</sup> Harold Hislop. *Voluntary Effort and Official Enquiry*, pp. 62-64.

hearing in the House of Commons but it didn't proceed any further, probably due to the politics of the forthcoming union.<sup>198</sup> The failure to implement any of the reports was sufficient proof that the government was not quite ready to accept the consequences of state supplied education which would inevitably have involved a role for the catholic church.

(vii) Background to the 1806-1812 Education Inquiry.

From the moment the Act of Union was passed on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1800 the Irish administration was fully accountable to the Westminster parliament. The lord lieutenant, the council and the law courts still remained in Dublin, while the legislature had been moved to Westminster.<sup>199</sup> From the signing of the Act of Union all concessions to catholics ceased. Efforts to address the grievances of the people were not even contemplated by the government even though social and economic difficulties had worsened by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most pressing problem the people faced was the land question. There wasn't enough land available to provide a living for a rapidly expanding population, which reached 5 million in 1800 and rose to 6.8 million in 1821.<sup>200</sup> Competition for land drove up rent prices and in the poorer regions in the west of Ireland, where the population grew more rapidly, over dependence on the potato led to the subdivision of holdings. The situation was worsened by the local famines of 1817 and 1822.<sup>201</sup>

This severe hardship led to widespread rural unrest and a corresponding increase in secret societies such as the Whitefeet, Blackfeet, Shanavests and Rockites who asserted the cause of the tenant against the landlord and the tithe proctor.<sup>202</sup> The government responded to every wave of disturbance by introducing a series of Coercion Acts, in order to suppress crime, a practice which continued for more than twenty years after the union. The government had at its disposal the services of 30,000 to 50,000 regular troops, 21,000

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>199</sup> J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland*, pp. 287-289.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., pp. 292-293.

<sup>201</sup> Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70..* (Gill and MacMillan, McGill Queen's University Press, 1978), p. 178.

<sup>202</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland*, p. 296.

militia and numerous bodies of yeomanry, in the tense years following the rebellion.<sup>203</sup> They were often called upon to back up the Sheriff's authority in distraint for non-payment of rent or tithes and on the enforcement of eviction orders.<sup>204</sup> Sir Arthur Wellesley, the chief secretary, summed up the anxious mood of the government about the state of the country when he wrote in 1807 'We have no strength here but our army. Ireland in a view to military operations must be considered as an enemy's country'.<sup>205</sup>

The decades following the union saw a general reformation in ecclesiastical discipline not just in the Catholic Church but also in the Church of Ireland, with the primary abuses being curbed if not eliminated. The most serious consequences of the Protestant religious revival or 'Second Reformation' as it was called, was the appearance among British and Irish Protestants of a new enthusiasm for missionary efforts 'and the Catholics of Ireland were as attractive a target for evangelisation as the heathens of Africa or India'.<sup>206</sup>

Some Protestant denominations took the view that the rebellion merely served as proof of the need for a sustained missionary endeavour among the Irish peasantry. The events of 1798 convinced the Methodists that Catholics were disloyal and violent by nature and that Ireland would never be at peace until a mass conversion to Protestantism was effected.<sup>207</sup> As early as 1799 they sent 3 Irish speaking missionaries to work among the Catholic population. By 1816 there were 21 Methodist missionaries operating from fourteen stations in different parts of the country.<sup>208</sup> Some other denominations got involved in missionary work such as the Church of Ireland missionaries who used the Irish language to convert Irish speaking Catholics. They formed societies like the London Hibernian Society (1806), the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland (1814) and the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language (1818). A plethora of missionary societies who used the English language to convert were formed in Ireland during this time also, the more important of which included the Hibernian Bible Society (1809), the Sunday School Society for

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<sup>203</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*. (W. Tempest, Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, 1949), p. 249.

<sup>204</sup> J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland*, p. 294.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>206</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and people in Pre-Famine Ireland*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>207</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise*.

<sup>208</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Ireland (1809), the Religious Tract and Bible Society (1810) and the Scripture Readers Society (1822).<sup>209</sup>

More worrying from the catholic church's perspective was the involvement of several of these societies in elementary education, which they provided free of charge to those who were prepared to accept the scriptural and religious instruction that went with them. The first of these was the Association for Discountenancing Vice & Promoting the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion (1792). By 1800 the association was incorporated by an act of parliament and between 1800 and 1827 it had received from public funds no less than £102,000.<sup>210</sup> By the 1820's it had become a vigorous proselytising agency. Next was the London Hibernian Society (1806) formed in London under the name of the Hibernian Society for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge in Ireland. This was to become possibly the most notorious of the education societies because of its openly aggressive style of proselytising and because of its blatant anti-catholic principles. This society viewed the catholic church as one of idolatry and superstition and held that

**The great Body of the Irish wander like sheep that have no faithful shepherd to lead them. Legendary tales, Pilgrimages, Penances, Superstitious Offerings, Priestly Domination, the notorious Habit of Reconciling Sanctimonious Accents and Attitudes with abandoned practices, and all that shocks and disgusts in the Mummery of the Mass House, cannot fail to fix a mournful sentiment in the heart of every enlightened and pious observer.**<sup>211</sup>

Like many of the bible societies the London Hibernian Society gave biblical and catechetical instruction in the Irish language. Another such to follow in its footsteps, was the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland (1814), which was also formed in London. They too decided to convert the native speakers, prompted by the success of the London Hibernian Society in Connaught. The Irish language was used by a third education society called the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the medium of their own Language (1818), which had such close links to the other Irish speaking societies that it took steps not to encroach on their territory.<sup>212</sup> Many impoverished hedge schoolmasters were employed by this society, two such masters Peter

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<sup>209</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 61.

<sup>210</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, pp. 30-31.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Gallegan (1792-1860) and John Farrelly of Kells, Co. Meath suffered the wrath of Rev. Halpin the parish priest of Nobber, for doing so.<sup>213</sup> [Ch. 2]. The Sunday School Society (1809) was to earn the reputation of being a proselytising organisation that derived considerable financial aid from the Association for Discountenancing Vice although its founder, Rt. Hon. David La Touche was highly regarded in Ireland and England as a man who had a genuine concern for the poor.<sup>214</sup>

Of all the education societies, the only one formed on liberal principles, was one founded by a group of Dublin professional men, philanthropists who believed, in the wake of the rebellion that the 'education of the lower classes could alone correct their turbulence and turn their minds to industry and respect for the laws'.<sup>215</sup> It was called the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor of Ireland (1811), better known as the Kildare Place Society, and it set out to provide elementary education for the poor of Ireland by adopting what it called its 'leading principle', which was 'to afford the same facilities for education to all classes of professing christians without any attempt to interfere with the peculiar religious opinions of any'. In all schools under its auspices, a strict rule had to be observed that the bible was to be read to the children 'without note or comment' and no other religious instruction was to be allowed.<sup>216</sup> Within eight years of its foundation, just as the religious fervour and zeal of the 'Second Reformation' began to impact on education societies, this society was destined to suffer from some of its worst effects, which would eventually bring it into disrepute.

In the meantime a great deal of religious rivalry was centred on the education question, especially in view of the fact that with financial assistance from the treasury, some of these education societies set up free schools in poorer counties such as Cavan and Mayo where there was a dearth of hedge schools or catholic parish schools. This was evident in Co. Clare where the London Hibernian Society had over 80 schools with 1,000 catholic children on their rolls. Bishop O'Shaughnessy of Ennis, Co. Clare and the bishops of

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<sup>212</sup> Carol E.F. Revington. *The Kildare Place Society: Its Principles and Policy*. Unpublished M.Ed. thesis. (University of Dublin, Trinity College, 1981), p. 198.

<sup>213</sup> Séamus MacGabhann. 'Salvaging Cultural Identity: Peter Gallegan 1792-1860'. In *Ríocht na Midhe*. Meath Archaeological & Historical Society, (1994), p. 75.

<sup>214</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>215</sup> Report of the General Meeting for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland. (Dublin 1820).

<sup>216</sup> Susan M. Parkes. *Kildare Place. The History of the Church of Ireland Training College 1811-1969*. (Dublin: C.I.C.E., Rathmines, 1984), pp. 17-18.

Tuam, Ardfert and Galway expressed their concern at this situation and the resultant damage to ecumenical relations.<sup>217</sup> Bishop Thomas Hussey of the diocese of Waterford and Lismore, in his controversial pastoral letter of 1797, favoured a more aggressive stance against his rivals in the field of education and religion. He publicly challenged the proselytising schools and urged his priests to resist their efforts and to remonstrate with parents who sent their children to them. If they refused they were to be denied the eucharist. He issued orders to

**Stand firm against all attempts which may be made under various pretexts to withdraw any of your flocks from the belief and practice of the catholic religion. Remonstrate with any parent who would be so criminal as to expose his offspring to those places of education where his religious faith or morals are likely to be perverted ... if he will not attend to your remonstrances, refuse him the participation of Christ's Body; if he should continue obstinate, denounce him to the church in order that, according to Christ's Commandment, he be considered as a heathen and a publican.**<sup>218</sup>

The hedge schoolmasters and their chapbooks were a source of deep concern at this time, not just to contemporary writers but also to the evangelical members of the bible societies. Two of the education societies took action to suppress or supplant the chapbook literature. The Association for Discountenancing Vice managed to obtain a conviction against a hawker or pedlar of obscene books and prints and it succeeded in persuading another to abandon his trade in these books.<sup>219</sup> The Kildare Place Society adopted a marketing strategy which had already been employed successfully by the evangelical writer Hannah More in England, which involved entering into competition with the offensive literature by supplying cheaper books, designed to resemble the books they were intending to replace.<sup>220</sup> The London Hibernian Society regarded the books they found in hedge schools as 'nonsensical..containing fairy tales, the *History of St. Patrick*, the *Seven Champions of Christendom*, the *Scapular &c* or at the very best *Aesop's Fables*.'<sup>221</sup> Contemporary writers such as Hely Dutton (1808), Edward Wakefield (1812), and Wm. Shaw Mason (1816) among others [Ch. 2] directed their criticism at a little over a dozen of these books from a comprehensive list of 299 books later provided by the 1825

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<sup>217</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 63.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>219</sup> J. Warburton, Rev. J. Whitelaw and Rev. Robert Walsh. *History of the City Vol. II.* (London, W. Bulmer & Co., Cleveland Row, St. James's, 1818), p. 888.

<sup>220</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 43.

<sup>221</sup> P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 82.

commissioners of education. Hely Dutton's 'general cottage classics' which he found in the hedge schools of Co. Clare were the ones most often quoted:

**History of the Seven Champions of Christendom**

**----- Montelion Knight of the Oracle**

**Irish Rogues & Rapparees**

**Freney, a most notorious robber, teaching them the most dangerous mode of robbing**

**Fair Rosamond & Jane Shore, two prostitutes...**<sup>222</sup>

The good character of the master was also impugned by such writers as Wakefield, who accused him of immorality. He wrote:

**The common schoolmaster is generally a man who was originally intended for the priesthood: but whose morals had been too bad, or his habitual idleness so deeply rooted as to prevent his improving himself for that office. To persons of this kind is the education of the poor entirely intrusted: and the consequence is, that their pupils imbibe from them enmity to England, hatred to the Government and superstitious veneration for old and absurd customs.**<sup>223</sup>

Sir John Carr who travelled Ireland in 1805 regarded the hedge schoolmaster as a 'miserable breadless being' who was almost as ignorant as his scholars.<sup>224</sup>

The commissioners of education of 1806 faced a number of challenges - they would have to decide how to make the protestant church clergymen more accountable in their role as managers of parish and royal schools and how to eliminate the irregularities in these institutions. They would have to decide whether or not to allow the catholic hierarchy a role in any new educational system and the best means of safeguarding the religious beliefs of children of different denominations. A decision would have to be taken also with regard to 'seditious masters' and their 'licentious books'.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>223</sup> Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*. (Longman Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, Paternoster Row, 1812), p. 51.

<sup>224</sup> John Carr. *The Stranger in Ireland*. (Richard Phillips, No. 6 Bridge Street, Blackfriars, 1806), pp. 250-251.



(viii) The 1806-1812 Commission of Inquiry on Irish Education.

The Irish education question was a priority for the post-union British parliament of Lord Grenville's 'Ministry of All The Talents', which took up office upon the death of William Pitt in 1806. Prime Minister Grenville appointed the Duke of Bedford as Irish lord lieutenant, a well known supporter of the English educationalist Joseph Lancaster, but it was Grenville himself who first pressed for an inquiry into Irish education.

The inquiry was a revival of the 1788-1791 commission and under the provisions of the act the lord lieutenant was to appoint up to six commissioners, and commissioners of charitable bequests were to appoint up to five of their own body as commissioners.<sup>225</sup> This provision was made due to the efforts of the primate of the established church, the formidable Archbishop William Stuart, who reluctantly agreed to co-operate with the establishment of the new board of education, because, as Harold Hislop in his study noted, 'he wished to limit any potentially damaging investigations into the established church's role in education'. He was less than pleased that the government appointees 'were almost entirely of liberal disposition on religious and educational matters'.<sup>226</sup> In fact the commissioners appointed by Bedford formed a link with pre-union educational thinking. Isaac Corry M.P. for Co. Armagh had served on the 1788 commission which recommended power sharing with catholics in the management of schools, R.L. Edgeworth who was instrumental in bringing about the 1799 commission and whose liberal views on education were well known, were among them.

The lord lieutenant's other nominees were William Parnell and Henry Grattan two notable liberal politicians, and Robert S. Tighe who had called for educational reform in his pamphlet of 1787. The only conservative appointee was William Disney, a member of the management committee of the protestant charter schools.<sup>227</sup> The appointees of the commissioners of charitable donations and bequests were the Primate, Archbishop William Stuart of Armagh, Charles Agar, Earl of Normanton and Archbishop of Dublin,

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<sup>225</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 76.

<sup>226</sup> Harold Hislop. *The 1806-1812 Board of Education*, p. 51.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*.

James Verschoyle, Dean of St. Patrick's and later Bishop of Killala, George Hall, the Provost of Trinity College, and James Whitelaw, Minister of St. Catherine's, Dublin.<sup>228</sup>

From the beginning of the inquiry on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1806 the established church clergy took a leadership role, with Archbishop Stuart chairing this meeting and almost all of the subsequent meetings of the board. The commissioners worked for 6 years and produced 14 reports, the first 13 dealt with schools investigated by the 3 major education inquiries between 1788-1799. The fourteenth report dealt with the current educational situation.<sup>229</sup> The core of establishment commissioners successfully ensured that damaging criticism was limited in the report on parish schools and managed to find positive features in the charter schools.<sup>230</sup> They concluded, upon examining 39 charter schools 'that they were in a flourishing state, the Education in them efficacious and practical and in every respect such as put it beyond the reach of private defamation or public censure'.<sup>231</sup>

This contrasted strongly with their outright condemnation of hedge schools, which they described as 'that ordinary class of country schools, generally known in Ireland by the name of 'Hedge Schools' which were frequently of an objectionable character'.<sup>232</sup> The professional ability of the masters was held up to ridicule also as the commissioners claimed that the only instruction given in the hedge schools was in basic literacy and numeracy skills. They stated that 'even this limited instruction the masters are in general very ill-qualified to give, having been themselves taught in schools of a similar description'.<sup>233</sup> They suggested that as the profession was so poorly remunerated it held 'out no temptation to a better class to undertake the office of instructors'.<sup>234</sup> As a result of their poverty hedge schoolmasters couldn't afford to purchase 'such books as are fit for children to read', and they were obliged to use chapbooks which the commissioners considered to be very dangerous and a threat to the morals of the children. According to the commissioners it frequently happened 'that instead of being improved by religious

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<sup>228</sup> Harold Hislop. *The 1806-1812 Board of Education*, p. 51.

<sup>229</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>230</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>231</sup> Fourteenth Report of the Board of Education, p. 329.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

and moral instruction, their minds are corrupted by books calculated to incite to lawless and profligate adventure, to cherish superstition, or to lead to dissension or disloyalty',<sup>235</sup>

A determined effort was to be made to rid all future schools of chapbooks by the suggestion in the report that the new education commissioners were to have control over all texts used in their schools. The commissioners wished to replace the hedge schools and to take some of the power from the hands of the church of Ireland clergymen, by appointing a permanent body of education commissioners with responsibility for creating supplementary schools, to be under their control. They recommended a series of training institutions for the proper training of teachers but most importantly, the fourteenth report made a strong case against any form of proselytising taking place in Irish schools. This was an enlightened 'leading principle' and one that was to be 'pivotal in all later Irish educational discussions'.<sup>236</sup> The commissioners outlined it as follows:

**We conceive this to be of essential importance that in any new establishments for the education of the lower classes in Ireland, and we venture to express our unanimous opinion, that no such plan, however wisely and unexceptionably contrived in other respects, can be carried into effectual execution in this country, unless it be explicitly avowed and clearly understood as its leading principle, that no attempt shall be made to influence or disturb the peculiar religious tenets of any sect or description of christians.**<sup>237</sup>

They were also to draw up a volume of sacred extracts to be read during secular instruction, so that all children would have access to the scriptures in the new school system. They may have ruled out proselytism but conversion must surely have been behind the ecclesiastical commissioners' thinking in this recommendation. They also accepted the mixed education principle but they rejected the separate religious education of children by their respective pastors. All existing educational institutions were to be left in the hands of the established church and, as Harold Hislop pointed out, the established church commissioners 'were determined to prevent the supplementary schools from becoming state supported schools under the control of the catholic church'.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>236</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 77.

<sup>237</sup> Fourteenth Report, p. 328.

<sup>238</sup> Harold Hislop. *The 1806-1812 Board of Education*, p. 53.

In fact they had no wish to see the supplementary schools established at all, or the formation of a new board of commissioners who were 'to have a general control over the whole of the proposed establishments for the instruction of the lower classes.'<sup>239</sup> This became apparent in September 1812 when the newly appointed chief secretary Robert Peel took up his post and attempted to implement the recommendations of the fourteenth report, by establishing the supplementary schools. However 'lobbying from the Irish Bench of Bishops in 1813 persuaded him to limit legislative measures to the creation of a board of commissioners to oversee endowed schools'. By March 1814 Peel established exactly how the ecclesiastical commissioners of 1806 felt about the supplementary schools and it transpired that they no longer supported their own report. They rejected it because they would have been obliged to share power in education with the catholic church.<sup>240</sup>

Peel was placed in a difficult situation but fortunately for him an idea was mooted at the meetings held in 1814, that state aid for education could be channelled through a voluntary society.<sup>241</sup> The government acted on this suggestion and gave grant aid to some of the education societies, one of which at least had a dubious reputation. The one which got the largest grant still had its reputation intact, this was the Kildare Place Society, which had formulated its guiding principles in accordance with the fourteenth reports' 'leading principle', which eschewed proselytism in a mixed education system. Consequently the society was awarded a generous grant of £6,980 in 1815 which rose to £25,000 in 1828 and reached £30,000 in 1831.<sup>242</sup>

#### (ix) Lay and Clerical opposition to the Kildare Place Society 1819-1824.

In 1800 William Pitt and his chief secretary Lord Castlereagh had intended that the union of the two parliaments should be accompanied by the admission of catholics to membership of parliament. When the measure had to be dropped due to the strong anti-concession lobby in England and the hostility of the king, both of them resigned in

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<sup>239</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 'Voluntary effort and official enquiry', p. 67.

<sup>240</sup> op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>242</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, p. 11.

protest.<sup>243</sup> Irish catholics renewed their efforts to pursue emancipation when, in November 1804, under Lord Fingall, they resolved to prepare the first catholic petition for emancipation since the act of union. It was at this stage that Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), a very successful catholic barrister decided to participate in catholic politics. He was motivated to campaign for political and civil equality for catholics for professional reasons. He could enjoy a lucrative career if judicial offices were open to catholics on the same basis as protestants,<sup>244</sup> and his sense of national pride was offended because catholics were precluded from sitting in parliament.

In the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Henry Grattan attempted to secure a catholic relief bill from parliament but Irish catholic opinion was split because of the quid pro quo of securities or 'wings' sponsored by Grattan in return for emancipation.<sup>245</sup> Daniel O'Connell emerged as the popular leader of Irish catholics because he led the resistance to the proposition that the crown should have the right of veto on Irish catholic episcopal appointments and to the state payment of the catholic clergy.<sup>246</sup> As Thomas McGrath observed in his recent study 'The "wings" were designed to secure the state from Roman pretensions and to make Emancipation palatable to the die-hard Protestants or ultras'.<sup>247</sup> The catholic movement split as a result of this and remained so until the early 1820's. During this time Daniel O'Connell was looking for some way to revitalise the movement and to consolidate its position. In one of his writings on O'Connell, Fergus O'Ferrall acknowledged that O'Connell was 'somewhat at a loss as to how to revitalise the catholic agitation: his proposals and gestures had neither overcome the split amongst Irish Catholics nor helped very much their parliamentary prospects'.<sup>248</sup>

In order to achieve his political ambition of securing catholic emancipation, it was essential for O'Connell to find a cause which would interest the catholic clergy and by so doing win their support for his main ambition. In 1820 he found such a cause in the

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<sup>243</sup> J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland*, p. 288.

<sup>244</sup> Fergus O'Ferrall. *Daniel O'Connell*, p. 26.

<sup>245</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education in the Public Ministry of Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin, 1786-1834*. (Four Courts Press, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>246</sup> H. Moore Kingsmill. *An unwritten chapter in the history of education, being the history of the Society for Promoting the Education of the poor of Ireland, generally known as the Kildare Place Society*. (London, 1904), p. 75.

<sup>247</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>248</sup> Fergus O'Ferrall. *Daniel O'Connell*, p. 42.

Kildare Place Society's bible reading rule and the nugatory effect he alleged it had on its 'leading principle', matters he had first raised at the Society's annual meeting in 1819.<sup>249</sup>

Before the annual meeting of the Kildare Place Society in 1820 he laid the foundations of a carefully planned strategy to win the support of the catholic hierarchy, by firstly applying to the Archbishops of Dublin, Drs. Troy and Murray for some direction regarding the education of catholic children, bearing in mind no doubt the papal bull of Pius VII of 1818 which 'excludes from Catholic schools the Testament even with note and comment, even though these might be acceptable to Catholics'.<sup>250</sup>

Having consulted their parish priests the archbishops framed a resolution which O'Connell read to the meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1820 which stated that 'The Scriptures, with or without note or comment, are not fit to be used as a school book'.<sup>251</sup> According to the Society's historian H. Kingsmill Moore the annual meeting proved eventful as O'Connell was supported by the Duke of Leinster, the Earl of Fingall and Lord Cloncurry and 'Both sides approached the occasion as a test of strength'.<sup>252</sup> O'Connell expressed his approval and admiration of the Society's leading principle of non-interference with the religious beliefs of any sect, but he added that 'The difficulty felt by him and others had been caused by the rule which required that the Scriptures without note or comment should be read'. He suggested that 'This rule had rendered the means employed by the Society inefficient, and the principles of non-interference nugatory'.<sup>253</sup> This insistence on the use of the bible discriminated against catholics, and to prove his point he cited cases in which catholics had refused aid from the Society rather than comply with the rule. He referred to the papal bull and to the archbishops' resolution, a gesture which must have appealed to the catholic hierarchy.<sup>254</sup> He then insulted the protestant clergymen present by engaging in a provocative outburst in which he attacked protestant views on scriptural education:

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<sup>249</sup> H. Kingsmill Moore. *An Unwritten Chapter*, p. 75.

<sup>250</sup> Fontana to Bishops of Ireland, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1818, cited in Keogh, *Edmund Rice*, p. 68.

<sup>251</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom, Relations and Education*, p. 157.

<sup>252</sup> H. Kingsmill Moore. *An Unwritten Chapter*, p. 77.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

**I well know that I shall hear today as I did last year, something like prose run mad, something like half sermons about the value and origin of this book the bible.**<sup>255</sup>

According to the report of this meeting, his words were greeted with 'applause, mixed with louder hisses'. O'Connell reacted sharply by accusing his detractors of hypocrisy in exploiting poor catholics by their proselytising activities, while protestant children were well supplied with schools. He said:

**If I have trod on the tail of the serpent of bigotry, let it hiss. Oh it was a good hiss! A noble hiss! An excellent hiss! And I thank you for the hiss. Those who hissed may suppose they are acting for the service of God, but they serve God by a falsehood. But there is more honesty in the hiss, than in those gentlemen who assert one thing, and then say and do another.**<sup>256</sup>

Richard B. Warren, a barrister and one of the founding members of the Kildare Place Society, defended the Society's role in education, claiming that numbers had actually increased since O'Connell first raised his objection against the bible rule, a year previously. Furthermore he charged the catholic clergy with neglect of the education of the poor. He suggested that even though the great body of those to be educated were catholics, those who were able and willing to devote their time and their property to the education of the poor were of a different persuasion'.<sup>257</sup> A motion that there should not be an inquiry into the possibility of changing the Society's rules to accommodate catholic difficulties was upheld by 80 votes to 19, at which stage O'Connell and his friends withdrew from the Kildare Place Society.<sup>258</sup>

Daniel O'Connell had selected his ground well. He had picked exactly the right issue with which to lure the clergy. It was controversial, provocative and held out the attraction of control of Irish catholic education.<sup>259</sup> For the next 11 years this power struggle over control of education would prove a battle of wits between members of the government who supported the Kildare Place Society, members of the Society and the powerful clerical leaders in the catholic church. As subsequent events unfolded, with O'Connell

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<sup>255</sup> Harold Hislop. *'Voluntary effort and official enquiry'*, p. 90.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>257</sup> H. Kingsmill Moore. *An Unwritten Chapter*, p. 80.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom. Relations and Education*, p. 157.

<sup>259</sup> op. cit., p. 77.

publishing a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1820 in the Dublin Weekly Register, addressed to the catholic prelates, in which he accused the Society of pretending to afford equal educational opportunities to all, while their real aim was proselytism, the catholic church couldn't remain outside the world of politics.<sup>260</sup> O'Connell had found an issue which would take them centre stage. The main players would be Dr. Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and to a lesser extent the Archbishops of Dublin, Drs. Troy and Murray and Dr. Curtis, Archbishop of Armagh.<sup>261</sup> In his letter O'Connell also advised the bishops to establish a 'National Association for Education' lest they leave themselves open to charges of hostility to the education of the poor.<sup>262</sup>

The bishops accepted O'Connell's advice and promptly established a society in January 1821 which was intended to be the catholic equivalent of the Kildare Place Society, called the Irish National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor.<sup>263</sup> Both catholic prelates and influential laymen founded this society in the hope of altering the distribution of the Kildare Place funds to permit catholic control of funds for the education of catholic children, or that they might at least obtain a share of the public money accruing to the education societies. The constitution and rules of the new society, even as to phraseology were almost identical to those of the Kildare Place.<sup>264</sup> Six months later the society had only managed to establish one non-denominational school for boys at No. 4 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, in contrast to the rapidly expanding Kildare Place Society which had started off with only 8 schools in 1816 and had 1,122 schools by 1823, a number which was set to rise in the following years.<sup>265</sup> Without state funding the society couldn't hope to survive and for this purpose Dr. Doyle, who was about to become the leading catholic church spokesman on education requested Sir Henry Parnell M.P. to present a petition to the House of Commons from the catholic archbishops, bishops and laity on the education of the Irish poor. Catholic hopes were high as the chief secretary Charles Grant was known to favour the scheme.

Before presenting the petition to parliament on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1821, Parnell requested a report from Doyle on the state of catholic education in Ireland. This report was most

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<sup>260</sup> Dublin Weekly Register, 26 February, 1820.

<sup>261</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 158.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>263</sup> Dublin Weekly Register, 26 February, 1820.

<sup>264</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 156.



revealing as up to this the catholic church had kept a careful watch over proceedings in the hedge schools,<sup>266</sup> they had engaged the services of the masters for Sunday school teaching and the parochial returns from the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin in 1824 clearly showed that the parish priests were happy with the masters they had either sanctioned or appointed. Right through the returns were the sworn depositions of the parish priests in which the hedge schoolmasters were described as 'of excellent character', 'of moral character', 'of good character.'<sup>267</sup> Now that Doyle was seeking a grant for catholic education, it wasn't in the church's best interest for him to paint a picture of hedge schoolmasters as worthy educators, even though he was well aware that the teachers in his own diocese at least, were competent to teach. This was evident from an analysis of the returns, which showed that 168 out of 262 catholic male teachers or 64% were competent to give further instruction beyond the basic numeracy and literacy skills.<sup>268</sup> Yet Doyle was critical of hedge schoolmasters in his report, stating that 'In the counties of Carlow, Kildare and the Queen's County very nearly all the Roman Catholic children attend schools during the summer and autumn, are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, but their masters, in many instances, are extremely ignorant'. He added 'we have not funds to buy forms, books or to pay a master capable of instructing'. In order to obtain a grant Doyle was prepared to sacrifice the professional reputation of the hedge schoolmaster, the reputation upon which he survived as a teacher. He repeated 'Of these three counties, I may safely say that nine-tenths of the farmers' children and all those of the better classes, receive education of a very imperfect kind, and imparted in a very defective way, by men, in most instances, incompetent to teach'. The bishops' petition for grant aid for catholic schools when submitted by Parnell, was rejected, most likely due to the change in administration.<sup>269</sup>

Undaunted by this rejection, Doyle employed a new tactic, which was that of pressurising the Kildare Place Society to modify its rules to suit the requirements of the catholic bishops and at the same time he continued his policy of discrediting hedge schoolmasters. He did so in the autumn of 1821 by drawing up a manuscript entitled *Thoughts on the Education of the Poor in Ireland*, which was submitted to the chief secretary, Charles

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<sup>265</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 87.

<sup>266</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 163.

<sup>267</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>269</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 164.

Grant, by Lord Fingall, Archbishop Troy and three other prelates, for the government's consideration. In it he attributed the lack of a sound religious education to the growth in secret oath bound societies in the country, and he took the opportunity to alert the government to the fact that one half at least, of the population, in his estimation, was 'unprovided with any kind of useful instruction in their youth', and those who attended school did not benefit 'owing to the lack of a good system of education, proper schoolhouses and well-educated schoolmasters'. He stressed that catholics couldn't provide for the education of their children, although he knew that this wasn't true because the majority of catholic parents were paying for the education of their children in the hedge schools. He claimed also that catholics could not benefit from the education provided by the Kildare Place Society because of the rule which laid down that the bible was to be read 'without note or comment'.<sup>270</sup> This wasn't true either, as Akenson pointed out at this time 'the Kildare Place Society ... came very close to being the basis of a successful national system' as numbers of scholars increased steadily from the years 1816 to 1824, from 557 scholars to 100,000 scholars.<sup>271</sup>

The assertive tone of Doyle's suggestions reflected the new confidence of the catholic church, now that it was a legal body. The addresses of loyalty such as those which King George IV received from the bishops on his arrival in Ireland in 1821 and the one they gave to Lord Lieutenant Wellesley the same year,<sup>272</sup> would from now on be accompanied by petitions for civil rights for catholics in the field of education. Doyle suggested also that the Kildare Place Society should be made more acceptable to the catholic church and he envisaged that this could be achieved by the appointment of the two archbishops of Dublin as vice-presidents of the Society and six parish priests in Dublin city, or others, to the committee of the Kildare Place Society. He wanted the *Evangelical Life of Christ* to replace the *New Testament* for catholic children and he requested that books objected to by the three members of the committee should not be printed. There was a veiled threat also in his statement, that the church would withdraw catholic children from Kildare Place Society schools if aid was not forthcoming in the future for catholic education. For the present the catholic clergy 'overlooked in many instances what they disapproved

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-166.

<sup>271</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 87.

<sup>272</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, pp. 8-10.

of, as no duty could be more painful to them than to withdraw children from one school without being able to receive them in another'.<sup>273</sup>

Doyle also referred to the undemocratic nature of the Lord Lieutenant's Fund for the education of the poor. This was a fund set up in 1819 following an appeal on behalf of catholics by William Parnell, the spokesman in parliament for catholic claims, but the funds were largely inaccessible to catholics because title to the site of an aided school had to be vested in the anglican minister and church wardens of the parish.<sup>274</sup> Finally Doyle suggested that if the Kildare Place Society could not modify its rules to comply with the demands of the catholic church then the assistance catholics required from government might be given through a separate fund to be placed in the hands of the trustees of Maynooth College.

The government ignored his *Thoughts on Education* but a copy of the submission came into the possession of the Kildare Place Society, which rejected all the charges made against it as well as the suggestions for power sharing with the catholic church, the suggested modification of the bible reading rule and the proposed replacement for the New Testament.<sup>275</sup> Doyle was not satisfied with the Kildare Place response so he wrote a rejoinder to their reply in which he accused the Society of neglecting the poorer areas of Connaught and Munster where, he alleged 700,000 children were being deprived of education. In seven years the Society had received £55,600 in grant aid but had only made grants to 36 schools in Connaught and 108 in Munster, where the population was mostly catholic. Doyle gave the catholic clergy credit for bringing education to these neglected areas, ignoring the fact that hedge schoolmasters were active throughout Ireland, and that they educated the majority of children. He maintained that the Society favoured giving grants to Dublin and the province of Leinster where many protestants lived. By calling attention to this apparent discrimination, he was underlining the inability of the Society to fulfil the wishes of the legislature in distributing funds without religious distinction.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>274</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 84.

<sup>275</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 167.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

The Kildare Place Society's 'leading principle' had little hope of success due to the effects of the 'Second Reformation' which peaked in the 1820's, when the Society's managers granted part of their income to proselytising education societies. By 1824 there were 57 schools of the Association for Discountenancing Vice, 340 of the London Hibernian Society, and 30 Baptist Society schools receiving aid from the Kildare Place Society.<sup>277</sup> In July 1820 Cardinal Somaglia issued a papal bull against the bible societies, forbidding catholic children from attending schools, where the bible was read without note or comment.<sup>278</sup> The following month sectarian tension increased when the church of Ireland, Bishop of Killaloe Richard Mant praised his clergymen for their fine work in a hostile religious environment and urged them to 'banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word'.<sup>279</sup> Religious tensions were heightened once again on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1822 when the evangelical leader and church of Ireland, Archbishop of Dublin, the Rev. William Magee delivered an inflammatory sermon in which he called on his clergymen to evangelise throughout Ireland. He reminded them of the primary position traditionally held by the established church within the state and of their right to claim pre-eminence in the field of education.<sup>280</sup>

The Kildare Place Society's strict rule that the bible was to be read 'without note or comment' was largely abandoned in the early years of the 1820's when 'local protestant clergy and landlords quite freely violated the Society's rules by providing exposition of the scripture lessons'.<sup>281</sup> Eventually the three fundamental rules of the Society were to be broken, as the 1825 commissioners of education reported:

**The use of the Scriptures is frequently a matter of form ... Catechisms are taught as freely in many of their schools as in any others merely by the fiction of treating the appointed times as not being school hours; and the selection of masters and mistresses though nominally uninfluenced by religious considerations are truly and practically confined to Roman Catholics, when the Patrons are the Roman Catholic Clergy, and to Protestants, when the schools are in connection with the Association for Discountenancing Vice, or the Patrons are clergymen of the Established Church...**<sup>282</sup>

<sup>277</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 56.

<sup>278</sup> Harold Hislop. *The Kildare Place Society, 1811-1831*, p. 698.

<sup>279</sup> Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 85.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>281</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 90.

By the mid 1820's it became apparent to some catholic leaders and clergymen, that the Kildare Place Society was another proselytising agency. In Febraury 1820, a young Maynooth priest, Rev. John MacHale, later to become a Professor of Theology in Maynooth College, coadjutor Bishop of Killala (1825) and Archbishop of Tuam (1834), began issuing a series of letters under the nom de plume 'Hierophilos' warning the clergy of the proselytising intent of the Society. These letters continued for three years and highlighted the monopoly enjoyed by a minority group in the field of education, and warned of the threat this posed to the catholic church.<sup>283</sup> In somewhat more restrained tones Doyle wrote a series of letters to the Dublin Evening Post, using the initials J.K.L., in which he castigated the proselytising societies especially those engaged in education for the 'wide superstition which, under the name of bible reading or bible distributions, is now disturbing the peace of Ireland and threatening the safety of the state'.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1824, James Grattan M.P. for Co. Wicklow presented a petition of the Irish catholic bishops on education to the House of Commons. The petition, signed by Bishops Curtis, Murray, Kelly, Laffan, Murphy, Magauran, Marum and Doyle, outlined catholic grievances on education.<sup>284</sup> The bishops contended that the state funds for Irish education of the poor were adequate but that they were misapplied, because 'the manner in which they were distributed was at variance with catholic religious principles, especially the indiscriminate use of the Bible which was uniformly insisted upon'.<sup>285</sup> The lack of grants to catholic schools, the activities of the proselytising societies, the rules of the Lord Lieutenant's Fund were all enumerated among their grievances.<sup>286</sup> Both the chief secretary Henry Goulburn and the home secretary Robert Peel were strong supporters of the established church and of the Kildare Place Society. Nonetheless, when Sir John Newport moved for a royal commission to investigate the state of Irish education, to include not only the Kildare Place Society but all schools maintained in any part from public funds, the motion was agreed to on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1824 and the commission of Irish education inquiry was duly established by the king. This was generally seen as a victory for the catholic bishops because it was set up in response to

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<sup>282</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 58.

<sup>283</sup> op. cit.,

<sup>284</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 93.

<sup>285</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 170.

<sup>286</sup> op. cit.,

their petition, and as a defeat for the Kildare Place Society, but the battle for the control of Irish education still continued through the 1820's and the early 1830's.<sup>287</sup>

(x) 'The Country Was Being Convulsed By Sectarian Zeal'.

The catholic emancipation campaign was renewed again in 1823 with the formation of what was to become the best organised and most successful pressure group for catholic civil rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the Catholic Association spearheaded by the former 'veto' protagonists Daniel O'Connell and Richard Lalor Shiel. Initially its progress was slow and its survival was in doubt, until January 1824 when O'Connell proposed the collection of what was called the 'Catholic Rent'. Previously membership of the Association was one guinea a year, but O'Connell proposed a new category of members, associates who would contribute as little as a penny a month, a sum so low, that the poorest could afford it.<sup>288</sup> The historian S.J. Connolly described the rent as 'a masterpiece of political strategy'<sup>289</sup> not just because it was a huge financial success having raised £16,836 by March 1825 and £51,000 over the period 1824-1849, but because of its psychological effect, as it helped to create a unique bond between the subscribing peasantry and the Association.<sup>290</sup>

Another vital element in the success of the renewed campaign was the participation of the clergy and the use O'Connell made of the education question in order to win over the catholic bishops to support his main political ambition which was that of securing catholic emancipation. The clergy were from the outset, ex officio members of the Association but O'Connell promised them that £5,000 would be set aside for the education of priests, £5,000 for building chapels and presbyters and most significantly £5,000 for the use of catholic schools and the purchase of books, which must surely have appealed to a church threatened by proselytising schools and rising sectarianism.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 170.

<sup>288</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, p. 72.

<sup>289</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People*, p. 84.

<sup>290</sup> op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>291</sup> Dáire Keogh. *Edmund Rice*, pp. 72-73.

There can be little doubt that the Association used the education issue to improve its co-operation with the Irish catholic church. In the House of Commons on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1824, when John Henry North, who was a founder member of the Kildare Place Society, claimed in his maiden speech, that until the establishment of the Kildare Place Society in 1811 'the whole country in regard to education was in a state of thick and palpable darkness' and that 'the Catholic priests never undertook the task of instruction themselves',<sup>292</sup> the Catholic Association invited the clergy to refute North's speech. Letters poured into the Association's Capel Street rooms and the first to respond was the redoubtable Doyle.<sup>293</sup> In his reply Doyle gave the catholic clergy full credit yet again for keeping the light of education alive during the dark days of the penal laws, which of course would have been an impossible feat for them, considering their size relative to the population. He never gave the hedge schoolmasters the credit which was due to them and consistently overstated the contribution of the catholic clergy. He boasted that since the repeal of the penal laws against catholic education in 1782 priests had founded schools in their homes and allowed their churches to be used as schoolhouses. In defending his clergy he wrote that 'This calumniated order of men have proceeded steadily and perseveringly in the discharge of their duty, and without succour or support, have succeeded in this part of the country, in removing "the thick and palpable darkness" created by a flagitious code of law'.<sup>294</sup>

North's speech referred to the immoral and seditious books which were read in the native schools and he held the clergy personally responsible for that, but Doyle refuted this allegation, calling it a 'gross and unfounded calumny'. He stated that the catholic clergy had taken steps to remove any such books before the Kildare Place Society was ever founded.<sup>295</sup> This part of Doyle's statement was no doubt true because he testified to it before the 1825 commissioners of education,<sup>296</sup> but when the home secretary Robert Peel read Doyle's letter, which had been inserted in the minutes of the Catholic Association, he didn't believe his claim on the church's contribution to educational provision. Peel commented 'Dr Doyle is a clever fellow. I have read a letter from him on the education of

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<sup>292</sup> W.J. Fitzpatrick. *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Doyle. Vol. I.* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co. Ltd., 14/15 Wellington Quay, 1861), pp. 320-321.

<sup>293</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 171.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>296</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education inquiry, 1825. App., p. 778.

the Roman Catholics, giving, I dare say, a very inaccurate account of the state of education, but very ably written.<sup>297</sup>

Other bishops followed Doyle's lead and gave detailed accounts of educational activities in their dioceses. For the most part these consisted of the clergy's input and the challenge presented to them by the progress of proselytising societies.<sup>298</sup> It was obvious that they didn't regard the hedge schoolmasters as a threat but they were careful at the same time not to credit them with educational provision, they simply responded to North's charge of clerical neglect in education. It was evident from their accounts that the education societies were a source of deep concern to them and that they greatly resented the fact that the Kildare Place Society was in receipt of state aid even though many bishops believed, as Bishop Marum did, that the object of the Society was to 'introduce and establish the fundamental principles of the Reformation'. The coadjutor Bishop Coen stated that 'it must appear evident to the most superficial observer that proselytism and not education is their primary object'. Archbishop Murray was of the same mind as Archbishop Laffan who described the Kildare Place Society as 'a system which no conscientious catholic can encourage'.<sup>299</sup>

Doyle was acutely aware of the dangers posed by the education societies, even as far back as 1820, when he issued guidelines for his diocesan clergy which were published in the Carlow Morning Post of 31<sup>st</sup> January. He advised them to co-operate with the Kildare Place Society provided his regulations were adhered to. If their schools were intended 'for the vile purpose of proselytism' then they should 'dissuade the children of our Communion from attending them'.<sup>300</sup> One can reasonably assume therefore that the aforementioned bishops had no hesitation in withdrawing catholic children from proselytising schools in 1824. In any event the 1825 commissioners of education discovered abundant evidence of the withdrawal by the catholic church of catholic children from education society schools.

In his *Letters on the State of Education in Ireland, and on the Bible Societies*. J.K.L. (1824) Doyle complained that state educational foundations were turned into sinecures -

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<sup>297</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 173.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 185.



diocesan and parochial schools were either not held or, if held, were only available to those who could pay and that charter schools were 'converted into seminaries of proselytism and their funds embezzled'. While admitting that 'The country was being convulsed by sectarian zeal',<sup>301</sup> Doyle showed himself capable of liberal educational ideas, which were progressive for his time, when he proposed that 'all the children of the same state... should be educated together'. He was prepared to give the Kildare Place Society credit for its system of education which he described as 'excellent' and its book publishing which he called 'unexceptionable', he had even sent youths from his diocese to be trained at its model school, but he reiterated his view that the Society could not possibly implement its leading principle while still retaining its bible reading rule.<sup>302</sup>

Sectarianism was emerging as one of the biggest problems in Irish society in the mid 1820's. There were several reasons for this. It occurred not just because of the Second Reformation but also because of the scale of the campaign for catholic emancipation and the catholic church's unremitting pursuit for equality in education. It manifested itself in the growth of the deeply sectarian secret society of Ribbonmen, which was a catholic organisation with a strong connecting link to the revolutionary nationalist societies of the previous century. The earliest mention of this society dates from 1811<sup>303</sup> but according to the government informer Michael Coffey, they had an insurrection planned for the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1817 and a later one planned for 1820 when they were hoping for French assistance.<sup>304</sup> Ribbonmen inherited Defenderism's anti-Orange character. The Orange societies were strong throughout the country at this stage and they had their own oaths which Ribbonmen tried to match. The society did much to aggravate protestant fears, with their sectarian catechisms which contained the refrain 'What are your intentions? - to regain all lost rights and privileges since the Reformation'.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>303</sup> C.H.E. Philpin (ed.) *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*. (Cambridge University Press, The Pitt Building, Trumpington St., Cambridge, CB2 1RP, 1987).

Tom Garvin. 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland', p. 220.

<sup>304</sup> M.R. Beames. 'The Ribbon Societies: Lower Class Nationalism in Pre-Famine Ireland', p. 254.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

They, like other agrarian societies, active during this period, promoted Pastorini's prophecy, which foretold the extermination of protestants in the year 1825 when catholics would reign supreme once more. This prophecy was first published in 1771 in a book entitled *The General History of the Christian Church*, and was written by the catholic Bishop of Rama, Charles Walmesley, under the pseudonym Signor Pastorini.<sup>306</sup> It was hardly a coincidence that Pastorini's prophecy first began to acquire a popular following at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 when agrarian disturbances increased as the post-war price slump produced nothing but hardship. By the 1820's the drastic fall in the price of grain had shown little sign of abatement so that many farmers switched from labour intensive tillage to pasturage thus causing untold misery to cottiers, labourers and tenant farmers. A precarious food supply combined with a rapid increase in population ensured that secret societies were never short of recruits.<sup>307</sup> The activities of the Ribbonmen and Pastorini's prophecy spread simultaneously after the bad harvest of the autumn of 1821 when people were on the verge of starvation. Pastorini's prophecy can therefore be seen 'as a response to the desperate social conditions of those years'.<sup>308</sup>

The catholic church strongly disapproved of the society of Ribbonmen and of Pastorini's prophecy. Doyle directed his pastoral address of 1822 'against the illegal association of Ribbonmen' in which he poured scorn on their professed 'love of religion' and their faith in prophecy, especially that of Pastorini.<sup>309</sup> In 1825 he returned once again to this theme in his pastoral, when he encouraged the people to read the books in their chapel libraries in preference to those 'profane, irreligious books and pretended prophecies, which distract your minds, and corrupt your hearts and disturb your peace'.<sup>310</sup>

The widespread involvement of hedge schoolmasters in the Ribbonmen was alleged by the contemporary novelist and hedge schoolmaster William Carleton (1794-1809) in his autobiography.<sup>311</sup> Doyle revealed that he too suspected hedge schoolmasters of membership of these secret societies in his *Familiar Dialogues* in which he stated that 'the master counts over the traditions of the country, tells of the battles which were won

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<sup>306</sup> Sailbheastar Ó Muireadhaigh. 'Na Fir Ribín'. In Galvia Irisleabhar Chumann Seandálaíochta is Staire na Gaillimhe. Imleabhar x, (1964-5), p. 19.

<sup>307</sup> J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland*, pp. 292-293.

<sup>308</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>309</sup> Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*,

and lost in the neighbourhood...He retires with the younger branches of the family, sons and servants to some place of rest – he inflames their minds anew, and before the rising sun has summoned them to labour, they are perhaps all bound to some mysterious compact by an unlawful oath.’<sup>312</sup> According to Carleton’s account, he himself had been sworn into the Ribbonmen movement in 1813, when he was only nineteen, the oath having been administered to him after wedding celebrations. Carleton claimed that there was scarcely a hedge schoolmaster in Ireland who did not ‘hold articles’, ‘that is, who was not a ribbon lodge-master’.<sup>313</sup>

It should of course be remembered that Carleton’s own experience was limited to the Ulster borderlands and then only for a limited period around 1813. A more reliable source, for establishing with accuracy the social profile of Ribbonmen would be the list of Dublin Ribbonmen for 1821-1822 contained in the diary of the notorious Chief of Police for Dublin. Major Sirr. Of the 76 names listed in his diary, only one was a hedge schoolmaster<sup>314</sup> and according to another reliable source – the list of Ribbonmen suspects for 1842 in the Public Records Office in London, no hedge schoolmasters were involved.<sup>315</sup> It would seem highly unlikely that there would be widespread membership of masters in this movement particularly as it ran concurrently with the hugely successful campaign of the Catholic Association.

(xi) **Irish Education Inquiry 1824-1827. ‘A Safe Body of Schoolmasters’.**

The catholic hierarchy suspended its campaign of letter writing, and petitioning of parliament on the education question while the 1824 commission of inquiry was in progress, although it was no secret that they were dissatisfied with the appointment of a commission rather than a committee of the House of Commons. Doyle wrote ‘all our hopes were blasted and from that hour to this (September 1826) we looked with doubt

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<sup>311</sup> William Carleton. *The Autobiography of William Carleton*. (MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 3 Upper James’s Street, Golden Square, 1968), pp. 77-80.

<sup>312</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 165.

<sup>313</sup> op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>314</sup> M.R. Beames. ‘*The Ribbon Societies*’, p. 248.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.,

and apprehension to whatsoever we have witnessed on the part of this Commission and to all that has emanated from it'.<sup>316</sup>

The composition of the Board did nothing to raise their level of expectations. The crown appointed Thomas Frankland Lewis. Lewis had been a member of parliament since 1806 and had served on the commissions which inquired into Irish revenue in 1821 and the revenue of Great Britain and Ireland in 1822. Charles Grant was a Scotsman who had been chief secretary of Ireland from 1818-1821. James Glassford was a Scottish advocate who toured Ireland three times between 1824-1826 and he was a well known supporter of the London Hibernian Society. Leslie Foster's appointment was greeted with dismay by the hierarchy as he had no catholic sympathies and was an active member of the Kildare Place Society.<sup>317</sup> The appointment of the first Roman catholic in modern times to a commission of inquiry was regarded by prominent catholic figures as mere tokenism. The person appointed was Anthony Richard Blake, the treasury remembrancer, one who was already burdened with onerous duties. Daniel O'Connell criticised Blake's appointment as 'a mere delusion in order to make a show of great liberality'.<sup>318</sup> As Akenson remarked Blake's 'presence might have reassured the catholics as to the commission's integrity were it not that all catholics who took office were suspect by their fellow religionists'.<sup>319</sup>

Nonetheless the catholic clergy were impressed by the impartiality shown by the commissioners in the collection of their statistical data.<sup>320</sup> In July 1824 the commissioners conducted a nationwide educational census and a questionnaire was drawn up requiring clergy of the established, Roman catholic and presbyterian churches to make a sworn return of all the schools in their parishes. Their returns showed that the hedge schoolmasters were still the dominant educators in Ireland, a situation that hadn't changed since the 1806-1812 education inquiry. There were 9,352 pay schools, which received no assistance of any kind, and the hedge schools formed the majority of these.<sup>321</sup> The number of schools in connection with the societies at this time was 1,727 out of a total

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<sup>316</sup> Pastoral Letter of Dr Doyle, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1826. Cited in Brenan, *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 6.

<sup>317</sup> W.J. Fitzpatrick. *Unpublished Essay by Dr Doyle. An Essay on Education and the State of Ireland.* (M.H. Gill & Son, 50 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin, 1880), pp. 19-20.

<sup>318</sup> Dublin Evening Post, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1824.

<sup>319</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 94.

<sup>320</sup> Harold Hislop. 'The Kildare Place Society, 1811-1831', p. 722.

<sup>321</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, pp. 1-24.

number of 11,823. The Kildare Place Society was the largest education society in the country but it represented only 25% of the total number of schools found in existence in 1825. It should be remembered also that the majority of the youth population did not attend schools, as revealed by the 1821 census. Research by the historian Joseph Lee shows that:

**If the figures for the population aged 5-15 years remained constant from 1821-1824 (or increased which is more likely), then at best just over 32% of this age cohort were found in attendance at schools of any sort in 1824, the Kildare Place schools would have accounted for only 3% of the total.**<sup>322</sup>

The challenge which faced the commissioners of 1825 was precisely the same as that which faced the commissioners of 1806, namely how to replace 'those ill-taught and ill-regulated schools'.<sup>323</sup> They acknowledged this fact by quoting verbatim from the fourteenth report, with regard to the hedge schools, as the situation had altered little since. The only difference now was that the matter had taken on some degree of urgency due to the rapid growth of the hedge schools and the well documented evidence of the past involvement of hedge schoolmasters in agrarian societies and revolutionary movements. This was a source of considerable disquiet to the anglican Primate of Armagh, Archbishop Beresford, who made a strong representation to the commissioners, to look into the question of the 'provision for the training of a safe body of schoolmasters'.<sup>324</sup>

Once again a body of education commissioners found instruction in the hedge schools to be 'extremely limited' and the masters in general to be 'ill-qualified' and the books to be 'an evil which still requires a remedy'.<sup>325</sup> Martin Brenan, writing about the hedge schools of the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin in 1935, viewed the 1825 commission as inequitable because of the negligible amount of time allotted to discussion of the native and catholic educational establishments compared to the disproportionate amount given over to the discussion of the schools and societies of the established church. He estimated that of a report consisting of 102 folio pages, only 3 were devoted to catholic educational

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<sup>322</sup> op. cit., pp. 738-739.

<sup>323</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 38.

<sup>324</sup> Timothy Corcoran. *Selected Texts on Education Systems From the Close of the Middle Ages*. (Dublin, 1928), p. 119.

<sup>325</sup> op. cit., p. 44.

organisation; and of 881 pages of appendices giving evidence on oath, only 36 were given to catholic apologists.<sup>326</sup>

Much more serious than this was a fact which emerged some years later, that at least three of the commissioners had shown themselves prejudiced against hedge schools and their masters, on what can only be described as superficial evidence or hearsay. One such was Anthony R. Blake who testified before the Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1837, and when asked whether 'pay schools' were synonymous with 'hedge schools' replied:

**I mean pay schools, schools in which the masters receive some small stipend from the children who attend them; schools set up on private speculation; schools that received no aid either from the state or from any society established for the promotion of education. The masters received a 1d a week or so from the children; sometimes more and sometimes less. The schoolmasters, I thought in these schools were of a very inferior class.**<sup>327</sup>

He was asked for his opinion on the character of the hedge schoolmasters, and even though he had never spoken to them personally, he replied that they:

**appeared particularly bad from what I could hear of them, they were described as very mischievous people, they were supposed to be Persons, engaged in writing Inflammatory Letters and Notices.**

It transpired that his evidence was based on 'Communications with Gentlemen as I went through the Country'.<sup>328</sup> James Glassford was also negatively disposed towards the masters. In his *Letter to Rt. Hon. Earl of Roden on the Present State of Irish Education* (1829) his comments on their professional abilities were quite derogatory. He wrote:

**...in that poorest class, formerly called Hedge Schools, we do not look for an intelligent system of instruction: the teacher is himself too ignorant, or if naturally endowed, has not the ability to exercise the minds of his pupils.**<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 8.

<sup>327</sup> Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Plan of Education in Ireland, with Minutes of Evidence H.C. 1837. Part 1, p. 54.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>329</sup> James Glassford. *Letter to Rt. Hon. Earl of Roden on the present State of Irish Education*. (James Nisbett, 21, Berner's Street, London, 1829), p. 20.

Later he added 'The common pay schools of the country were kept up on private speculation of the teachers, and these were of the lowest classes of the community'.<sup>330</sup> Charles Grant's negative views on the hedge schoolmasters appear to have been based on his objections to the chapbooks which were read in their schools, which he considered to be immoral. He informed the Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1837 that he believed

**The Hedge Schools ... were Schools in which the lowest possible State of Morals was observed, in which the most Immoral Books were admitted, and in which intellectual Education was at the lowest possible Scale.**<sup>331</sup>

Despite the fact that 'The country was being convulsed by sectarian zeal',<sup>332</sup> evidence was given by Rev. Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt, later promoted to the See of Cashel in the established church, on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1824, that hedge schools provided non-denominational education.<sup>333</sup> The Rev. Henry Cooke, who gave evidence on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1825 also testified to the non-denominational nature of the hedge school, he himself having been taught the presbyterian catechism in one of them by a Roman catholic master.<sup>334</sup> Even Doyle verified that this was so in his testimony before the House of Lords committee on the state of Ireland on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1825. He said that where there was no suspicion of proselytism catholics and protestants were educated quite happily together in the hedge schools.<sup>335</sup> The commissioners of education in their report accepted this evidence and :

**Declared themselves 'much struck' by the many pay schools (or hedge schools which constituted the vast majority of Irish schools) managed as private speculative ventures, unattached to any particular denomination or society, in which there appeared to be 'perfect harmony' amongst the children of all persuasions. In these schools the masters taught religion to all denominations separately.**<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>331</sup> Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on new Plan of Education in Ireland, 1837, Part 1, p. 560.

<sup>332</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 183.

<sup>333</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 811.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 812.

<sup>335</sup> House of Lords Committee on the State of Ireland, 1825 (181), ix, 1, p. 244.

<sup>336</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, p. 92.

The hedge schools were successful in attracting pupils because they offered a broad curriculum which the education societies failed to match. Captain Pringle ascribed this reason for the failure of the London Hibernian Society schools.<sup>337</sup> Rev. Robert Daly confirmed that parents were not satisfied with mere Scripture schools, they wanted arithmetic taught to their children. He told the commissioners that parents:

**Think a fine Arithmetic book, written out, is a sure test of a good School and if a master is not able to put the children through Voster or Joyce, he is considered an ignoramus .... In order to gratify the children's parents, teach them profit and loss, and tare and tret, which will never do them any good whatever.**<sup>338</sup>

There was a strong belief held by conservative contemporary writers, political figures and shared by bible societies involved in education, that the poor should not be educated above their station in life. This was the philosophy behind the Lancastrian monitorial plan of education, which was a scheme which had been designed in England by Joseph Lancaster in 1798 and later at his Borough Road premises (1801), to teach a large number of children basic skills using a small teaching force, by using the older children as monitors.<sup>339</sup> This was the plan of education submitted to John Foster in 1805 and applied by the Kildare Place Society in order 'to make youth more useful, without elevating them, above the situation in life for which they may be designed'.<sup>340</sup> But it was a plan which found little favour with Irish parents in general as the growth of the hedge schools, which supplied individual instruction, bore witness to, and as the Rev. Henry Cooke testified to. He stated:

**I have observed them in the country; the people look at them there with great prejudice; they think they are useless; they think the master must teach the children himself, and that his inspecting the monitors is not teaching the children; and the prejudice is so strong as almost to render them inefficient.**<sup>341</sup>

Parents and masters rejected the utilitarian philosophy. This was evident from the broad curriculum in the hedge schools, which in some cases included instruction in the classics - Latin, Greek and Hebrew. [Ch. 3] It was evident also in their choice of fictional works as

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., App. p. 689. Examination of Captain George Pringle.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 798.

<sup>339</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, p. 11.

<sup>340</sup> Timothy Corcoran. *Selected Texts*, p. 104.



reading material, in an age which viewed the imagination and works of fantasy with the deepest suspicion. [Ch. 4] The fact that the masters allowed works of fiction as a reading aid may also account in some measure for the popularity of their schools. That they were successful in teaching English reading is attested to by the huge propaganda campaign of the Catholic Association which relied completely on the written word to spread its message.

On the recommendations of the fourteenth report the Kildare Place Society attempted to supplant the hedge school chapbooks [Ch. 6], which were memorably described in 1812 and repeated by the 1825 commissioners as books 'calculated to incite to lawless and profligate adventure, to cherish superstition, or to lead to Dissension and Disloyalty'.<sup>342</sup> The Society tried to do so by replacing them with their own published works which were 'sufficiently entertaining to enter into fair competition with the hedge school books and at an affordable price'. Even though the Society produced nearly a million of these books within seven years the chapbooks still remained popular and the commissioners 'nevertheless found the Traces of their former Abundance'; in the returns made by the respective clergymen, subsequent to the issuing of the commission.<sup>343</sup>

Two catholic prelates Dr. Kelly, Archbishop of Tuam and Doyle gave evidence that no such books were in use in the hedge schools in their dioceses. Dr. Kelly made the strictest inquiry over two years with respect to the books in use in the schools in his diocese and he 'could not discover that throughout the whole extent of the Arch-Diocese of Tuam there was an immoral or obscene book made use of, except in two instances'. He verified also that it was the parents of the children who provided them with books.<sup>344</sup> Dr. Doyle made particular inquiries as to whether there were any immoral books in the hedge schools in his diocese, and from a careful study of all the returns from his clergy, he testified that:

**During the last year I made particular enquiries as to whether there were any immoral books in schools of that description.. and I discovered that there was one, and that in the town of Ballynakill: it was brought to the**

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<sup>341</sup> First Report of the Commissioners, 1825, p. 821.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., App. p. 777.

**school in that town, by a child, the son of a protestant parent who had come to reside in Ballynakill from the diocese of Ossory.**<sup>345</sup>

The 1825 education inquiry had the effect of exposing the failure of the Kildare Place Society to implement non-denominational education. The commissioners concluded that the Society had 'failed in producing universal satisfaction' but they also acknowledged the benefits the Society bestowed on Ireland through:

**The issue of Books, the arrangement of the Model School, the training of Masters and Mistresses, their system of Rewards, and their directing the public mind so powerfully to education, they have conferred the most extensive and undoubted benefits on Ireland.**<sup>346</sup>

The commissioners recommended that the activities of the Kildare Place Society should be severely limited, it was to cease giving grants to other societies, and following the establishment of a proposed education board, was to cease adding schools to its connection. The Incorporated Society was to have aid withdrawn from it and the Association for Discountenancing Vice was to limit its activities to printing and distributing books. Like the Kildare Place Society, its schools were to be transferred to the control of the government education board.

This new board would superintend the management of the 'schools of general instruction' which were to be established in each benefice. Like their predecessors, the commissioners recommended a mixed education system where children would be united for secular instruction and where separate religious instruction would be given on one or two days a week. Religious instruction for protestant children was to be given by the protestant clergyman or presbyterian minister but catholic children were to be taught by a catholic lay teacher who had received the bishop's approval.<sup>347</sup> The last recommendation was hardly likely to find favour with the catholic bishops.

The government board was also to have sweeping powers, including the expenditure of public money on education, it was to have a legal right to the schoolhouse, the right to determine what books should be used in the schools, and the sole right of appointing and

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 778.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>347</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, pp. 96-97.

dismissing all teachers.<sup>348</sup> Doyle found these proposals totally unacceptable but in general catholic opinion was much better disposed to the report - the *Dublin Evening Post*, Archbishop Curtis and the Catholic Association approved of it but the latter felt that it would not find acceptance among catholics as a future system of education unless 'it were very considerably modified'.<sup>349</sup> Ironically it was Doyle, of all the prelates who gave evidence at the commission, who made the biggest impression before the commissioners of 1825. As Séamus Ó Cannáin pointed out in his study on the inquiry, it was Doyle's skilful answering of questions on such topics as allegiance to the crown, papal authority, and keeping faith with heretics, which managed to allay protestant fears and to reassure the government that the catholic clergy could be trusted.<sup>350</sup> He offered re-assurance that the pope's power was limited to the spiritual domain and he could not, for instance, absolve catholics from oaths of allegiance.<sup>351</sup> The commission provided a platform for Doyle, on behalf of the catholic church, to prove conclusively that it was far from being the church of superstition, idolatry and political sedition that many protestants might have thought. As Ó Cannáin observed:

**The evidence of the catholic prelates to the Commissioners, much of which was concerned with the interpretation of traditional Catholic doctrine rather than education, was a prerequisite to the acceptance by protestants that catholics could be full, loyal citizens of a constitutionally protestant state.**<sup>352</sup>

**(xii) The Catholic Church's Campaign Against The Kildare Place Society 1826-1831.**

It was Daniel O'Connell who first drew the attention of the catholic hierarchy in 1820, to what he considered to be the 'nugatory principles' of the Kildare Place Society. Since the setting up of the short lived Irish National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in January 1821, O'Connell was happy to leave the catholic education question in

<sup>348</sup> First Report of the Commissioners, 1825, p. 99.

<sup>349</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>350</sup> Seamus Ó Cannáin. 'The Education Inquiry 1824-1826 In Its Social and Political Context'. In *Irish Educational Studies*. (Vol. 3, No. 2, 1983), p. 8.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>352</sup> Seamus Ó Cannáin. 'Relations between the Catholic Church and the state with regard to Education in Ireland 1795-1825'. Unpublished M.Ed. thesis. (University of Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin, 1979). Chapter VI, *passim*.

the capable hands of the prelates. Following the publication of the first report of the commissioners in 1825, the emancipation campaign was well under way and once again 'O'Connell made the conscious decision to leave educational dealings in the hands of the Irish bishops'.<sup>353</sup>

From the private 'marginal notes' which Doyle made on his copy of the 1825 report, and which his biographer W.J. Fitzpatrick published in 1880, it would appear that he was 'heartily disgusted with this Report' and with the Kildare Place Society in particular. Accompanying certain paragraphs referring to the Society he had written the comments 'Masters to be prepared by this Soc. Yet we are not to teach even our religious instructions! Proh pudor!' 'What a humbug'; 'Inconsistency'; 'Justification of all our allegations against the KPS'; 'Admirable illustrations that the master is always of the religion of the patron'; 'Subversion of our religion aimed at'; 'Shuffling and contradiction'; and 'Proselytism avowed'.<sup>354</sup>

While the majority of prelates were not as incensed as Doyle, the catholic church did adopt a hardline stance on the education issue, most likely due to the pressure they felt from the challenge posed by the bible society schools. This became apparent when Archbishop Murray forwarded to the commissioners six resolutions, unanimously passed by the catholic archbishops and bishops.<sup>355</sup> These resolutions called for wide reaching powers for the church in a state aided education system, to include a say by the catholic church in the appointment of catholic teachers, a male and female catholic model school, the right to select or approve books to be used in the schools. They also expressed their disapproval of the commissioners' recommendation that schools should be vested in the new board to be established. But the government was not prepared to take power away from the Kildare Place Society and the established church just yet, nor was it prepared to agree to a denominational system of education,<sup>356</sup> to suit the catholic church, in a country torn by sectarian strife.

Parliamentary opposition to the Kildare Place Society was very much in evidence when the debate took place on the Irish estimates for education in the House of Commons, on

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<sup>353</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 99.

<sup>354</sup> W.J. Fitzpatrick. *Unpublished Essay by Dr Doyle*, p. 5.

<sup>355</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 99.

the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1826.<sup>357</sup> Thomas Spring-Rice, the member for Limerick, produced damaging statistics to show that the Society was not educating the majority of the school going population. He stated that of 408,065 catholic schoolchildren in Ireland, 377,007 were educated at their own expense. Of 69,186 children in schools supported by public aid only 31,058 were catholics. Neither the chief secretary Sir Henry Goulburn or the home secretary Robert Peel were swayed by this evidence and the Society was granted £25,000 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March.<sup>358</sup>

Doyle was now spurred into action and in April 1826 he ordered his parish priests and catholic patrons to sever all connections with the Kildare Place Society. Four months later he issued an important pastoral, on the education question in which he outlined the efforts made by the catholic hierarchy in a bid to secure government aid for catholic education. Not surprisingly he criticised the Kildare Place Society's rules which turned it into a bible society and the government's decision to grant it £25,000. He ordered the withdrawal of catholic children from the Society's schools and suggested that each parish should build a schoolhouse to be funded by the parishioners. Many parishes had already undertaken such a scheme and were providing non-denominational education.<sup>359</sup>

Doyle's next assault on the Kildare Place system was one which reflected very little credit on him. In December 1826 he saw a copy of the Society's report for the year ending 5 January 1826 and he made notes from it concerning the schools in the principal counties of his diocese. When he examined the figures in the report for 1825 he suspected the Society of fraud and immediately ordered his priests to make a complete return to him on the state of education in their respective parishes, with a view to having them 'published in parliament'. The returns showed a wide discrepancy between the two sets of figures, indicating that the Kildare Place Society had given a fraudulent account.<sup>360</sup> Armed with this damaging information Doyle issued a public letter to Daniel O'Connell, which was published on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1827 in which he contrasted the two conflicting sets of figures. The Society replied publicly seven days later and successfully managed to clear its name by showing that Doyle had dealt with the year 1825, (ending early January 1826)

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<sup>356</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 197.

<sup>357</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 102.

<sup>358</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 198.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

whereas his priests had been asked to assess the number of Kildare Place schools in their parishes in late 1826, after he had ordered a withdrawal of catholic children from the Society's schools. Doyle didn't apologise for his error but he replied to the Kildare Place Society by launching a bitter attack on the Society and its supporters, in which he labelled the Society 'one of those scorpions with which the Irish Catholics are scourged'. He forbade his priests to have anything to do with such an 'illiberal and anti-Catholic' society, a 'mere branch of the Bible Society' whose system was 'supremely odious', and whose bible reading rule was an 'obnoxious principle'.<sup>361</sup>

Doyle's unremitting attacks on the Society continued in February 1827 when he drafted the catholic bishops' petition to parliament on education. In it he claimed that catholic children who attended the Society's schools were few in number and those who attended did so under duress. He stated also that both the catholic laity and clergy were hostile to its system and urged parliament to implement the recommendations of the 1825 commissioners. James Grattan presented the petition on 19th March 1827, but Robert Peel continued to defend the Society against the attacks by Spring-Rice and Sir John Newport, protesting that 'the charges against the Kildare-Street Society were grossly exaggerated'.<sup>362</sup>

Even though some nine reports had been produced by the commissioners between 1825-1827, no effort was made to implement their recommendations. This was set to change as soon as Thomas Spring-Rice became the spokesman in parliament for catholic interests. In April 1828 he secured a select committee on education in Ireland to examine the reports of the Education Inquiry 1824-1827 and all previous reports. As chairman of the select committee Spring-Rice entered into correspondence with Doyle in the 'strictest confidence' but warned him that secrecy was essential, otherwise his plan of education would be jeopardised.<sup>363</sup>

Spring-Rice's plan was the one which would form the blueprint for the national education system. It was to be a non-denominational system, where the principle of non-interference in the religious beliefs of children was to be upheld. A new board of

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<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

education was to be appointed, with members from all denominations represented on it. It was to have wide ranging powers - it would superintend a model school, edit and print all books for the literary instruction of pupils and religious books that had been approved by all churches. The board would receive title to all schoolhouses built at public expense and grant aided by the board. Spring-Rice suggested combined moral and literary instruction on four days of the school week, the remaining two days to be set aside for separate religious instruction. The latter was to be under the sole supervision of the respective clergy.<sup>364</sup> Interestingly, the pragmatic Doyle now accepted this arrangement even though in his petition to parliament in 1824 he rejected separate religious instruction out of hand. Ignoring the confidential nature of the plan Doyle wrote to Daniel O'Connell giving him the relevant details and urging him to support Spring-Rice's education scheme when it would eventually come into the public domain.<sup>365</sup>

Spring-Rice's report was well received by the catholic prelates. The authorities of the established church and the supporters of the Kildare Place Society were strongly opposed to it and the government was apathetic about it. Spring-Rice received little assistance from the new Irish chief secretary, Lord Francis Gower, even though he had been an active member of his committee.<sup>366</sup> He next approached the lord lieutenant Anglesea who frankly admitted that there was little he could do because the Kildare Place Society had already disposed of the entire education grant.<sup>367</sup> When the bishops petitioned for the implementation of Spring-Rice's suggested reforms, the Kildare Place Society countered with a petition of their own for continued grant aid. The Kildare Place Society won on this occasion and the bishops lost.<sup>368</sup>

Wellington's government had much more pressing problems than the Irish education question to cope with in 1828 as the emancipation campaign was nearing its climax. Besides Robert Peel had no great desire to withdraw his support from a Society he had done so much to promote and defend throughout his political life. However by August 1828 even Peel recognised that the position of the Kildare Place Society was untenable,

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<sup>364</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>365</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 212.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>367</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, pp. 104-106.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

because the education offered by it was unacceptable to the majority of parents.<sup>369</sup> Doyle didn't allow himself to be distracted by the exciting political events that were unfolding, judging by an entry in the minute book of the meetings of the Irish catholic hierarchy for the 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1829, when he moved a resolution 'that the prelates in their respective dioceses do issue instructions to their several clergy to prevent by every means in their power the attendance of Catholic children at schools in connexion (sic) with the Kildare Place Society. The following day he wrote the petition to parliament on education on behalf of the hierarchy, which was submitted to parliament once again by James Grattan, and once again Doyle merely used it as an excuse to denigrate the Kildare Place Society.<sup>370</sup>

On the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1830 the bishops presented yet another petition to the lord lieutenant and the chief secretary, but the response was unsatisfactory.<sup>371</sup> Seven months later the luck of the catholic prelates was about to change with the formation of the whig cabinet in November 1830. Lord Anglesea who had catholic sympathies and who had been dismissed as lord lieutenant under Wellington was now re-appointed under the new prime minister Lord Grey. Lord Edward Stanley, later earl of Derby, became the Irish chief secretary, and he approached the education question with an open mind. To crown their good fortunes Doyle found a welcome ally in the arrival on to the educational scene of Thomas Wyse, the newly elected M.P. for Tipperary and former Catholic Association activist and historian.<sup>372</sup>

Wyse informed Doyle on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1830 that he intended to bring forward a motion on education before the House of Commons after the Christmas recess. Wyse was optimistic and had confidence in the new administration that they would solve the Irish education problem. He wrote to Doyle in this vein 'I have every confidence that the new administration, liberal and energetic to a degree we could not have hoped for a few years ago - I might even say a few weeks - since, will direct their immediate attention to the urgent wants of education'. On the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1830 Wyse submitted a detailed plan for national education to the government, in the form of the heads of an education

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<sup>369</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 213.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>372</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, pp. 107-108.



bill.<sup>373</sup> Wyse's plan didn't offer anything new. It was, as Akenson noted 'merely a rehash of generally accepted educational ideas'. Lord Stanley ignored Wyse's plan at the end of 1830 and for the first half of 1831.<sup>374</sup>

Doyle was not idle however. In January 1831 he took the initiative to inform the chief secretary on the educational needs of his own diocese to demonstrate what the government would have to consider when dealing with the country as a whole. It was apparent from his communication that his hostility to the Kildare Place Society was equalled only by his disdain for hedge schoolmasters, as he informed Stanley of the exclusive education provided by the Society and the 'bad system' of education supplied by the hedge schools. He emphasised the fact that a large number of excellent, well furnished schools connected to the Society were closed, and that the few catholics who attended Kildare Place Society schools did so at 'a sacrifice of their religious feelings to the fear infused by their landlords, or to the hope in obtaining, in return for such compliance, food or raiment for themselves or their children'. He accused the Society of bending their rules in order to attract greater numbers of catholics to their schools and he alleged that on inspection days they 'borrowed' students for the financial gain of their teachers. He went on to explain:

**These children are lent obligingly to the master of the school (when the inspection day approaches), that he may appear to the inspector entitled to the donation usually granted to teachers a sum proportionate to the number of pupils respectively.**<sup>375</sup>

Doyle gave full credit to himself and his diocesan clergy for the education of the poor, even though, he had publicly acknowledged as early as the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1820 in his letter to the *Carlow Morning Post*, that the catholic clergy were 'overwhelmed with other duties of their calling'.<sup>376</sup> Now it suited his purpose to impress upon Stanley the obstacles the church faced when providing education for the poor. It helped his case also to state that they were making little progress but that he took heart from the fact that they had been 'more successful in correcting or removing a bad system of education than in the

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>375</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 220.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

establishment of a good one'.<sup>377</sup> He qualified this by stating that 'We have within these few years suppressed numberless hedge schools, and united, often within the place of worship the children theretofore dispersed'. Doyle pressed his case that the catholic church couldn't afford to 'pay respectable masters' nor could they afford to furnish schools or supply them with requisite materials. He suggested to Stanley that as catholics outnumbered protestants eight to one, in his diocese alone, and as a large expenditure would be required to maintain 'catholic' schools, it would be better to devise an education system uniting the children of the different religious persuasions in the same schools.<sup>378</sup>

Doyle's suggestions were favourably received by Stanley who cordially replied 'I am, in Ireland, opposed to all exclusive education, supported by the state... In the attainment of this great national object I feel sensibly how much benefit I may derive from your suggestions.' Doyle was happy to oblige and he advised Stanley along the lines of Spring-Rice's education plan, to educate all children without social distinctions, in a system where religion was left solely to the respective clergymen, and where a board of commissioners acceptable to all denominations, would have power to devise their own rules and regulations. Unlike Spring-Rice's plan, Doyle, for obvious reasons, suggested that the commissioners should be able to extend aid to existing schools without having the titles of the schools vested in themselves.<sup>379</sup>

It could be argued that Daniel O'Connell had little direct input into the long running campaign for educational rights for catholics. Nonetheless he played a pivotal role by his successful campaign for catholic emancipation, the achievement of which provided 'a practical demonstration that Catholic demands for fair treatment could not be suppressed any longer.'<sup>380</sup> In March 1831 O'Connell was once again vocal on the education question and his message was the same as in 1820. He stated that 'Catholics might justly claim a share of the public money, without its being made a condition that they must renounce their father's faith'.<sup>381</sup> The battle for the control of Irish education took place in earnest in mid-July when an important two-day debate on the topic took place. The battle lines were clearly drawn between the supporters of the Kildare Place Society and those who

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>380</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, p. 4.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 224.

vigorously opposed the Society. O'Connell presented a petition which had been drafted by Doyle and signed by 26 Irish prelates seeking the discontinuance of the Kildare Place Society grant. The education debate was raised again on the 26<sup>th</sup> July and the 23<sup>rd</sup> August when pro- and anti-Kildare Place petitions respectively were presented and O'Connell presented yet another petition from the Irish prelates, in their tireless pursuit for a share of the educational grant.<sup>382</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1831 the catholic church won a major victory when Stanley set out his proposals for the national education system of Ireland in the House of Commons. In doing so he referred to the failure of the Kildare Place Society to provide an education for all, due to its restrictive rule on bible reading, the failure of the government for not taking action when it was obvious that the Society could never become a national one, and for allowing education to fall into 'hands unqualified for that task'. Not only was Stanley's speech reminiscent of Doyle's petitions but he even quoted from the latter's evidence before the 1830 committee as follows:

**In the schools which are managed under your superintendence, and conducted upon your rules do you consider their system to be applicable to the education of both Protestants and Catholics equally? – Their system, of course, is not: because their rule excludes religious instruction, which we require as an essential part of education.**<sup>383</sup>

It was poor consolation to the Kildare Place Society that Stanley was prepared to adopt from them their 'excellent model school' and their school books, while at the same time taking control of educational funds out of their hands.<sup>384</sup>

Stanley followed Spring-Rice's educational plan of 1828 almost exactly, even though he never gave him credit for it. A non-denominational board of seven commissioners was to be appointed, which would have 'a complete control over the various schools which may be erected under its auspices' and 'the most entire control over all books to be used in the schools', and 'absolute control over the funds which may be annually voted by parliament'.<sup>385</sup> Stanley asked that the commissioners look on joint applications 'with

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., pp. 225-226.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>385</sup> Áine Hyland. 'National Education', pp. 100-102. In Irish Education Documents Vol. 1.

peculiar favour'. Privately, he had admitted to Archbishop Murray that joint applications would not be essential or even likely.<sup>386</sup> Like Spring-Rice he proposed to have united moral and literary instruction and separate religious instruction on different days of the week but Stanley also ordered that denominational instruction should be allowed outside of school hours on other days of the week.<sup>387</sup> It was clear to the keen observer that it would only be a question of time before the proposed non-denominational system of national education would become a denominational one.

O'Connell was well pleased with Stanley's plan. So too was Thomas Wyse. The catholic prelates had won the education battle and even though Doyle had some reservations about the commissioners' right to prescribe the books to be used in the schools,<sup>388</sup> he took satisfaction in the proposed scheme for the training of teachers, and he looked forward to the displacement by them of the independent hedge schoolmaster. He wrote 'The rule which requires that all teachers henceforth to be employed be provided from some model school, with a certificate of their competency, will aid us in a work of great difficulty, to wit, that of suppressing hedge-schools, and placing youth under the direction of competent teachers'.<sup>389</sup>

The uneasy relationship between some of the catholic clergy and the hedge schoolmasters lived on into the national school system according to the study carried out by Mary Daly on the applications to the commissioners of national education for the years 1831-1840 for the counties of Cavan, Mayo, Cork and Kilkenny. She found evidence that many priests hoped that the establishment of a national school would undermine the existence of local private pay schools.<sup>390</sup>

James Hoban in his study of the hedge schools in Co. Roscommon found that the hedge schools were still educating the majority of school children in 1841, this was also borne out by the census report for that year. According to the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into primary education of 1870 (Powis), 'some hedge schools continued in

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<sup>386</sup> Harold Hislop. *The 1806-1812 Board of Education and Non-Denominational Education in Ireland*, p. 56.

<sup>387</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>388</sup> P.J. Dowling. *A History of Irish Education*. (The Mercier Press, 4 Bridge Street, Cork. 1971), p. 117.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>390</sup> Mary Daly. *The Development of the National School system, 1831-40*, pp. 156-157.

existence, 40 years after the introduction of the national schools'.<sup>391</sup> In the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin none of the hedge schools changed over to the national system in the early years, even though their bishop had struggled so long to bring it about.<sup>392</sup>

However the hedge schoolmasters' loose, haphazard educational enterprise couldn't possibly hope to compete for long with the new formalised, structured and well financed system of education, which had the support of the catholic church and eventually of parents. In Roscommon in 1835 there were 189 hedge schools, by 1879, a year after the passing of the Intermediate Act, this number had fallen to 11, and a very small number continued into the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>393</sup> The catholic church had not only won a victory over the government supported Kildare Place Society but it had also won a major victory over 'that sturdy figure, the old independent hedge schoolmaster'.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> James Hoban. 'The Survival of the Hedge Schools - a local study'. In Irish Educational Studies Vol. 3, No. 2, (1983), pp. 25-26.

<sup>392</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 237.

<sup>393</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>394</sup> P.J. Dowling. 'A History of Irish Education. (The Mercier Press, 44 Bridge St., Cork, 1971), p. 118.

(xiii) Conclusion

One could conjecture that had the protestant church clergymen, whose legal responsibility it was, to provide mass education for the Irish, done their job efficiently, the history of Irish education from 1695 to 1831 might have been very different from what it turned out to be. Few could have imagined that the catholic hierarchy, who had suffered so much under the penal laws in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century would by the 1770's be on friendly negotiating terms with a member of the Irish parliament or that by 1795 Archbishop Troy would have successfully negotiated with a lord lieutenant for the procurement of a catholic seminary at Maynooth, and that by 1831 catholic priests would be sharing power on equal terms with the protestant clergymen as managers of national schools. Few could have imagined either an education system in which hedge schoolmasters hadn't a primary role to play. For one hundred and thirty six years they had operated a network of schools throughout Ireland, set up on private speculation in an open competitive market where only the competent survived. But by late 1831 the day of the independent entrepreneur was on the wane. It had been superseded by a well financed and structured system of national education where the catholic and protestant clergymen held managerial positions and where the teacher occupied the lowest rung of the educational ladder, and was treated in a rather perfunctory manner by the world of officialdom.<sup>395</sup>

Hedge schoolmasters were men of knowledge and learning, the leaders in their communities, the ones people looked to for guidance. From the 1760's to the 1780's some of the masters led Whiteboys and possibly Steelboys and Rightboys - secret societies that protested, sometimes violently, against local grievances. These were pre-democratic times when acts of savagery and brutality were considered a normal part of legitimate protest. Lawless behaviour and actions such as levelling fences, houghing cattle and attacking the tithe proctor or the landlord's agent were actions which were fully supported by the people who had suffered at their hands. It is questionable whether the masters were involved in these movements in any sizeable numbers, as few would have wished to have brought the wrath of the parish priest upon them and suffer the usual fate of either banishment from the parish, excommunication from the catholic church, or both.

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<sup>395</sup> John Coolahan. *Irish Education*, p. 30.

It mattered little to the government whether a handful of hedge schoolmasters were involved, the very fact that any of them were, was sufficient reason for the government to take steps to have control of education removed from their hands. The chief secretary Thomas Orde attributed 'all the violent and atrocious acts which had too often disgraced this nation' to a 'want of education'. In his plan of education presented to parliament on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 1787, he argued that the voluntary participation of catholics in protestant schools would surely dispense 'the mists of ignorance' and encourage their appreciation 'of the superiority of our own (protestant) doctrines'.<sup>396</sup> Orde's aim was to pacify and civilise the lawless catholic Irish by supplying a superior protestant education. However Orde's scheme was progressive in some respects but there was no place in it for catholic hedge schoolmasters. His successor Alleyne Fitzherbert appointed a commission of inquiry into Irish education, consisting of seven commissioners to include Fitzherbert himself and the provost of Trinity College, John Hely-Hutchinson. The spirit of enlightenment which characterised the age was evident in the liberal educational thinking behind the recommendations of their 1791 report, which suggested power sharing in the management of schools to include catholic laymen and also equality of rights for catholic clergymen who were to be permitted to instruct the children of their flock on religion, on the same basis as protestant clergymen. Hedge schoolmasters however were not favoured under this scheme, which stipulated that masters would have to undergo examination, receive certificates of morals and ability and be licensed annually. The chapbooks which were read in the hedge schools were also to be banished as the books to be used were to be subject to inspection.<sup>397</sup>

In 1795 hedge schoolmasters were to receive very bad publicity when the lord lieutenant, the earl of Camden singled out the Gallow, Co. Meath hedge schoolmaster and Defender leader Lawrence O'Connor for one of his show-trials. Camden ordered his hanging and the public display of his head impaled on a spike for all to see, outside Naas gaol.<sup>398</sup> Widespread involvement of hedge schoolmasters in this particularly violent organisation was implied by Camden's action although no actual proof existed of this beyond a few names gathered by Leonard McNally, Camden's spy and possibly the confessions of

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<sup>396</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 59.

<sup>397</sup> Report of the Education Commissioners, 1791, pp. 343-344.

<sup>398</sup> Thomas Bartlett. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, p. 213.

some Defender prisoners. Even so this provided sufficient impetus for another education inquiry. This time it was requested by R.L. Edgeworth on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1799, when he called on the then lord lieutenant Westmorland to lay the 1791 report before the House of Commons. This was agreed to and Edgeworth as chairman of the select committee put forward a system of denominational education with a degree of favouritism to be shown to the protestant persuasion. Nevertheless, it had very enlightened implications, such as the right of catholic children to a state aided education which would see grants for catholic schools and catholic religious education. The scheme suggested state involvement in education, less power for the church of Ireland clergymen and none at all for hedge schoolmasters and chapbooks were to be replaced by books that had passed an inspection for suitability.<sup>399</sup> These reports were never acted upon because if they were it would have meant the government's acquiescence in the power sharing concept with the catholic hierarchy. For the present they were happy to maintain the status quo.

Following the 1798 rebellion in which some well known and respected hedge schoolmasters had contributed in some way, either through membership of the United Irishmen, or in disseminating the radical teachings of Thomas Paine (1737-1809), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and William Godwin (1756-1836), it was certain that the government, in the post-union period, would take urgent steps to remove education from the hands of such masters. It is difficult to believe that vast numbers of masters would have risked excommunication and the closure of their hedge schools for their nationalist principles but the high profile of those who did so, was enough to ensure severe repercussions for them all, by the government. In fact one of the first decisions Lord Grenville took, having just been appointed prime minister in the 'Ministry of All the Talents', was to set up an inquiry into Irish education, which was to be a revival of the 1788-1791 commission. The five commissioners of charitable bequests who formed part of the commission of inquiry ensured that 'potentially damaging investigations into the established church's role in education' was limited.<sup>400</sup> The commissioners worked for six years and produced fourteen reports, the latter dealing with the current educational situation. The charter schools were given a favourable report which must have come as a surprise to contemporary observers, as abuses in the charter school system had been well

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<sup>399</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 71.

<sup>400</sup> Harold Hislop. 'The 1806-1812 Board of Education and Non-Denominational Education in Ireland'. In *Oideas* 40, Earrach (1993), p. 51.



documented by Wesley (1773), Fitzpatrick (1786-1787) and Howard (1780's), to name but a few.

It would have surprised few observers that the hedge schools were condemned as objectional places where limited instruction was given by masters ill-qualified to do so, places where poorly paid masters couldn't afford to provide 'such books as are fit for children to read' and consequently had to rely on chapbooks which the commissioners thought to be immoral, seditious and dangerous.<sup>401</sup> The commissioners recommended the appointment of a permanent body of commissioners with responsibility for creating supplementary schools, while at the same time leaving all existing educational institution in the hands of the established church clergymen. Hedge schoolmasters and their chapbooks were to be eliminated from any new scheme, by the recommendation that the new commissioners would have complete control over the appointment of teachers and the selection of books to be used. As proselytism was the main objective of the recently formed education societies, an enlightened leading principle was included which stated that in any future education system 'no attempt shall be made to influence or disturb the peculiar religious beliefs of any sect or description of christians'<sup>402</sup>. It became apparent to the chief secretary Robert Peel by March 1814 that the ecclesiastical commissioners had no desire whatsoever to see the supplementary schools established because this would inevitably have meant some form of power sharing with the catholic hierarchy. The compromise then reached was that funds should be channelled through a voluntary society such as the Kildare Place Society which met the 'leading principle' criteria.<sup>403</sup>

The politically ambitious Daniel O'Connell needed a cause to entice the catholic bishops to support his main goal of catholic emancipation. He found an ideal issue when he drew the attention of the catholic hierarchy to what he alleged was taking place in the Kildare Place Society schools, in particular the discriminatory nature of their bible reading rule, which was unacceptable to catholics.<sup>404</sup> He pointed the bishops in the right direction when he told them to set up a society for education of the catholic poor, as a sign of their sincerity regarding catholic education. They followed his instructions to the letter and in 1821 set up their own rival society – the National Society for Promoting the Education of

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<sup>401</sup> Fourteenth Report of the Board of Education, p. 331.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>403</sup> Harold Hislop. 'The 1806-1812 Board of Education', p. 54.

the Poor, in direct competition with the Kildare Place Society. The venture failed due to lack of funding, a situation they would later use to strengthen their case for grant aid.<sup>405</sup>

From 1821 to 1831 Dr. Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin pursued the catholic education question with great vigour and tenacity. He was aware that the catholic church could not afford to build schools in the numbers that were required, as an increased population had placed an added strain on the church's already overstretched financial resources 'and chapel building took precedence over the provision of schools'.<sup>406</sup> With the church being assailed on every side by bible societies and proselytising education societies, Daniel O'Connell knew he could leave Doyle to fight the educational campaign while he devoted his energies to the emancipation campaign.

On occasions the tactics employed by Doyle in his desperate bid for a share of the Kildare Place Society grant were of a somewhat dubious character, especially insofar as they related to hedge schoolmasters. In his written account to Henry Parnell M.P. on the state of education in his diocese in 1821 Doyle was deeply critical of the hedge schoolmasters and the education they provided, which he described as 'of a very imperfect kind and imparted in a very defective way, by men, in most instances, incompetent to teach'.<sup>407</sup> Nothing could have been further from the truth. An analysis of the parochial returns for his diocese for the year 1824 showed that 168 out of 262 catholic male teachers, or 64% were competent to give further instruction beyond the basic numeracy and literacy skills.<sup>408</sup> In his *Thoughts on Education of the Poor in Ireland*, addressed to the chief secretary Charles Grant, Doyle inferred that the main reason why the peasantry were easily induced to take rash oaths and combine in illegal combinations was because they had been deprived of an early religious education.<sup>409</sup> This was somewhat disingenuous of Doyle who was obviously prepared to discount the contribution of the hedge schoolmasters in the propagation of the catholic faith through their catechising work with the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.<sup>410</sup> He must surely have been aware that religion

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<sup>404</sup> H. Kingsmill Moore. *An Unwritten Chapter*, p. 75.

<sup>405</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 158.

<sup>406</sup> A. Cosgrave and D. McCartney (eds.). *Studies in Irish History*. (Dublin: University College Dublin, 1979).

\_\_\_\_\_ Mary Daly. 'The Development of the National School System, 1831-1840', p. 153.

<sup>407</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 164.

<sup>408</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 79.

<sup>409</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 165-166.

<sup>410</sup> Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 16-17.

was a subject which received special emphasis in hedge schools, after all it was one of the duties of priests to supervise the teaching of religion in all schools in their respective parishes, a duty they took seriously because of the proselytising climate that prevailed in so many schools in the 1820's.<sup>411</sup> This might account for the fact that in the hedge schools in Doyle's diocese there were 25 different religion books used on top of 26 doctrinal and devotional books, such was the emphasis placed on religion at this time.<sup>412</sup>

In 1824 the Catholic Association found a way of strengthening its co-operation with the catholic hierarchy by inviting the bishops to respond through their offices, to the charge made by John Henry North M.P. in his maiden speech in the House of Commons, when he accused the priests of neglect of the education of the poor and of failing to supervise the indigenous schools so that immoral and seditious books were being read by catholic children. In Doyle's written response to the Catholic Association, he credited his own clergy with keeping the light of education alive through the penal era, by opening schools in their homes and allowing their churches to be used as schoolhouses.<sup>413</sup> Unquestionably the catholic clergy did make a contribution to Irish education during the penal days but their contribution was negligible due to their size relative to the population. There were 1,587 catholics to every one priest in 1731, compared to 2,627 catholics at the end of the century. Clearly the priests could barely have kept the light of religion alive much less education because the population had increased by 80% between 1731 and 1800, but the number of priests had only risen by 12%.<sup>414</sup> It was the hedge schoolmasters who had kept the light of education alive, but it simply didn't suit Doyle's campaign for grant aid, to give them credit for this. There was however, one astute politician who doubted very much the veracity of Doyle's account of the state of education. This was the Kildare Place Society's ally in government Robert Peel, who commented 'Dr Doyle is a clever fellow. I have read a letter from him on the education of the Roman Catholics, giving I dare say, a very inaccurate account of the state of education, but very ably written.'<sup>415</sup>

In his *Familiar Dialogues*, Doyle implied that the hedge schoolmasters were members of oath bound societies, the most active one in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the sectarian

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<sup>411</sup> Patrick J. Corish. *The Irish Catholic Experience*, p. 165.

<sup>412</sup> op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>413</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 171.

<sup>414</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1982), pp. 32-33.

Ribbonmen.<sup>416</sup> The novelist and one time hedge schoolmaster William Carleton was even more confident in his assertion that there was scarcely a hedge schoolmaster in Ireland who did not 'hold articles', 'that is, who was not a Ribbon lodge-master'.<sup>417</sup> There is no evidence whatsoever to prove this and plenty evidence to the contrary such as Major Sirr's diary giving a list of the Ribbonmen in Dublin for 1821-1822 and the records of the Public Records office in London for 1842 which prove that the masters were not involved in this movement.<sup>418</sup> In all probability the masters, like their past pupils, strongly supported the Catholic Association and Daniel O'Connell's democratic movement for catholic emancipation which was gathering pace from the mid 1820's.

The second major inquiry into Irish education in the post-union period took place from 1824-1827, and its establishment was generally viewed as a victory for the catholic bishops and a defeat for the Kildare Place Society. The evidence given before the commissioners on the Kildare Place Society was enough to convince them that the Society should no longer continue to add schools to its connection, mainly because of breaches in its rules and evidence that its managers had given grant aid to proselytising schools.<sup>419</sup> On the other hand Doyle distinguished himself before the commissioners and greatly impressed them by his knowledge of church dogma, and his tolerant ecumenical views on mixed education.<sup>420</sup>

The commissioners of 1825 were as negatively disposed towards the native schools as were their predecessors in 1806. They too wished to replace 'those ill-taught and ill-regulated schools', and they quoted verbatim the allegations of the 1806 commissioners regarding the instruction in the hedge schools being 'extremely limited' and the masters in general being 'ill-qualified' and their books continued to be 'an evil that still requires a remedy'.<sup>421</sup> The commissioners reported that the Kildare Place Society had attempted to

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<sup>415</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 173.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>417</sup> William Carleton. *The Autobiography of William Carleton*. (MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 3 Upper James's Street, Golden Square, 1968), pp. 77-80.

<sup>418</sup> C.H.E. Philpin (ed.) *Nationalism and Popular protest in Ireland*. (Cambridge University Press, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP, 1987).

\_\_\_\_\_ M.R. Beames. 'The Ribbon Societies: Lower Class Nationalism in Pre-Famine Ireland', p. 28.

<sup>419</sup> First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry 1825 (xii), p. 56.

<sup>420</sup> Seamus Ó Cannáin. 'The Education Inquiry, 1824-1826, In Its Social and Political Context'. In *Irish Educational Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 2, (1983), p. 8.

<sup>421</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 38.

supplant the hedge school chapbooks by producing nearly a million replacement books within seven years, written and published by the Society, but the chapbooks still retained their popularity with children and the commissioners found 'the Traces of their former Abundance'.<sup>422</sup>

Three separate witnesses testified to the non-denominational nature of the education given in the hedge schools and neither one was a supporter of the indigenous schools. Rev. Henry Cooke, Moderator of the presbyterian church, Rev. Robert Daly, the church of Ireland rector of Powerscourt gave evidence before the 1825 commissioners and Doyle testified before a House of Lords committee the same year, to the same effect. The 1825 commissioners accepted all this evidence and stated in their report that they were 'much struck' by the many pay schools or hedge schools which constituted the vast majority of Irish schools where 'the masters taught religion to all denominations separately'.<sup>423</sup> Evidence was given also by Captain Pringle of the London Hibernian Society and by the Rev. Robert Daly that the reason the education societies were losing out to the hedge schools was because the hedge schools had a more extensive curriculum on offer.<sup>424</sup>

Unlike the education societies the hedge schools did not offer a utilitarian education, they broke with the accepted norms of the time by allowing works of fiction and fantasy to be read, and these were supplied by the childrens' parents.<sup>425</sup> The main reason for the popularity of the hedge schools was no doubt the high standards of literacy attained in them, and this was clearly shown by the success of the newspaper industry, the surge in devotional literature with booksellers and publishers doing a flourishing trade, not to mention the highly successful paper propaganda campaign of the Catholic Association, which would have been impossible without a sizeable literate population.

Doyle was incensed when he read the first report of the commissioners, particularly those sections regarding the Kildare Place Society and its connection with proselytising societies. He also resented the recommendation that protestant clergymen should be allowed to instruct protestant children in religion while catholic children should receive

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 798.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p. 777.

instruction from a member of the catholic laity.<sup>426</sup> The catholic hierarchy in general adopted a hardline stance with the government, two members of which were leading supporters of the Kildare Place Society – the chief secretary Sir Henry Goulburn and the home secretary Robert Peel who granted the society a grant of £25,000 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1826. In April, Doyle ordered his priests and catholic patrons to sever all links with the Society and four months later he issued an important pastoral on education in which he ordered the withdrawal of all catholic children from schools connected with the Society.<sup>427</sup>

From now until 1831 it was open warfare between the supporters of the Kildare Place Society and Doyle on behalf of the catholic church, occasionally assisted by Daniel O'Connell. The hedge schoolmasters were used merely as pawns by Doyle in this power game. The battle took the form of accusations of fraud being levied by him against the Society in a public letter addressed to Daniel O'Connell, the Society's attempt to clear its good name publicly and Doyle's unapologetic rejoinder. It also took the form of petitions being submitted to parliament on a regular basis both by the bishops petitioning for aid and denigrating the Society, and the Society countering with petitions of their own for continued aid.<sup>428</sup> Even though nine reports had been produced between 1825 and 1827, no action had been taken to implement the recommendations, that is until Thomas Spring-Rice, M.P. for Limerick, and a spokesman in parliament for catholic interests applied pressure on the government and secured a select committee on education.<sup>429</sup> He communicated in the 'strictest confidence' with Doyle who confided in O'Connell by giving him an outline of Spring-Rice's scheme of education, in order to win his support for it.<sup>430</sup> Doyle was fortunate that he also had the confidence and support of Thomas Wyse, the newly elected M.P. for Tipperary, an education enthusiast who kept the pressure on the government by submitting a detailed plan for national education on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1830, which Stanley, the chief secretary, was pleased to ignore until mid 1831.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> W.J. Fitzpatrick. *Unpublished Essay by Dr Doyle. An Essay on Education and the State of Ireland.* (M.H. Gill & Son, 50 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin, 1880), p. 5.

<sup>427</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 199.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>431</sup> D.H. Akenson. *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 110.

In one last desperate bid to secure parliamentary aid for catholic education Doyle took the initiative to write to the chief secretary in January 1831 giving his assessment of the state of education in his own diocese. Predictably he was critical of the Kildare Place Society schools and what he called their 'exclusive' education system. He was also dismissive of the hedge schoolmasters 'bad system'<sup>432</sup> of education but failed to mention that they were educating the majority of the children of Ireland. By Doyle's account the catholic clergy, under his stewardship were responsible for providing education in his diocese although they faced huge obstacles. Evenso he took comfort from the fact that they had been 'more successful in correcting or removing a bad system of education than in the establishment of a good one'.<sup>433</sup> This was an account largely similar to the one he submitted to the Catholic Association in 1824, which was a source of bemusement to Peel, who questioned its accuracy.

Stanley was impressed by Doyle's liberal views on mixed education, especially considering that the country was 'convulsed with sectarian zeal'<sup>434</sup> and the fact that he was not averse to power sharing in education unlike the Kildare Place Society, but then Doyle had no power to share and the Kildare Place Society did and were anxious to keep it in the hands of the established church. However the position of the Society was no longer tenable. They were being paid a substantial grant to provide education for all and were failing to do just that. Even their most ardent supporter Robert Peel had come to realise this as early as August 1828.<sup>435</sup>

By 9<sup>th</sup> September 1831, it was clear after Stanley revealed his proposals for a national education system that Doyle had won an impressive victory over the Kildare Place Society, there was to be power sharing in Irish education for the very first time, as Doyle had proved before the commissioners of 1825 that the catholic hierarchy could be trusted to take charge of catholic education and Daniel O'Connell's successful emancipation campaign had shown that catholics had a right to equality of treatment in education. The fruits of Doyle's labours were now finally paying off. The catholic church had at last, some protection from the proselytising schools and it was released from carrying the financial burden for catholic education.

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<sup>432</sup> Thomas McGrath. *Politics, Interdenom Relations and Education*, p. 220.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

For the hedge schoolmaster it marked the beginning of the end of an era, after one hundred and thirty six years of teaching the catholic, protestant and presbyterian children of Ireland. Doyle wasn't likely to eulogise on their contribution to the history of Irish education, the nearest he came to paying tribute to them was when he said he looked forward to their displacement by national schoolteachers, who 'will aid us in a work of great difficulty, to wit that of suppressing hedge schools'.<sup>436</sup>

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>436</sup> P.J. Dowling. *A History of Irish Education*. (The Mercier Press, 4 Bridge Street, Cork, 1971), p. 118.



# Chapter Two

## The Social Setting (1764-1831)

### Introduction

Throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period when hedge schoolmasters dominated Irish education, with their 'schools set up on private speculation' in which they 'received a 1d a week, or so from the children: sometimes more and sometimes less'<sup>1</sup>, poverty among the ordinary people had reached alarming proportions. Travellers to Ireland were deeply affected by some of the scenes of hardship and misery they witnessed and they frequently commented on the presence of beggars everywhere they went. Georgian Ireland, according to many contemporary writers' accounts, was a very inequitable society and this was reflected in the magnificent works of architecture which adorned the main town and cities, particularly Dublin, but these were in marked contrast to the scenes of squalor which they witnessed in most towns and villages in the country and in parts of the cities. Many middle class catholic merchants, middlemen or head tenants of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and 'big farmers' had a comfortable life style, so too did the protestant and catholic gentry and some high ranking protestant church clergymen, but travellers to Ireland were most struck by the abject poverty of the majority of the population, the cause of which they generally attributed to the unjust system of land tenure, the exaction of tithes, rack rents and priests' dues.

Frustration at these injustices grew and it manifested itself in the growth of secret oath bound agrarian societies, such as the Whiteboys. The early travellers to Ireland in the 1760's and 1770's were surprised by the level of public support they had, while the 19<sup>th</sup> century historian W.E.H. Lecky and many contemporary writers, expressed the view that hedge schoolmasters played a prominent role in this movement.<sup>2</sup> Early observers also cast a quizzical eye on the strange location of the hedge schools, but it was the later

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<sup>1</sup> Report from the Select committee of the House of Lords, appointed in 1837 to inquire into the Progress and Operation of the New Plan of Education in Ireland, with Minutes of Evidence. Part I, 1837, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. (London, Longman, Green & Co., 1872-1874). Vol. II, p. 21.

writers who cast a more critical eye on the hedge schoolmasters and who were harshly critical of their teaching ability, their moral fibre as well as their readiness to allow reading material to be used in their schools which the writers contended was either immoral, seditious or had a subversive sub-text.

Priests were singled out for critical mention also with a number of writers accusing them of being negligent in their duty regarding the education of the poor and of failing to supervise the activities in the indigenous schools<sup>3</sup> and thereby failing to stop the circulation of these 'dangerous' chapbooks. The relationship between the hedge schoolmaster and the parish priest is identifiable from the travellers' accounts and so too is the power of the priest and the vulnerability of the master.

Leaving aside the obvious bias of some writers and their antipathy to hedge schoolmasters, they do nonetheless give a valuable insight into the way parents viewed a hedge school education. They set such a high value on it that they went to extraordinary lengths to secure it for their children, and made great sacrifices in order to provide the necessary payment for the masters. The professional status of the master was sufficient to ensure that he was placed on a pedestal in society and the accounts also confirm that his social standing was comparable to that of the lord of the manor, the parson or the priest.<sup>4</sup> The master, for his part, remained close to the people and played a leading role in their leisure activities and quasi-religious festivities, long after the gentry and the priests had seen fit to withdraw from them.<sup>5</sup> He shared the same social and political outlook as the people, the same respect for Irish culture. It was the poet/hedge schoolmasters who raised the morale of the people with their music, poetry, songs and story telling and ensured that the tradition was handed down to future generations by preserving innumerable old manuscripts and by transcribing new ones.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hely Dutton. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*. (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 10 Back Lane, 1808), p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*. (Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 47 Paternoster Row, 1818), p. 326.

<sup>5</sup> J.S. Donnelly Jr. & Kerby A. Miller (eds.). *Irish Popular Culture (1650-1850)*. (Irish Academic Press, 44 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4, 1998).

Sean Connolly. "'Ag Déanamh Commanding": Elite Responses to Popular Culture, 1660-1850', p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland during the years 1812-1822*. (Dublin: C. Roworth, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, 1823), p. 331.

The following study of the social background to the setting up of the hedge schools and the place in society of the hedge schoolmaster is largely based on the accounts of contemporary writers of the late 18th and mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, statistical surveys carried out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Dublin Society (1801-1833), accounts of travellers to Ireland during this period (1764-1846), contemporary Irish poetry and modern research by social and economic historians. Some of the best available first hand accounts we have, of the prevailing social conditions of the period prior to the union, have come down to us from the accounts of contemporary writers who toured Ireland out of a sense of curiosity and interest, between the years 1764 and 1799 [App. A]. These were Englishmen such as John Bush (1764), Richard Twiss (1775), Philip Luckombe (1780) and the French Consul, Charles Etienne Coquebert de Montbret (1790-1791), who left a diary of notes, 'Carnets de Voyages' behind, as a record of his six tours, which were edited in the mid-20th century by Síle Ní Chinnéide. Four tours were undertaken between 1791 and 1799 - one by Charles Topham Bowden (1791) and another by Frenchman Le Chevalier de la Tocnaye (1796), followed by two further tours undertaken by Englishmen, George Holmes (1797) and George Cooper (1799).

The unrest in the country, occasioned by the 1798 rebellion and the subsequent abortive rising of Robert Emmet in 1803, along with the passing of the Act of Union in 1800, awakened a fresh interest in Irish affairs. Some thirteen English writers toured Ireland during the period 1805-1846 [App. B], many of them motivated by a desire to 'reform' the people now that they were members of the British union, by imparting liberal helpings of 'improving' advice. This was inkeeping with the temper of the times, a period when the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and the laissez-faire economics of Adam Smith (1723-1790) were being enthusiastically received both in England and Ireland. A diversity of views and a broader perspective was given by four European and three Irish accounts which were also completed at this time. We have one from Scotland written by Christopher Anderson (1846), two from Germany, by Prince Von Puckler-Muskau (1828) and J.G. Kohl (1844), one from France, by Gustave de Beaumont (1839), and finally three native accounts, by Isaac Weld (1807), Thomas Newenham (1809), and T. Crofton Croker (1822).

Less impartial, but nonetheless important, as contemporary accounts of social conditions, are the twenty three statistical surveys carried out between the years 1801 to 1833, [App. D], by a group of resident 'improving' landlords, aided by some patriotic Anglican clergymen 'all members of the ruling ascendancy but conscious of their duty to their country which gave them birth and sustenance'. They were members of the Dublin Society, founded in 1731, and were of 'Anglo-Irish stock, second and third generation Irish born'<sup>7</sup>. The object of the society was the improvement of 'Husbandry, manufactures and other useful arts'<sup>8</sup>, and it was in fact 'one of the first and most successful undertakings of the kind in Europe'<sup>9</sup>. On June 29th, 1820, King George IV honoured the society by becoming its patron and it assumed the title of The Royal Dublin Society from that time. While the aim of the society was clearly to improve agricultural endeavours and those of manufacturing, the brief of the statistical surveys was much wider than this, as they 'covered every aspect of the social, agricultural and economic condition of the country as well as the antiquities'<sup>10</sup> [App. C].

An overview of the backgrounds and pursuits of the main writers of the tours and statistical surveys will give a good indication of the level of objectivity, reliability and accuracy one can expect from their accounts.

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<sup>7</sup>James Meenan and Desmond Clarke. *RDS The Royal Dublin Society 1731-1781*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 1981), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>9</sup>J.C. Beckett. *The Makings of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*. (Fakenham Press Ltd., Fakenham, Norfolk, England, 1981), p. 176.

<sup>10</sup>Desmond Clarke. *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys. A Paper Read Before the Bibliographical Society of Ireland on 30th April, 1957*. (Dublin, The Royal Dublin Society Library), p. 6.

(i) 'Through Erin's Isle to sport awhile', Travellers to Ireland 1764-1799 and 1805-1846.

The main tour writers of pre-union and post-union Ireland whose works have since been most frequently quoted, by both social historians and academics alike are John Bush's *Hibernia Curiosa* (1746); Arthur Young's *A Tour in Ireland 1776, 1777, 1778* (1780); Coquebert de Montbret's 'Carnets de Voyage' (1790-1791); John Carr's *The Stranger in Ireland* (1805); Edward Wakefield's *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (1812); T. Crofton Croker's *Researches in the South of Ireland During the Years 1812-1822* (1822); and James Glassford's *Notes on Three Tours in 1824 and 1826* (1824). The earliest account by Bush, written in the form of *A Letter from a Gentleman in Dublin to his Friend at Dover in Kent*<sup>11</sup>, covered the period of the early enactment of the penal laws and the subsequent outbreak of agrarian unrest. Bush's account was fair and balanced. He expressed his sympathy for the impoverished peasantry and displayed an understanding of the frustration which led some of them to seek redress of their grievances through illegal agrarian societies like the Whiteboys. Bush was also one of the first commentators to attribute blame to the English government for the misery inflicted on the peasantry. His account was highly regarded by Lecky, who quoted from his book on more than one occasion in his *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*<sup>12</sup>. So too did Lecky's contemporary the English historian J.A. Froude, in his book *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*<sup>13</sup>.

Arthur Young's (1741-1820) account was also rated highly by Lecky and by the early 20th century social historian Constantia Maxwell. They considered him to be a very reliable witness of social conditions and of being impartial in his judgement.

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<sup>11</sup>John Bush. *Hibernia Curiosa. A Letter from a Gentleman in Dublin to his Friend at Dover in Kent, Giving a General View of the Manners, Customs, Dispositions, etc. of the Inhabitants of Ireland, Collected in a Tour Through the Kingdom in the Year 1764.* (W. Flexney, opp. Gray's Inn Gate, Holbourn, 1769).

<sup>12</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century.* (Longman's Green & Co., 39 Paternoster Row, London, 1913).

<sup>13</sup>James A. Froude. *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century.* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1872-1874).

Agriculture was Young's area of specialisation and he was an elected member of most of the noted European agricultural societies. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Society (1774) and the Prime Minister, William Pitt appointed him secretary to the Board of Agriculture in 1793. In fact members of the Dublin Society were so impressed by Young's *Tour of England* that they commissioned John Wynn Baker, an agricultural writer, farmer and Society member, to compile an abridged edition of Young's *Tour of England*, for the benefit of their members, many of whom were 'improving' landlords.<sup>14</sup>

In his Irish tour, Young commented on the prevailing system of land tenure. He was strongly opposed to the penal laws and the commercial restrictions. He devoted much time and effort to his deliberations on the pitiful condition of the cottier class who didn't own land and wrote convincingly on the need to abolish middlemen who acted on behalf of the landlord and the need to prevail upon absentee landlords to reside in Ireland. His research work took him to some rather inaccessible, remote areas of Connacht, where travelling conditions were uncomfortable and on occasions, trying. He recalled one such occasion when 'six labourers, two passing strangers and' his 'servant, could with difficulty get the chase up'<sup>15</sup>, as he tried to ascend a steep hill. He did however, have the advantage of being friendly with Lord Shelbourne, who had many influential friends among the Irish aristocracy and gentry, including the Viceroy John Hobart (1777-80), Earl of Buckinghamshire. He was not deflected from his work which he carried out assiduously and by scientific methods as Constantia Maxwell noted:

**His spirit of enquiry was that of the scientific observer. He systematically covered a large area of country and wrote down in his notebook all that he saw and heard. Not indiscriminately, however, for he never made a note without first resolving the matter in his own mind.**<sup>16</sup>

His approach was undeniably professional. When the tour was over, he went to Dublin, where he remained for a period of nine weeks:

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<sup>14</sup>James Meenan and Desmond Clarke. *RDS The Royal Dublin Society 1731-1981*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 1981), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ 'Mineralogy and Geology', by G.F. Mitchell, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup>Constantia Maxwell (ed.). *A Tour in Ireland*. (Cambridge University Press, 1925), pp. ix-x.

**examining and transcribing public records and accounts relating to trade and manufactures, being thus enabled to publish many details hitherto unknown to the public.**<sup>17</sup>

Young's account is therefore of considerable value.

So too is the reliable report recorded by the French tour writer Charles Etienne Coquebert de Montbret, who was sent as Consul to Ireland in 1789 by La Luzerne, a Minister of King Louis XVI. Coquebert spent the greater part of his two years service touring the countryside and he kept a written record of his travels, which is now in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale. He was a brilliant classical scholar who spoke several European languages well and while Secretary-General to the Ministry of Commerce in France, he had a survey made of the dialects then spoken in that country.<sup>18</sup> He was deeply interested also in the cultural side of Irish life. While here in Ireland he learnt the Irish language thus gaining the edge over his fellow travellers while at the same time adding a whole new dimension to the social history of the period.

Coquebert regarded his methods of research as being more reliable than those of Arthur Young. He asserted that 'Young always questioned tenants in the presence of the landlord or his agent and so received answers more in harmony with the landlord's wishes than with the truth'<sup>19</sup>. One can scarcely regard this as an unbiased opinion. Equally difficult to accept was the view expressed by Síle Ní Chinnéide that Coquebert '(alone among eighteenth-century foreign travellers in Ireland) mixed freely with all creeds and classes, including catholic merchants, school-teachers and priests'<sup>20</sup>. There is no doubt however, that Coquebert did get close to the people, as we learn from his notes that he 'very often took to the road without provisions that he might be forced to look for a simple meal in a workman's cottage and so learn for himself how the poor really

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>18</sup>Síle Ní Chinnéide. 'A New View of Eighteenth-Century Life in Kerry'. In *Journal of the Kerry Archaeology and Historical Society*, No. 6, (1973), p. 83.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

lived'<sup>21</sup>. Like Young, Coquebert took with him on his travels letters of introduction to members of the aristocracy and prominent politicians. This did not inhibit him from expressing adverse views, on this class in Irish society.

**... far from being impressed by Young's admiration for Lord Shelbourne, the richest landowner in Kerry, Coquebert discovers that 'this gentleman, who draws £18,000 a year from a county in which he never sets foot, uses every possible ruse to deprive his tenants of their means of livelihood by trickery'.<sup>22</sup>**

Coquebert's research was thorough. Before setting foot in County Kerry, he familiarised himself with every available account of the region. 'Yet in no case was he prepared to follow blindly the pattern laid down by previous observers'.<sup>23</sup> Where Smith in his *History of Kerry* provided a list of the parishes for the Church of Ireland, with their respective patrons, he provided the names of 'The Catholic priests in the dioceses of the Bishop of Kerry who reside in Killarney'<sup>24</sup>. He was familiar also with Smith's *History of Cork* (1750) and noted:

**The only purpose that Smith's description of 1750 can now serve is as a monument to the improvements that have been carried out since his time. The city has become almost unrecognisable in the past ten years.<sup>25</sup>**

He was sufficiently competent to pass this judgement as he arrived in Cork not only with Smith's map, but also with J. Connor's map of 1774, and one of 1789.

One striking feature of his research, is its total lack of anti-English sentiment and his objective assessment of Irish affairs. He wrote:

**I picture England and Ireland as two sisters, the elder steady, thrifty, attentive to her business, thoughtful but over exacting and a little jealous, and so treating her younger sister rather badly at times. The younger less poised, a little giddy and inconsistent, fickle, scarcely perturbed about the morrow ...<sup>26</sup>**

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<sup>21</sup>Ní Chinnéide. *Coquebert de Montbret in Search of the Hidden Ireland*, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup>Ní Chinnéide. *A New View of Eighteenth-Century Life in Kerry*, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>25</sup>Síle Ní Chinnéide. 'A New View of Cork City in 1790'. In *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 27, (Jan-June 1973), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Síle Ní Chinnéide. 'A Frenchman's Impressions of County Cork in 1790'. In *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Vol. LXXIX, (Jan-Dec, 1974), p. 24.



Unlike his fellow writers, he levied blame on the ruling classes in Ireland rather than the government in London, for the distressed and oppressed condition of the Irish peasantry. Coquebert was one of the most astute observers writing at this period, his accounts are therefore very significant.

Less important from the social historian's point of view would be *The Stranger in Ireland* by John Carr, which described a very brief tour in the southern and western parts of Ireland in 1805. Carr was a Devonshire gentleman who had been called to the Bar but due to ill-health never practiced. Instead he travelled extensively, taking full advantage of the peace with France, brought about on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1802 by the Peace of Amiens, thereby ending the war which commenced on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1793. He became a prolific writer of tour books of various European countries, having six volumes published between 1803 and 1811. His tour of Ireland 'sold "very nearly" 1,500 copies and a French translation appeared in 1809'. This success was due to 'the existence of a market for travel books requiring to be entertained as well as informed'.<sup>27</sup>

Agreement was universal among commentators that Carr's accounts were very superficial. His Irish tour was 'written in a ridiculously verbose style' and was 'not always very accurate'<sup>28</sup>, especially with regard to his references to the prevalence of middlemen. He also failed to distinguish between the legal and economic status of cottier and tenant and his assertion that total poverty was widespread was untrue. He made minor errors also when he referred to the fair at Dunboyne instead of the famous Donnybrook Fair, or again when he gave Newcastle credit for Dublin's coal supply.<sup>29</sup> There were wide gaps in his account on occasions, most noticeably when he described his visit to the north of Ireland in a mere five lines.

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<sup>27</sup>Louis M. Cullen. *The Stranger in Ireland*. (Shannon, 1970), p. v.

<sup>28</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *The Stranger in Ireland*. (London: Jonathan Cape, Thirty Bedford Square, 1954), p. 223.

<sup>29</sup>op. cit., pp. viii-ix.

Carr quoted copiously from other works, which - according to the Edinburgh Review, accounted for some eighty-eight pages or one-sixth of the book's length<sup>30</sup>. Constantia Maxwell, while adopting his title for her book on foreign travellers, recognised Carr's shortcomings as a writer also. She wrote:

**Carr is pompous and facetious. He gives far too many quotations from other people's books and relies to a greater extent than he should on other people's opinions. He tells too many, not always amusing anecdotes.**<sup>31</sup>

His weaknesses as a tour writer were highlighted by Edward Du Bois, the wit and literary critic, in his burlesque *'My Pocket Book'* or hints for 'a ryghte merrie and conceited tour' in quarto to be called *'The Stranger in Ireland'* in 1805, by a knight errant (London, 1808). He parodied Carr's methods of research. Carr brought a libel action against the booksellers but lost his case on the grounds of the liberty of the press and the rights of literary critics.<sup>32</sup> Despite many flaws, his books were very popular with those who wished to be entertained and to gain a superficial knowledge, adequate to satisfy their curiosity. While depth of analysis was lacking, he was a very keen observer who occasionally had matters of social interest and significance to relate. He was also the only writer for this period which makes his contribution all the more important. One person of eminence at least, regarded his work highly enough to have him knighted at the end of his tour. This was John Russell, the sixth Duke of Bedford, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1806-1807.

Edward Wakefield (1774-1854), a well known authority on agriculture and a land agent of Pall Mall, London, devoted no less than four years, from 1808 to 1812, to the task of describing his tour of Ireland. His dedication to his work stood out in stark contrast to John Carr's hastily compiled account of his tour. He was a strong advocate of the monitorial system of education devised by the English educator Joseph Lancaster (1778-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. vii.

<sup>31</sup>Maxwell. *The Stranger in Ireland*, p. 237.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

1838), an interest which won for Wakefield 'the character of a practical philanthropist'<sup>33</sup>. The fact that he started his book in 1808 at the instigation of John Foster, later Lord Oriel and former Chancellor of the Exchequer meant that he had firm establishment loyalties and wasn't likely to write a great deal which would reflect badly on the government. Nevertheless, it was generally agreed by commentators that Wakefield's account was 'a work which, in spite of many inaccuracies' was 'from the candour and tolerance' it displayed, 'a very valuable account of Ireland in the early years of the nineteenth century'.<sup>34</sup>

Of all the tour writers T. Crofton Croker (1798-1854), had the least amount of formal education as he left school at the age of sixteen. He did however, possess a great deal of natural talent. He belonged to an Anglo-Irish family which had settled in Ireland during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and by profession he was an admiralty officer.<sup>35</sup> From his early youth, Croker developed a very refined taste in literature and antiquities and between the years 1812 and 1815, he travelled around the south of Ireland collecting the native songs and legends of the peasantry. In 1818, he forwarded to Thomas Moore, the famous composer of Irish melodies 'nearly forty ancient airs, many curious fragments of ancient poetry, and some ancient traditions current in Cork'<sup>36</sup>. In 1825 Croker's best known and most successful book appeared, which was *The Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, a work which earned him the respect of Sir Walter Scott, and the original edition of which was translated into German by the brothers Grimm (1826), and into French by P.A. Dufour (1828).<sup>37</sup> When Croker died on the 8th August, 1851, he was held in such high esteem that Lord Londesborough placed a memorial tablet in Grimston Church, West Riding, Yorkshire in his honour.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee. *The Dictionary of National Biography*. (Oxford University Press, 1921-1922), p. 448.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>35</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town in Ireland Under The Georges*. (W. Tempest. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, 1949), pp. 165-166.

<sup>36</sup>Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee. *The Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Croker's tour of Ireland which he conducted in 1821, the written account of which, he issued, as *Researches in the South of Ireland, a sumptuous quarto, describing an Irish tour of 1821*, is of immense value. It is valuable not only because of the insights which he was able to bring to the Irish cultural traditions and pursuits but also because of his own expertise in the field of antiquary, which in later years would enable him to value and to preserve the cultural heritage of countries very different from his own. His Irish account was well researched and it is from this source that we get the clearest picture of the social and professional status of the hedge schoolmaster in the local community.

Finally, we have the benefit of the wise counsel of James Glassford, the Scottish advocate and former deputy-sheriff of Dumbartonshire, who also served as one of the commissioners of inquiry into the state of Irish education 1824-27. It was in his role as commissioner that he visited Ulster, Leinster and Munster in 1824 and Connacht in 1826, from which he compiled his account, called simply *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland in 1824 and 1826*.<sup>39</sup> The first edition was printed for private distribution in 1831 and it was re-published in 1832.

Glassford was an erudite gentleman judging from the varied list of his scholarly publications, which ranged from legal works such as *Remarks on the Constitution and Procedure of the Scottish Courts of Law* (Edinburgh 1812), to translations of Latin pieces by Lord Bacon *Exemplum Tractatus de Fontibus Juris* (Edinburgh 1823), to the state of popular education in Ireland. *Letter to the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Roden on the Present State of Popular Education in Ireland* (London 1829), to translations of *Lyrical compositions selected from the Italian poets* (Edinburgh 1834).<sup>40</sup> However his most interesting work was his *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland in 1824 and 1826* as he gave his opinions on the religious, political and social issues of the day, especially with regard

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<sup>39</sup> James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland in 1824 and 1826*. (W. Strong & J. Chilcott, 1832), p. 219.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

to education. Glassford expressed his views without fear or favour, even when this meant pointing the finger of blame at members of his own class and the government he represented. He was critical of the denial of civil rights to Catholics, deeming it to be a counter-productive measure, while at the same time recognising that the granting of Catholic emancipation could not be viewed as a panacea for all social ills in Irish society. His sense of justice was offended by what he saw as a 'Protestant ascendancy ... which ... had little connection with the principles or the religion of Protestantism', and he disapproved of the role of a government which 'governed through factions'<sup>41</sup>, as well as the behaviour of unscrupulous landlords, who reduced their tenants to a state of penury.

Glassford made no secret of the fact that he supported the London Hibernian Society in Ireland in their efforts to convert Catholics to the Protestant religion. His loyalties were obvious when he visited Protestant Belfast, a place where 'the Presbyterians have long preponderated' and where 'the Scotch settlers brought with them industry and good order',<sup>42</sup> an experience he found uplifting. His tour of Leinster and Munster however had the opposite effect on him as he bemoaned the dearth of Protestants and the lack of good Scottish influence which he believed could only have improved the habits of the people

**... there is not the same leaven of Protestant population as in Ulster - where so many Protestant settlers were planted, and so much intercourse subsists with Scotland.**<sup>43</sup>

On the question of Catholic hedge schools, their masters and the priests who supported them, Glassford adopted a consistently negative attitude, which in the light of his own religious affiliations, was hardly surprising. However, his account is no less valuable because of that, once we understand the perspective from which he was judging them.

The accounts of the tour writers in general, both native and foreign, provide us with a view of the social conditions of the time from many perspectives. The writers

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup>James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland in 1824 and 1826*, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

themselves came from diverse backgrounds. Their experiences of different cultures enabled them to draw comparisons. Their writings help to fill in many gaps regarding the social history of Ireland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and as such are valuable historical sources.

(ii) **Statistical Surveys Drawn up for the Consideration, and by the Direction of the Dublin Society.**

Arthur Young was among the many writers who were critical of the landlord class in Ireland, particularly the absentee landlords of the 18th century. He described them eloquently as being 'lazy, trifling, inattentive, negligent, slobering, profligate'<sup>44</sup>, but not all landlords deserved such a stinging condemnation. It was patriotic landlords, anxious to improve the social and economic life of Ireland who first set up the Dublin Society, which was the 'precursor of all other existing agricultural societies'<sup>45</sup>. Many eminent statesmen lent their support to the venture in order to improve agriculture and manufactures throughout the entire country. Its first members included Sir Thomas Molyneux, a Fellow of the Royal Society, Arthur Dobbs, the Surveyor-General of Ireland and later Governor of North Carolina and Thomas Prior, who was the actual founding member.<sup>46</sup> By degrees the society attracted a wide variety of civic minded people most notably peers, bishops, government officials, judges, army officers, barristers, doctors<sup>47</sup> and viceroys such as the Earl of Chesterfield, who was president during his Viceroyalty of Ireland in 1745. It was due to his influence that the society received its charter and a grant of £500 from George II in 1750, and subsequently the Irish Parliament voted it considerable sums.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>J.C. Beckett. *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*, p. 176.

<sup>45</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Ireland Under the Georges*, p. 201.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Dublin Under the Georges 1714-1850*. (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 182 High Holborn, London WC1, 1936), p. 172.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 173.

One of the most important decisions of the society was its undertaking to provide a statistical survey of every county in Ireland, a decision arrived at no doubt by the promptings of Arthur Young.<sup>49</sup> The dynamic force behind these statistical surveys was General Charles Vallencey (1721-1812), Antiquary and Engineer in Ordinary in Ireland, a gentleman who took a keen interest in the history, language and the antiquities of Ireland, while making a military survey.<sup>50</sup> He was held in such high regard that many of the writers of the statistical surveys, among them, the Rev. John Dubourdieu and John McEvoy dedicated their books to him.<sup>51</sup>

The Irish statistical survey writers were mainly members of the establishment and the landed class. Sir Charles Coote, owned an estate in Cootehill, Co. Cavan. Hely Dutton was a member of the Farming Society of Ireland while John McEvoy had 'an acquaintance with agricultural concerns from his earliest age'<sup>52</sup>. Two writers had military titles - Lieutenant Archer and Captain Robert Fraser. Four were protestant clergymen - Rev. Horatio Townsend, magistrate and rector of Kilgariffe, who graduated from Trinity College with an M.A. in 1776, Rev. William Shaw Mason who also graduated from Trinity College with a B.A. in 1796, Rev. John Dubourdieu, rector of Annahilt and Rev. C. Vaughan Sampson, who drew up the survey of Londonderry.

In 1802, ten surveys were published. This was due mainly to the efforts of Sir Charles Coote and Dr. James McParlan. Coote compiled five surveys in all and Dr. McParlan four:

Writer	County	Year
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<sup>49</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Ireland Under the Georges.*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>51</sup>Desmond Clarke. *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys. A Paper Read Before The Biographical Society of Ireland on 30th April 1957.* (Royal Dublin Society, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup>Clarke. *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys*, p. 3.

Sir Charles Coote	Queen's	1801
	King's	1801
	Monaghan	1801
	Cavan	1802
	Antrim	1804
Dr. James McParlan	Sligo	1802
	Leitrim	1802
	Donegal	1802
	Mayo	1802

The other surveys published in 1802 were those of Co. Down, by the Rev. John Dubourdiou and Kilkenny by William Tighe, the latter being considered 'one of the best volumes of the series'<sup>53</sup>. The tenth volume published in 1802 was Hely Dutton's *Observations on Mr Archer's Statistical Survey of the County of Dublin*. It was considered to be a second volume to the Dublin survey and Dutton was commended by the society for taking this initiative. They had hoped others would emulate him but in this they were to be disappointed.

The final survey to be published by the society - the *Statistical Survey of the County of Roscommon* was written by 'the much travelled' secretary of the society Isaac Weld (1774-1856) 'this survey, undoubtedly the most competent was published in 1832'<sup>54</sup>. Weld, a topographical writer of Fleet Street, Dublin was better equipped to take on the challenges of conducting a statistical survey, than most of his fellow writers. He was of an adventurous, enterprising nature, having spent from 1795 to 1797 in Philadelphia, exploring its unsettled country and vast forests, under the guidance of Indians. He wrote about his escapades in *Travels through the States of North America and Lower Canada*

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<sup>53</sup>Clarke, *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 6.



during the years 1795, 1796 and 1797. The book was published in 1799, a second edition appeared within the same year, and other editions followed in 1800 and 1807. It was also translated into German, French and Dutch.<sup>55</sup>

Weld's contribution to the society was very significant especially with regard to Irish industry. It was he who suggested an innovative idea, which the society adopted - that of the triennial exhibitions. In 1849, he became vice-president of the society and as a tribute to him, after he died, the members of the Royal Dublin Society raised a monument to his memory in Mount Jerome cemetery, in the course of 1857.<sup>56</sup>

The reliability and accuracy of the surveys must now be considered, bearing in mind the constraints which impeded the surveyors, such as the extent of the task, the shortage of manpower, their ability to get close to the peasantry, the lack of co-operation by some clergymen and gentry and the level of objectivity one might expect from the writers themselves.

The biggest problem that confronted the writers was the actual extent of the survey itself. It contained five different headings under *Suggestions of Enquiry* [App. C], of sixty eight areas to be investigated as follows:

<b>Headings</b>	<b>No. of Suggestions</b>
Geographical State and Circumstances	6
Agriculture	7
Pasture	11
Farms	13
General Subjects	31

<sup>55</sup>Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee. *Dictionary of Nat. Biog.*, p. 1070.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1070-1071.

The General Subjects covered a vast range of topics varying from the 'use of beer and spirits - whether either or which is increasing' to the 'State of Education, schools and Charitable institutions', to the 'Quantity of bog and waste ground' and 'The weight of measure, by which grains, flour, potatoes, butter, etc. are sold'. They were required also to give an 'Account of towers, castles, monasteries, ancient buildings or places remarkable for any historical event'.

The enormity of the task presented was adverted to by Coote, Dubourdieu and Dutton. These writers were conscientious and valued their own reputations sufficiently to explain to the reader why there might be a shortfall in their reports. Coote, in the preface to his *Statistical Survey of Armagh* wrote:

**A work embracing such various subjects, as are suggested for the statistical enquiry of a county, should doubtless have the assistance of many. I have heartily to lament, and feel it a presumption that I must lay before the public the following sheets, which I cannot boast have had that advantage.<sup>57</sup>**

The Rev. John Dubourdieu, in his preliminary Observations to the *Statistical Survey of the County of Down*, which, incidentally, was considered to be one of the better surveys, went to great lengths to impress upon the reader why his survey might be considered deficient and he hoped that: 'they will attribute the deficiency to the difficulty of obtaining accurate information upon so great a variety of points, and not to any want of diligence in the reporter'<sup>58</sup>. John McEvoy did not feel that he had the necessary expertise or scientific knowledge to do a thorough job, in surveying an area as vast as Tyrone: 'A complete Agricultural Survey of a County of such extent, opulence and variety, as the County of Tyrone, would require a writer of much more general information and scientific research'<sup>59</sup>. The impossibility of investigating sixty-eight areas of enquiry was appreciated by Dutton, who acknowledged, that if the work was to be conducted

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<sup>57</sup>Sir Charles Coote. *Statistical Survey of the County of Armagh*. (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, No. 10, Back-Lane, 1804), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup>Rev. John Dubourdieu. *Statistical Survey of the County of Down*. (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, No. 10, Back-Lane, 1802), p. v.

<sup>59</sup>McEvoy. *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone*, p. v.

efficiently 'it would take at least two years to accomplish this'<sup>60</sup>. He concluded also that in order to attract men of professional stature to do the job, greater financial inducements than the Dublin Society could afford to pay, were necessary: 'It could not be expected that any professional man, or one of small income, would undertake it for the sake of the trifling sum the Dublin Society are enabled to offer'<sup>61</sup>.

Uncooperative protestant clergymen and resident gentry were also a source of frustration to the writers. Coote and Dutton had similar experiences. Coote was disappointed with the clergymen of Armagh from whom he had expected so much: 'From so learned and respectable a body as the clergy of this county, surely, much information might have been expected for a work intended to effect such public service'<sup>62</sup>. He had even circularised the resident gentry of the county of his proposed visit, and had provided them with details of the subjects to be investigated. His best efforts met with failure. Undaunted, he traversed the county four times, at considerable expense to himself, but he complained: 'I oftentimes called on many of them at their houses, but had not the good fortune of meeting them, nor have I since been furnished with any observations towards the proposed enquiry'<sup>63</sup>. He asked the reader to make allowances for the inevitable 'errors and omissions'<sup>64</sup> that must necessarily result because of this and he attributed this lack of co-operation to the 'illiberal jealousies, which have been roused by the active endeavours of the Dublin Society in their institution of Statistical Surveys of counties'<sup>65</sup>. Dutton wrote to the clergy in the County of Clare, with 'the most sanguine hopes of success'<sup>66</sup>, as he considered them to be the most competent to give him the required information, because of their 'local knowledge, liberal education, habit of putting their thoughts on paper, and great leisure'<sup>67</sup>. The lack of written responses from

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<sup>60</sup>Hely Dutton. *Observations on Mr. Archer's Statistical Survey of the County of Dublin*. (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, No. 10, Back-Lane, 1802), p. v.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. v.

<sup>62</sup>Coote. *Statistical Survey of the County of Armagh*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>66</sup>Dutton. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, p. iv.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. iv.

the protestant clergy, however, disgusted him, and he was disheartened by the gentry who were not even prepared to favour him with half an hour's conversation, even though he produced his commission from the Dublin Society. He took care to mention the few gentlemen who 'were so kind as to give me in writing much valuable information'<sup>68</sup>.

The greatest sources of irritation to the surveyors were the withholding of information and that 'most unpardonable, ungentlemanlike insult of neglecting to acknowledge letters'<sup>69</sup>. When Thomas James Rawson was conducting his *Statistical Survey of the County of Kildare* in 1807, he circulated hundreds of letters stating the desires of the Society, and requesting information on specified subjects. He received no response whatever. Dutton summed up the frustration felt by the surveyor as follows:

**It must surely be extremely grating to the gentleman engaged in the different Surveys, to have to state the neglect of answering letters or refusing to convey information; for without the warm support and active interference of the landed proprietors it is utterly impossible to carry such a work into execution with any beneficial effect.**<sup>70</sup>

It should be mentioned that at least two writers found clergymen to be very co-operative. Dr. James McParlan in his *Statistical Survey of the County Donegal* reserved high praise: '... for the clergy of this country, to most of whom I have for some years had the honour of being known, are composed of gentlemen conspicuous for every species of virtue and of worth'<sup>71</sup> and William Shaw Mason could never have compiled a *Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland* without their assistance. He acknowledged this on the title page, when he added that they were, 'Drawn up from the Communications of the Clergy'.

In general the surveys were undertaken by dedicated, committed men who were frustrated in their efforts to give an accurate, professional account but who, in spite of all the difficulties managed to supply invaluable statistical data. The society can take credit

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>70</sup>Dutton. *Obser. On Mr. Archer's Statistical Survey*. p. iv.

<sup>71</sup>James McParlan. *Statistical Survey of the County of Donegal*. (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, No. 10, Back-Lane, 1802), p. v.

also as they insisted that the work produced should reach a certain standard. We know this because Arthur Hunt's first survey of the County of Carlow was returned to him, by the committee of the society, under the chairmanship of General Vallencey, who resolved that:

**Mr. Hunt's review of the said county should be returned to him, and that he be directed to return to County Carlow to make such further observations in the review of the said county as may render his report more complete and satisfactory to the Society.<sup>72</sup>**

It is evident also that the writers made contact with the cottiers and labourers, who, according to Hely Dutton, were only too willing to furnish the relevant information: 'I have also great pleasure in stating the extreme readiness I found in the farmers and lower classes of society to give me in detail many things their landlords seemed to be totally ignorant of'<sup>73</sup>. The statistical data provided in the surveys, on the living conditions of the peasants is quite considerable and it does give a clear insight into the social conditions prevailing at this time. It corresponds exactly with what the tour writers reported with regard to the habitations of the peasantry, wages, food, the system of land tenure and the poverty and misery that was all pervasive.

The attitude adopted by the writers was generally one of a benevolent interest in the peasantry, a suspicion of hedge schoolmasters, and a dislike of the catholic clergy. Hely Dutton strongly condemned the clergy but it was the Rev. Horatio Townsend's survey which earned the condemnation of the Most Rev. Dr. Coppinger, catholic Bishop of Cloyne, 'on the grounds that it was intolerant and basely attacked the Catholic priests of the diocese'<sup>74</sup>. Writing to the Dublin Society, on 'Misstatements of the Rev. Horatio Townsend, in his Statistical Survey of the County of Cork', in 1811, Dr. Coppinger stated that Townsend 'holds us up, as bigoted oppositionists to the mental improvement of our own flock, perverting our influence over the people, to keep them in ignorance

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<sup>72</sup>Clarke. *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup>Dutton. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, p. vii.

<sup>74</sup>Clarke. *Dublin Society's Statistical Surveys*, p. 6.

...<sup>75</sup>. He then paid the other survey writers a compliment, although he wrongly claimed that: 'No such invidious observations are to be found in the Statistical Reports of any other writers, eminent for laborious research, though all, I believe, laymen ...'<sup>76</sup>.

The statistical surveys therefore provide useful statistical data and give a clear picture of the social conditions in Ireland for the early 19th century. They were undertaken by committed protestant landlords and clergymen, whose objectivity on occasions must surely be questioned but whose work is nonetheless valuable because, as Desmond Clarke pointed out, the surveys give 'a picture, which if out of sympathy with Irish feeling, are still the only complete picture we have of the Regional State of agriculture, industry, and the social conditions prevailing at the time'<sup>77</sup>.

(iii) Poverty and the development of the hedge schools.

**Misery, naked and famishing, that misery, which is vagrant, idle, mendicant, covers the entire country ... it is the first thing you see when you land on the Irish coast and from that moment, it ceases not to be present to your view.<sup>78</sup>**

The mid 18th century writers and the 19th century travellers encountered a great number of beggars as they travelled through Ireland. As early as 1764, John Bush noted beggars on 'the high roads ... throughout the southern and western parts'<sup>79</sup>. In 1775 Richard Twiss, considered Irish beggars to be reasonable in their demands, with 'most of them offering a bad half-penny, which they call a 'rap', and soliciting for a good one in exchange'<sup>80</sup>. Writing in 1805 Sir John Carr was struck by the number of beggars he

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<sup>75</sup>T. Corcoran. *Education Systems in Ireland*, (Printed for academic use in the Department of Education, University College Dublin, 1928), p. 92.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>78</sup>Gustave de Beaumont. *Ireland, Social, Political & Religious*. (Richard Bentley, New Burlington St., 1839), p. 264.

<sup>79</sup>George Bush. *Hibernia Curiosa*, p. 30.

<sup>80</sup>Richard Twiss. *A Tour in Ireland in 1775*. (J. Robson, New Band St., 1776), p. 73.

witnessed, who seemed to him 'to be even more numerous and wretched than those he had seen in France'<sup>81</sup>. Von Puckler-Muskau, the German prince who arrived in Ireland on the 11th of August 1828, was shocked by the dirt, the poverty and the ragged clothing of the people. Beggar-boys buzzed around him like flies, so much so that he always kept his pockets full of coppers 'to throw out to the beggars 'like corn among the fowl''<sup>82</sup>.

The cabins which the peasants occupied were the source of much comment by many writers, mainly because of their primitive nature. A typical cabin was described by Coquebert de Montbret who recognised a strong similarity between it and the mud huts built by beggars on the highways in France. Travelling through Limerick in 1791, he observed:

**The Irish cabins ... are like the mud huts which beggars build on our highways ... very few have windows. In some there are one or two holes which are stuffed, at night, with a wisp of straw. Less frequently still, have they chimneys and when there is one, it is made of boards or bundles of sticks. The roofs are often weighted with stones and even with pieces of wood as protection against the wind. The entrance is generally the dirtiest place on the main road.**<sup>83</sup>

Coquebert de Montbret was well acquainted with scenes of poverty. He had witnessed them before in France and Germany, yet he was taken aback at the extent of the poverty in rural Ireland. Some travellers were bemused by the inventiveness displayed by Irish peasants when choosing a location for their cabins. De Latocnaye discovered a most unusual cabin in Co. Dublin. It was in fact a 'cromlech', under which, lived a couple and their ten children 'together with their dog, cat, goat, pig and poultry'. They resided there until such time as 'the proprietor, wishing to show the monument to the public, built them another residence'<sup>84</sup>. Other cabin dwellers were even more adventurous. The Rev. Caesar Otway came across what he styled 'the bog cabin' on Achill Island, the occupants of which he regarded as 'bog troglodytes'. He described the structure as follows:

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<sup>81</sup>Constantia Maxwell (ed.). *The Stranger in Ireland*.

\_\_\_\_\_ John Carr. 'The Stranger in Ireland', p. 225.

<sup>82</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ Von Puckler-Muskau. *Tour in England, Ireland and France*, p. 266.

<sup>83</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A Frenchman's Impression of Limerick Town and People in 1791'. In *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, (1948), Vol. V, No. 4, p. 96. tr. Síle Ní Chinnéide.

<sup>84</sup>Constantia Maxwell (ed.). *A Stranger in Ireland*.

\_\_\_\_\_ 'Le Chevalier De La Tocnaye', p. 195.

the foundations of their dwellings are sunk eight feet or more below the surface of the surrounding black bog, the walls are constructed of wet sods, cut off from the surface of that bog; there is no door or door-case, no chimney; the orifices by which the people enter, and through which the smoke should issue, are filled up, as suits the wind, with bundles of heath or turf-kreels, filled with potato stalks; a drain comes from under the floor of the dwelling from which the superabundant moisture escapes or else it would be a common bog hole; but, by its means, the water that springs abundantly from the side and bottom flows away, and the people sitting or standing within, are free from actual overflow.<sup>85</sup>

Otway was somewhat surprised by the fact that all the occupants, both young and old, were so healthy in spite of the 'perpetual vapour bath'<sup>86</sup>, and on enquiry, he found that pulmonary complaints or rheumatism were non-existent. Scenes of misery were ubiquitous. Charles Topham Bowden toured Ireland in 1791 and on passing through the county of Tipperary he was so overcome by the scale of the poverty he witnessed that his 'mind was filled with melancholy, on contemplating the situation of these poor creatures, who drag on a miserable existence under an accumulation of woes'<sup>87</sup>. He considered that their habitations were 'less calculated for any of the comforts or conveniences of life, than the huts of the savages' he had seen 'in the back settlements of North America'.<sup>88</sup> The nakedness of the children and indeed the adults was also a cause of concern to Bowden: 'in those wretched hovels, I have remarked, children from two or three to ten years old quite naked, and their unhappy parents little better'.<sup>89</sup>

Three of the 18th century tour writers mentioned the hedge schools they observed on their travels. In 1775 Richard Twiss 'observed a dozen bare-legged boys sitting by the side of the road scrawling on scraps of paper placed on their knees'<sup>90</sup>. Arthur Young

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<sup>85</sup>Rev. Caesar Otway. *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly*. (Dublin: Wm. Curry, Jun. & Co., 1841), pp. 46-47.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>87</sup>Charles Topham Bowden. *A Tour Through Ireland*. (Wm. Corbet, No. 57, Great Britain St., 1791), p. 158.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>John P. Harrington (ed.). *The English Traveller in Ireland*. (Wolfhound Press, 68 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, 1991).

Richard Twiss, *A Tour in Ireland in 1775*, p. 171.



noticed many hedge schools also but he felt that this was a misnomer for them. He wrote 'they might as well be termed ditch ones, for I have seen many a ditch full of scholars'<sup>91</sup> and the French tourist De Latocnaye who walked around Ireland in 1796-97 found 'numerous schools in the hedges'<sup>92</sup>.

As the penal laws were relaxed after 1782, the hedge schools moved to a bewildering assortment of buildings, but they still retained the name hedge schools. Chapels were used regularly as schools, as William Shaw Mason reported from Limerick in 1814, while at Ennistymon, where there was no chapel, the sessions-house was used for this purpose.<sup>93</sup> The Scottish visitor Christopher Anderson made the unusual discovery of a hedge school being conducted in a graveyard<sup>94</sup>, whereas in Monaghan they used corn kilns, out-offices, a mill, a wheat store and two rooms at Monaghan race course.<sup>95</sup> Proof of these locations is to be found in the report of the commissioners of education 1824-27, as they conducted a nationwide survey in 1824, when dual sets of returns were submitted from both sets of clergymen catholic and protestant, giving details of the schools in their parishes. From an inspection of these it is clear that hedge schoolmasters and Irish parents were living in abject poverty and the conditions in which children were taught were very spartan. Take for example the following extract from the 1824 parochial returns for the hedge schools in Breiffne.

**John Rothwell ... Income £6 ... a miserable hovel.**

**Edward Smith ... Income about £5 ... a mud cabin**

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<sup>91</sup>Constantia Maxwell (ed.). *A Tour in Ireland*. (Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 202.

Arthur Young. *A Tour in Ireland ... made in the years 1776, 1777 and 1778*.

<sup>92</sup>John Stevenson. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*. (McCaw, Stevenson & Orr Ltd., The Linenhall Press, 1917), p. 145.

De Latocnaye. *Promenade d'un Français dans l'Irlande*.

<sup>93</sup>William Shaw Mason. *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland, Vol. I*. (Graisberry and Campbell, 1814), p. 495.

<sup>94</sup>Christopher Anderson. *The Native Irish and their Descendants*. (Dublin: William Curry & Co., 1846), p. 205.

<sup>95</sup>John I.D. Johnston. 'Hedge Schools of Tyrone and Monaghan, 1800-1820'. In *Clogher Record*, (1969), p. 48.

**Peter Rogers ... Income about £5 ... [Schoolhouse] serves also for a barn and a cowhouse.<sup>96</sup>**

The parochial returns for Kildare and Leighlin paint a similar picture of deprivation and discomfort:

**Pat Byrne ... Income £4 ... Schoolhouse in an old ditch built of sods.<sup>97</sup>**

**William White ... Income £2**

**Where these children are belongs to a poor farmer where he fothered cows last winter, at this moment I am greatly annoyed by the rain coming down at every side of me: as to its accommodations, there are none, except some stones laid round by the walls on which the children sit - not even a table or form.<sup>98</sup>**

In many instances the returns show that parents built hedge schools for the masters 'The most frequently recurring phrase to be met with being "Built by the Parish"' and those were usually primitive structures, little more than 'a miserable hovel with a clay wall only partially thatched, 15 feet long and 10 feet wide' like the one built for Fanny Moore in 1817 in Kill.<sup>99</sup> The number of female teachers was not nearly so numerous as the men, due to the severity of the lifestyle. Ninety six female teachers appeared in the parochial returns for Kildare and Leighlin and if we add the findings of the 1824 survey to this, the number comes to 170 female teachers in all.<sup>100</sup> The most notable feature of the hedge schools was their lack of windows, a factor which can be explained by the Window Tax introduced in 1799, which applied to every inhabited house. Another reason why hedge schools devoid of creature comforts was to avoid confiscation by the landlord.

A typical hedge school was described graphically by William Shaw Mason, writing of Maghera, Co. Derry in 1814. The following account is almost identical to that recalled

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<sup>96</sup>Philip O'Connell. *The Schools and Scholars of Breiffne*. (Browne & Nolan Ltd., Dublin, 1942), pp. 392-393.

<sup>97</sup>Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, p. 104.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

by William Carleton (1794-1835) of his hedge schoolmaster Pat Frayne's school at Skelgy in Clogher, Co. Tyrone,<sup>101</sup> and that of Humphrey O'Sullivan, (1748-1784) recorded in his diary (1827-1835) on the 14th May, 1827 of his father's first hedge school at Callan, built for him at the crossroads in the summer of 1791.<sup>102</sup>

**Schoolhouses are in general wretched huts, built of sods in the highway ditches, from which circumstance they are designated hedge schools. They have neither door, window nor chimney; a large hole in the roof serving to admit light and let out smoke. A low narrow wall of mud, hard baked serves as a seat. A hole cut in the mud wall on the south side affords ingress and egress to its inhabitants.**<sup>103</sup>

By 1824 the hedge schools were known in official quarters as 'Catholic Pay Schools'. The evidence of the Rt. Hon. A.R. Blake given before the Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1837, provides us with the official definition of a hedge school.

**"Do you mean by Pay Schools what are usually called Hedge Schools?"**

*"They are usually called Hedge Schools."*

**"Are they called Pay Schools because the Children pay for their own Instruction?"**

*"Yes: they are distinguished as 'Pay Schools' in the Reports which we had in 1825 and 1826."*

**"Will you explain further what you mean by Pay Schools?"**

*"I mean by Pay Schools, schools in which the masters receive some small stipend from 'the children who attend them', schools set up on private speculation; schools that receive no Aid, either from the State or from any Society established for the Promotion of Education. The Masters received Id a week or so from the children; sometimes more and sometimes less."<sup>104</sup>*

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<sup>101</sup>William Carleton. *The Autobiography of William Carleton*, (MacGibbon Kee Ltd., 1968), p. 29.

<sup>102</sup>Tomás de Bhaldraithe. *The Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan 1827-1835*. (Dublin: The Mercier Press Ltd., Lr. Abbey Street, 1979), p. 23.

<sup>103</sup>William Shaw Mason. *A Stat Account or Parochial Survey, Vol. I*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>104</sup>*Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed in 1837, to inquire into the Progress and Operation of the New Plan of Education in Ireland, with Minutes of Evidence. Part I, 1837, p. 54.*

Although the hedge schools were little more than 'wretched huts, built of sods in the highway ditches', by 1812, a contemporary writer who visited Ireland could confidently claim that 'the people of Ireland are, I may almost say, universally educated'<sup>105</sup>, while another gave credit for this phenomenon to the parents, who made 'meritorious sacrifice of earnings ... for the education of their children'<sup>106</sup>. Lord Palmerston too acknowledged, the great sacrifices made by his Irish speaking tenants in Co. Sligo, in 1808, to secure a hedge school education for their children

**The thirst for education is so great that there are now three or four schools upon the estate. The people join in engaging some itinerant master: they run him up a miserable mud hut in the roadside, and the boys pay him half-a-crown, or some five shillings a quarter.**<sup>107</sup>

Considering that a shilling in Irish money represented a full days wage for a farm labourer, 'in poorer districts it would have paid three days' wages',<sup>108</sup> the sacrifice made by parents was quite considerable. A striking illustration of this quest for learning was given in the official recognition of the existence of evening schools run by hedge schoolmasters, for those who had to work on farms or 'for those children whose service during the day their parents could not afford to lose'. The commissioners of education in 1806 mentioned the fact that in one parish alone there were eleven evening schools.<sup>109</sup> Of greater curiosity for the modern reader however would be the two recorded cases of parents who required the services of hedge schoolmasters so desperately that they kidnapped them. Mr and Mrs S.C. Hall who travelled in Ireland referred to this as common practice, as they recalled

**The people who inhabited a rude district of the Connemara Mountains felt the necessity of a teacher for their children ... they took forcible possession of a Domine, and conveyed him by might from a distance of several miles to the vicinity of their rude mountain-huts.**<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*. (Longman Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, Paternoster Row, 1812), p. 397.

<sup>106</sup>S.C. Curwen. *Observations on the State of Ireland*. (Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 47, Paternoster Row, 1818), pp. 388-389.

<sup>107</sup>Alice Stopford Green. *Irish National Tradition*, p. 28.

<sup>108</sup>P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 77.

<sup>109</sup>*The Fourteenth Report of the Commissioners of Education, 1806-1812*, p. 331.

<sup>110</sup>Mr and Mrs S.C. Hall. *Ireland, It's Scenery, Character etc.* (London: How & Parsons, 1841), p. 260.

The teacher was forbidden to travel a mile from his domicile until he had trained a replacement. The imprisonment lasted five years, at the end of which the domine had no desire to leave a people he had become attached to.<sup>111</sup> William Carleton, novelist and former hedge schoolmaster also mentioned this practice in his story '*The Hedge School*', when Mat Kavanagh, the fictional representative for his own teacher Pat Frayne, was kidnapped by the parents of Findramore, William Carleton was at pains to impress upon the reader why kidnapping a schoolmaster was a necessity at the time.

**The country was densely inhabited, the rising population exceedingly numerous ... the old and middle-aged heads of families were actuated by a simple wish, inseparable from Irishmen, to have their children educated; and the young men, by a determination to have a properly qualified person to conduct their Night Schools.**<sup>112</sup>

He stressed the fact that the kidnapping incident he related actually took place.

#### (iv) Education and the Land Question.

Labourers in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century were far from constituting a homogeneous class, some had a certain amount of security, being housed by farmer employers; others discharged the rent of a plot in labour to a tenant master, but the cottiers and spalpeens or migrant workers who had no land, were not quite so fortunate. The rent of land continued to rise from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards when the population exploded. Prices rose also but wages did not keep pace with inflation.<sup>113</sup> Labourers lived in a state of acute distress yet it was mainly children of this class in society who attended the fee paying hedge schools. When one bears this in mind it becomes all the more remarkable that these parents were prepared to make, what must have been enormous sacrifices, to have their children educated.

Writing in 1924, Daniel Corkery (1878-1964) explored what he called the 'hidden Ireland' of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the underworld of the Gaelic Munster poets, several of

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>William Carleton. *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1979), pp. 287-288.

<sup>113</sup>L.M. Cullen. *The Formation of the Irish Economy*. (The Mercier Press, 4 Bridge Street, Cork, 1976), pp. 15-16.

whom were also hedge schoolmasters, and the Big Houses of the old Gaelic families who had escaped the Williamite confiscations and the subsequent penal laws. He demonstrated from the sentiments expressed by these poets in their verse and song that racial pride was offended by the insult of their poverty. Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) the great satirist and political writer, was no doubt correct when he said that to his conquerors the peasant was little more than 'a hewer of wood and a drawer of water', but this was not how the poor regarded themselves. Their favourite quatrain, attributed to the Kerry hedge schoolmaster Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784) known to the people as 'Eoghan an Bhéil Bhínn' or Eoghan of the Sweet Mouth, was one which told of wounded pride at the servitude of poverty:

*Ní h-í and bhoichtineacht is  
measa liom  
Na bheith síos go deo,  
Ach an tarcuísne a leanann í,  
Ná leighisfeadh na leoin.*

**'Tis not the poverty I most  
detest,  
Nor being down for ever,  
But the insult that follows it,  
Which no leeches can cure.<sup>114</sup>**

Their songs and poems continuously reminded them that they were the 'children of kings, the sons of Milesius'<sup>115</sup>. The poet/hedge schoolmasters never regarded themselves as poor peasants eventhough they were indistinguishable from them in dress, manner and speech. They saw themselves as men of learning, what Corkery called 'the residuary legatees of over a thousand years of literary culture', with an aristocratic lineage. Ó Súilleabháin boasted in one of his poems 'I that come of the stock of the Gaels of Cashel of the Provincial kings'<sup>116</sup>. Their status was confirmed for them by the welcome they received at the Big Houses. The Co. Clare poet/hedge schoolmaster Brian Merriman (1747-1805) 'never a rich man, visited these houses, and perhaps was set to teach the children in some them'. We know that Ó Súilleabháin not only worked for them as a spalpeen but also as a private tutor.<sup>117</sup> Other hedge schoolmasters who provided private tuition for the children of the gentry were Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara (1715-1810) in Waterford, Riocárd Báiréad (1739-1819) in Erris, Co. Mayo and Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1785-1848) in Iveragh, Co. Kerry to name but a few.

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<sup>114</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Corkery identified two classes in Irish society – the harried, poverty-stricken cottiers of the smoky cabins and the Gaelic speaking cultured landlords of the Big Houses.<sup>118</sup> But he failed to identify two further groups of wealthy middle class catholics among the landed classes, namely catholic middlemen, many of them displaced Irish gentry, who leased lands from absentee English landlords who had received confiscated lands after the Williamite wars. Their leases were ‘sometimes for ever, more often for lives extending over 40, 50, 60 or 70 years’<sup>119</sup>. The other group consisted of strong catholic farmers, who had emerged just as the middleman system went into decline at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aided by the Catholic Relief Bill of 1782 which admitted them into the land market where they were permitted to purchase and dispose of land. They had accumulated capital during the agricultural boom in the last quarter of the century, when the export figures for wheat increased twentyfold, oats tenfold and barley sixfold.<sup>120</sup> This occurred as a direct result of Foster’s Corn Law of 1784 which favoured all landlords and tenants as it ‘gave large bounties on the export of wheat and limited imports by duties’<sup>121</sup>. The provision trade was also flourishing despite embargoes, when the export of beef quadrupled, butter doubled and pork increased eightfold.<sup>122</sup>

These strong farmers led lives of simplicity, frugality and hard work with 90% to 95% of them living in cabins.<sup>123</sup> They were the new ‘underground gentry’ and they stood out in marked contrast to the middlemen who were partial to the pleasures of ‘hunting, of conviviality and gregarious drinking’ and who had a reputation for being ‘the most grasping of tyrants’.<sup>124</sup> The catholic big farmers had fewer overheads than their protestant counterparts and consequently were able to outbid them when leases came up for renewal.<sup>125</sup> Education was quite important to these families so they engaged the professional services of the hedge schoolmasters ‘usually by a system of patronage-cum-tutelage’ because ‘education paved the way for openings in trade, the church or

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>119</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 67.

<sup>120</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland*, p. 201.

<sup>121</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town Under the Georges*. (W. Tempest, Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, 1949), p. 203.

<sup>122</sup> op. cit.,

<sup>123</sup> Kevin Whelan. ‘An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth Century Ireland’, p. 133. In *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850*.

<sup>124</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (abr.), p. 65.

<sup>125</sup> op. cit., p. 137.

abroad.’<sup>126</sup> They became very unpopular among the smaller tenants, labourers and cottiers, who came to regard them as the new oppressors because they found themselves dispersed to the edges of their big farms, as Robert Bell recorded in 1804:

**The master never fed a labourer of this description (i.e. a cottier). It was on the contrary, a chief object with him to keep such a person as far away from his dwelling as possible. He therefore allowed him to occupy, at some remote corner of his farm, a miserable hut, a mere shell formed of mud or sods...**<sup>127</sup>

The older gentry-derived middlemen families were contemptuous of the rising catholic families. This contempt was evident in the Irish poetry of the period, which generally reflected the aristocratic aspirations of the middleman class. They were portrayed as upstart gentry, without manners or education. Two northern poets Art Mac Cumhaigh (1715-1773?/91) and the poet/hedge schoolmaster Peadar Ó Doirnín (1704-1768) satirised the ‘arrivistes’ or the upstarts with their social pretensions. MacCumhaigh satirised the O’Callaghans of Cullaville in Armagh, when he nicknamed them ‘Bodaigh na hEorna’ – The Churls of the Barley because they made money from owning a distillery. Saevo indignatio also marked the poem *Tarlach Cóir Ó hAmaill* by Peadar Ó Doirnín.<sup>128</sup>

Travellers to Ireland, according to Whelan (1998), who passed ‘rapidly through the roadside rattle-taggle of miserable cabins’<sup>129</sup> were so overwhelmed by the images of poverty that greeted them that they failed ‘to notice the discreet but comfortable world of the strong farmer insulated from the perimeter of poverty around them’, consequently he claimed that ‘the seat behind the coachman was ... a biased one in pre-famine Ireland’. It is true that they may not have been aware of the catholic strong farmers’ hidden wealth but Coquebert de Montbret was forcibly struck by the contrasts presented by the two extremes of opulence and poverty when he met both poor and wealthy catholics in Kerry, Limerick and Cork.<sup>130</sup> All visitors to Ireland remarked on the prosperity of the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Bell. *A Description of the Condition and Manners of the Peasantry of Ireland between the years 1780 and 1790*. (London: Charles Barber, 15 Fleet Street, 1806), pp. 8-9.

<sup>128</sup> B. Ó Buachalla. *Peadar Ó Doirnín: Amhráin*. (Dublin, 1969), p. 55.

<sup>129</sup> Kevin Whelan. ‘An Underground Gentry’, pp. 139-140.

<sup>130</sup> Coquebert de Montbret. ‘A New View of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Life in Kerry’. In *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*. No. 6 (1973), p. 96 tr. Síle Ní Chinnéide.



north in comparison to the south but great poverty did exist in certain parts of Belfast. Sir Walter Scott recognised the scale of Belfast's poverty when he travelled there in 1825 and noticed 'mountainous packages of old clothes; the cast off raiment of the Scotch beggars on its way to a land where beggary is the staple of life'<sup>131</sup>, and yet this city could boast of a Chamber of Commerce as early as 1783 and of a Harbour Corporation and a White Linen Hall in 1785.<sup>132</sup> If the seeming prosperity of Belfast was deceptive so too was the magnificent splendour that formed much of the exterior of Georgian Dublin. The elegance and grandeur of its architectural showpieces was praised by Arthur Young (1776), De Latocnaye (1796), Sir James Carr (1805) and S.C. Curwen (1818) but it is equally true to say that practically every 18<sup>th</sup> century and some 19<sup>th</sup> century visitors to Dublin referred to the scenes of filth and squalor and the wretchedness of the poor which they witnessed in parts of the city.<sup>133</sup>

Arthur Young described in considerable detail a large number of resident landlords who had devoted their time to 'improving' agriculture and who had tried to root out the system of middlemen and by 1793 they had achieved some success in this regard, in the more prosperous parts of the country.<sup>134</sup> Many Irish landlords were philanthropic members of the Dublin society such as its founding member Dr. Madden (1686-1765) who wrote his *Reflections and Resolutions Proper for the Gentlemen of Ireland, as to their Conduct for the Service of their Country* (1738) advocating agricultural improvement and social reform. He established premiums for the encouragement of learning at Trinity College, and for the encouragement of Irish agriculture, manufacture and trade under the auspices of the Dublin Society.<sup>135</sup>

Absentee landlords made their contributions also, eventhough most commentators, including Young, were critical of them for drawing rental out of the country. It was they, who had the best managed estates and who made big investments in the agriculture of

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\_\_\_\_\_ 'A Journey from Cork to Limerick in December 1790'. In Kerry Historical & Archaeological Society (1971), p. 72. Tr. Síle Ní Chinéide.

\_\_\_\_\_ 'A New View of Cork City in 1790'. In Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society. Vol. LXXVIII, No. 227, (Jan-June 1973), p. 1. Tr. Síle Ní Chinéide.

<sup>131</sup> Diarmaid Ó Mhuirthe. *A Seat Behind the Coachman*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 2, Belvedere Place, Dublin 1, 1972), p. 26.

<sup>132</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>133</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *Dublin Under the Georges*, p. 114.

<sup>134</sup> W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. II, p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p. 199.

Ireland, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>136</sup> However despite the fact that there were so many 'improving' landlords, the majority of them failed to effect any change in the system of agriculture, which would have brought about a radical improvement in the living conditions of the bulk of the population of Ireland. As for the Anglo-Irish gentry, they behaved, not as a body of philanthropic gentlemen but rather according to the standards of their time and the code of conduct expected of their class. As Constantia Maxwell remarked in her book *Dublin Under the Georges*, 'they lived up to their incomes'. The employed more servants than they needed, their dress was extravagant, and their equipages exceeded their incomes in many instances.<sup>137</sup> In 1799 the Duke of Leinster had an annual income of £20,000, the Duke of Ormonde £22,000, Mr. Conally of Castletown £25,000, and in addition, the lowest value of their estates in 1812 was £100,000.<sup>138</sup> It should be noted also that the wealthiest landlords in Ireland had their incomes supplemented by the rents they received from a half starving population, living on the verge of famine for much of their lives as the potato crop, the main staple of their diet, failed on average 'one year in every two or three'.<sup>139</sup>

Another influential landed class in Irish society – the governing body of ecclesiastical gentlemen in the Church of Ireland, also failed to make any appreciable difference to the lives of these cottiers. There were of course some exemplary, humanitarian archbishops such as 'Bolton, Archbishop of Cashel, who died in 1744, and Hoadly, Archbishop of Armagh who died in 1746', who were credited with having 'done good service to the country by draining bogs, and improving husbandry'. Other prelates who were noted as ecclesiastical 'improvers' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century were 'Archbishop Robinson of Armagh, Augustus Hervey, Bishop of Derry and Bishop Percy of Dromore',<sup>140</sup> and the philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753), Bishop of Cloyne (1732).<sup>141</sup> However many Irish bishops were absentees, due to the fact that nearly all the higher posts in the Church of Ireland were filled with Englishmen, and some resident prelates were distracted from

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<sup>136</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 188.

<sup>137</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Dublin Under the Georges*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>138</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>139</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda. *Ireland Before and After the Famine*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Oxford Road, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>140</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 320.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334.

their pastoral role because they were closely involved in the politics of the state, when they ruled the country as Lord Justices in the absence of the lord lieutenant, in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the century bishops of the established church were among the richest men in Ireland, due largely to the rise in rents and tithes,<sup>142</sup> paid for by the poorest in the land. Arthur Young recorded that 'the primate was receiving £8,000 a year, the archbishop of Dublin £5,000. The bishop of Derry had £7,000, that of Cashel £4,000 and that of Cloyne £2,500'.<sup>143</sup> The Edinburgh Review of 1835 made interesting observations also when it noted that the established church population in Ireland 'was less than that found in the Diocese of Durham in England, yet it was governed by four archbishops and twenty-two bishops and its revenues were some £800,000, three-quarters of which came from tithes mostly paid by the more than 6,000,000 catholics in Ireland'.<sup>144</sup>

John Bush was among the earliest writers to reject the unjust system of tithes and the pressing demands for priests' dues. The 'rapacious, insatiable priests' who exacted tithes, were, he regretted to say, 'English persons'<sup>145</sup>. He castigated catholic priests also for demanding their 'full quota of unremitted offerings'<sup>146</sup>. When De Latocnaye attended mass in the chapel near Tralee, he said the priest 'consigned to all the devils (although in highly proper terms) all those infamous enough not to pay his dues'<sup>147</sup>. While he recognised that many dedicated priests were very poor, he had seen others who appeared to be quite 'comfortable', having between 'one and two hundred a year, besides a tolerable house, and dinners innumerable'.<sup>148</sup> The wealthiest catholic bishop resided in Co. Cork and according to Coquebert de Montbret, who visited Cork city in 1790, he earned a modest £1,000 per annum, while the income of the parish priest of Carrigaline,

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 325-326.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>144</sup> Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 39.

<sup>145</sup> John Bush. *Hibernia Curiosa*, p. 30.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> John Stevenson. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*, p. 111.

<sup>148</sup> Constantia Maxwell. *The Stranger in Ireland. The Chevalier De Latocnaye*, pp. 197-198.

Monsieur Synan, was 'almost equal to that of a Bishoprick in any other part of Ireland'<sup>149</sup> but their protestant counterparts were in receipt of incomes five, six, seven and sometimes even eight times these amounts.

Rack rents, tithes and priests dues placed a severe financial strain on the cottier class but in 1758 an even worse calamity befell them. They, along with the day labourers who couldn't afford to rent land, and the migrant workers, or 'spalpeens'<sup>150</sup> were reduced to a condition of almost hopeless wretchedness due to the English government's decision to allow Irish landowners to export live cattle into England. The decision was taken because 'a murrain which had broken out in 1739 among the horned cattle of Holstein ... had at length extended to Holland and England'<sup>151</sup>. This had the effect of turning whole baronies into pasture land, resulting in 'numerous evictions'<sup>152</sup>, which produced a situation whereby 'vast herds of Irish bullocks were set upon the roads towards the Irish ports ... the result of all was that herds of dispossessed human beings, as well as the herds of beasts, began to darken the roads'<sup>153</sup>. Charles Topham Bowden writing in 1791 regarded the exportation of Irish cattle to England as 'an evil of the most pernicious tendency'. He had it on good authority, that there was 'scarce a port or creek in the south of Ireland, where some thousand head of black cattle were not shipped off'<sup>154</sup>. He was outraged when he saw that 'the whole country was almost appropriated to pasturage, and human beings were banished the soil to make way for sheep and bullocks'.<sup>155</sup> He considered that the situation in which the peasant now found himself, rendered him no 'better than a beast of burden', because he couldn't enjoy or experience 'the necessaries of life or the just rewards of his labour'.<sup>156</sup> Coquebert de Montbret who travelled from

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<sup>149</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A New View of Cork City in 1790'. In *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 227. (Jan-June 1973), p. 1. tr. Síle Ní Chinnéide.

<sup>150</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 118.

<sup>151</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the 18th Century*, Vol. II, p. 1.

<sup>152</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the 18th Century*, Vol. I, p. 219.

<sup>153</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 38.

<sup>154</sup>Charles Topham Bowden. *A Tour Through Ireland*, (W. Corbert, No. 57 Gt. Britain St., 1791), p. 161.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid. p. 159.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

Cork to Limerick in 1790 was also horrified at the sight of so 'many wretched dwellings confined to the roadside to avoid breaking up the pasturage'<sup>157</sup>.

The rapid conversion from tillage to pasturage led to enclosures, when landlords withdrew from their tenants 'a right of commonage which had been given them as part of their bargain, when they received their small tenancies, and without which it was impossible that they could pay the rents which were demanded'<sup>158</sup>. It was hardly a coincidence then that the Whiteboy movement should have been activated at the end of 1761 just as the system of enclosing commons was extending throughout the country. John Bush who travelled through Ireland three years later, witnessed at first hand the misery which provoked the Whiteboy disturbances, and he wrote with sympathy:

**What dread of justice or punishment can be expected from an Irish peasant in a state of wretchedness and extreme penury, in which if the first man that should meet him were to knock him on the head and give him an everlasting relief from his distressed and penurious life, he might have reason to think it a friendly and meritorious action; and that so many of them bear their distressed abject state with patience is to me a sufficient proof of the natural civility of their disposition.**<sup>159</sup>

Before 1770 Whiteboy activity had nearly ceased only to erupt with new vigour in 1775, in Kildare, Kilkenny and the Queen's County. It continued there with partial interruptions until 1785, when it spread widely once more through Munster. Another English writer, Philip Luckombe, toured Ireland in 1780 and judging from his account, he had very little sympathy with the native grievances and even less with the 'lawless ruffians called White-boys'. He proceeded to elaborate:

**These are ignorant peasants, who do not chuse to pay tythes, or taxes, and who in the night-time assemble sometimes to the number of many hundreds, on horseback and on foot, well armed, and with shirts over their clothes, from whence their denomination is derived.**<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A Journey from Cork to Limerick in December, 1790'. tr. by Síle Ní Chinnéide. In Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society, (1971), p. 69.

<sup>158</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the 18th Century*, Vol. II, p. 11.

<sup>159</sup>John Bush. *Hibernia Curiosa*, p. 33.

<sup>160</sup>Philip Luckombe. *A Tour Through Ireland*. (Dublin: Messrs. Whitestone, Sleater, Sheppard, Wilson, Spotswood, Beatty, White, Wogan, Perrin & Byrne, 1789), p. 100.

He gave an account of their daily activities, which were acts of the utmost barbarity. He wrote '... they stroll about the country, firing houses and barns, burying people alive in the grounds, cutting their noses and ears off'. Luckombe noted that there was strong Whiteboy activity in the counties of Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford and Carlow eventhough rewards of up to fifty pounds were offered for their apprehension and despite the fact that sometimes the 'deluded wretches'<sup>161</sup> were hanged. In spite of Acts against the Whiteboys dating from 1765 and increasing in severity over the following years, and in spite of 'admonitions, denunciations and even excommunications ... oathbound secret societies continued to exist, and, particularly in times of distress, the people obeyed the local Whiteboy code instead of the law of the land'<sup>162</sup>. Those instrumental in administering the oath and in formulating the objectives of the Whiteboys, were as Lecky pointed out 'evidently men of some education and of no small organising ability'<sup>163</sup>. It would be reasonable to conclude that they were the local hedge schoolmasters, educated men who held such sway over the people because of the deferential attitude of the people towards their learning.

(v) Education and Religion.

**Their church makes a part of their history.  
It has shared in all the vicissitudes of their good or evil fortune;  
It has drunk deeply of their almost exhaustless cup of bitterness.**<sup>164</sup>

A strong bond was forged between the priests and the majority of the catholic population in Ireland during the penal days (1695-1782), as they colluded with one another to evade the law. As Lecky remarked 'Priests were an illegal class compelled to associate with smugglers, robbers, privateers, to whose assistance they were often obliged to resort in

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Maureen Wall. *The Age of the Penal Laws (1691-1778)*, p. 229.

<sup>163</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the 18th Century*, Vol. II, p. 21.

<sup>164</sup>Thomas Reid. *Travels in Ireland in the year 1822*. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, Paternoster Row, 1823), p. 116.

order to escape the ministers of justice'<sup>165</sup>. Priests carried out their religious obligations by responding bravely and imaginatively to the challenges that faced them. Mass was celebrated 'in secret rock-clefts, with sentries posted on the hilltops'<sup>166</sup>, and in 'sand-pits, barns, the upper rooms of public houses ... the ruins of ancient churches'. The French traveller De Latocnaye came across such a service being conducted in the ruins of an old abbey in Co. Leitrim. He was taken aback by the wretched appearance, not only of the building, but also of the people in attendance. He also observed two or three priests in the graveyard hearing confessions.<sup>167</sup> They each sat on a stone and held a piece of cloth in their hands to separate the penitent from the crowd. The reason for this was 'that the flock might afterwards truthfully swear, if put to it, that they knew not who the celebrant was'<sup>168</sup>. Bishops also braved the perils of the time and by using disguises managed to carry out their episcopal duties. In the 1750's the Bishop of Kilmore, Dr. Andrew Campbell, who was an expert performer on the bagpipes, attended the fairs dressed as a Highlander, carrying his pipes under his arm, as children wearing some distinctive sign, advanced, each in turn to shake hands with, or give a coin to the piper, who dutifully administered the sacrament of confirmation to each.<sup>169</sup>

In the 1760's and especially after the relaxation of the penal laws against religion in 1782, when the catholic church became a lawful agency and when the illegal activities of the secret society of Whiteboys was at its most intense, the power of the priest over his flock temporarily diminished. The main reason for this was the church's denunciation of agrarian agitation and its subsequent excommunications of 'Whiteboys and members of other secret societies'<sup>170</sup>, societies which had the support of the people, eventhough they

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<sup>165</sup>W.E.H. Lecky. *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*. (abr.) (The University of Chicago Press Ltd., London, 1972), pp. 79-80.

<sup>166</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*. (Gill & MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1984), p. 40. 1st ed. 1924.

<sup>167</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges*, p. 342.

<sup>168</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 40.

<sup>169</sup>op. cit., p. 349.

<sup>170</sup>Maureen Wall. *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760*. (Dundalk: Dundalgon Press, 1967), p. 67.

'adhered to an alternative conception of law and government'<sup>171</sup>. The travellers to Ireland during this period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, were forcibly struck by 'their own immunity from gangs of malcontents who saw travellers as not involved in their local struggles'<sup>172</sup>. Philip Luckombe, who travelled through Ireland in 1780 was in no doubt that the Whiteboy movement was 'economic, rather than political or sectarian'<sup>173</sup>, and in fact the catholic bishops themselves recognised that a substantial part of their agitation 'reflected widespread anti-catholic church sentiment'<sup>174</sup>. The Archbishop of Tuam, Oliver Kelly, pinpointed one of the reasons for this, when he gave evidence before the parliamentary committee inquiring into the state of Irish education in 1825, as the resentment people felt at 'the payment of the Catholic clergy'<sup>175</sup>. In fact the people were so resentful of having to pay priests' dues that on occasions they openly rebelled by converting to the protestant religion en masse. One such incident was recorded by the historian Desmond Bowen (1978), in his book *The Protestant Crusade*, when he told how a priest in the Cork area sought refuge in the parsonage when the wrath of the people increased against his exaction of dues and more and more of them tried to convert to Protestantism.<sup>176</sup>

Even the hedge schoolmasters, whose livelihoods depended on the approval of the priests, not only supported the secret societies but some were in fact instrumental in setting them up, and in organising many of their activities. According to T. Crofton Croker the hedge schoolmaster was

**frequently the promoter of insurrectional tumults; he plans the nocturnal operations of the disaffected; writes their threatening proclamations studiously mis-spelled and pompously signed, Cpt. Moonlight, Lieut. Firebrand, Major Hasher, Col. Dreadnought; and**

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<sup>171</sup>R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. (Penguin Books Ltd., 27 Wright's Lane, London W8 5TZ, England, 1989), p. 292.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>174</sup>Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70*. (Gill and MacMillan, McGill Queen's University Press, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>175</sup>First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, VIII (129), pp. 259-60.

<sup>176</sup>op. cit., p. 143.



**Gen. Rock, night errant, and Grand Commander of the Order of the Shamrock Election'.<sup>177</sup>**

This assertion by Croker can be substantiated, as the historian Roy Foster pointed out, 'the classic picture of hedgeschoolmasters as conduits of subversion' can be 'borne out by court records'.<sup>178</sup>

The catholic prelates strongly disapproved of the United Irishman's rebellion of 1798, which was based on what they considered to be dangerous French principles [Ch. 1]. Many of these prelates had been trained in seminaries on the continent and they 'knew well how dangerous revolution could be, and how ineffectual the church usually was when it tried to control social agitation'<sup>179</sup>. The people didn't follow the guidance offered by their spiritual leaders on this occasion either and neither did some of the hedge schoolmasters who had either direct or indirect involvement in the rising [Ch. 1]. After the 1798 rebellion the priests gained in popularity with the people once more. The reason for this was that the ruling classes grew suspicious of the priests, suspecting some of them of having sympathy with their revolutionary parishioners. Several priests were killed and their houses were attacked by Orangemen and militia. This was sufficient to restore the clergy to their old position of influence and to help them to regain their hold over the people.<sup>180</sup>

Travellers to Ireland in the 1790's commented on priestly power in local communities, the readiness of the priests to excommunicate law breakers and to banish the morally lax. De Latocnaye remarked 'The priests have greater power over their people. They are in fact the judges of the country and settle everything connected with morals and manners. They excommunicate a peasant and oblige him to leave a parish.'<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*, pp. 328-329.

<sup>178</sup>R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland*, p. 293.

<sup>179</sup>Desmond Bowen. *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 3.

<sup>180</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges*, p. 348.

<sup>181</sup>John Stevenson. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*. (McCaw, Stevenson & Orr Ltd., The Linenhall Press, 1917), p. 111.

Sometimes they were obliged to use their powers against their strongest allies and intellectual equals - the erring poet/hedge schoolmasters. It should be stated however, that the majority of the poets and masters, greatly assisted the clergy in keeping the faith of the people strong, [Ch. 3], poets such as Séamus Dall MacCuarta (c. 1647-1732) who lived most of his life in Omeath, Co. Louth and who was famous for the fervour of his religious poems and Tadhg Gaedhealach Ó Súilleabháin (1715-1795) from Limerick who wrote exclusively on religious themes, his most famous work being the *Pious Miscellany*, which was published some forty times after its first publication in 1802.<sup>182</sup> Other poets supported the catholic church by censuring priests and brothers who converted to the protestant religion. This they did by means of satire: 'the conforming priest was attacked in some very bitter poetry, mockingly bitter if he married, savagely bitter if he exercised orders in the Established Church'<sup>183</sup>. Others still, played a supportive role to the priests by working as coadjutors in the teaching of the catechism and christian doctrine on Sundays.<sup>184</sup>

English travellers to Ireland in the 19th century were exceptionally critical of catholic clerical influence. George Cooper, a young English law student, who came here on the eve of the Act of Union, was one of the first writers to accuse catholic priests of being ignorant and bigoted. To Cooper the priest was 'the petty tyrant of each village'<sup>185</sup>. He held him responsible for the degraded character of the Irish, whom he regarded as being indolent, ignorant, impoverished and superstitious. He it was who plunged 'their minds in the darkness and gothic ignorance of the 13th century'. Cooper consoled himself with the fact that Great Britain did not continue as 'the prey of papal tyranny'<sup>186</sup>, otherwise they would have been as ignorant as the Irish catholics. He may have been alluding to

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<sup>182</sup>Ristéard Ó Foghludha. *Tadhg Gaedhealach Ó Súilleabháin*. (Muintir C.S. Ó Fallamhán Teo., 1927), p. 13.

<sup>183</sup>Patrick J. Corish. *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. (Helicon Ltd., 1981), p. 110.

<sup>184</sup>Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin A.D. 1775-1835*, p. 81.

<sup>185</sup>George Cooper. *Letters on the Irish Nation*. (London: J. White, Horace's Head, Fleet Street, 1800), p. 44.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

the protestant revival in the Church of England, known as the 'Second Reformation' [Ch. 1], which spread to Ireland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The evangelical zeal which accompanied this revival resulted in the proliferation of over twenty bible societies, of which at least five were protestant education societies, four of which had the stated aim of converting catholics from the 'errors of popery'<sup>187</sup>. As many of the contemporary writers were either protestant Englishmen like Cooper or Irish protestant clergymen, or landlords, one should not be too surprised by the unfavourable comments which many of them reserved for the catholic clergy, or for their partners in education, the hedge schoolmasters.

The attacks against the clergy gained momentum throughout the 19th century. The Rev. James Hall who toured Ireland in 1813 accused them of bigotry and ignorance, and he became increasingly exasperated by the exceedingly large numbers of catholics he encountered in the capital. He wondered how their number might be lessened,<sup>188</sup> because he considered that 'the catholicism established in Ireland, is in many places, of the most bigoted and absurd kind, and when we consider the ignorance of many of its professors, not likely soon to purify itself'<sup>189</sup>. Further claims were made against the clergy by Hely Dutton in 1808 and by James Glassford in 1824. Dutton accused them of being negligent in their duty regarding the education of the poor. It was the practice at the time to convert catholic chapels into 'hedge' schools, especially in winter, but Dutton was outraged at the damp, dirty state these chapels were in, considering it to be to 'the disgrace of the priest and his flock'<sup>190</sup>. Glassford for his part, accused the clergy of deliberately adopting a policy of keeping the peasantry ignorant, in order to retain their power over them. He alleged

**there is an evident indifference, on the part of the Roman Catholic clergy, to extend the sphere of intellectual knowledge among their**

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<sup>187</sup>Rev. E.J. Quigley. 'Grace Abounding'. In *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, xxi, (1923), p. 519.

<sup>188</sup>Rev. James Hall. *Tour Through Ireland*. (London: W. Wilson, 4, Greville Street, Halton Garden, 1813), p. 244.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>190</sup>Hely Dutton. *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*. (Dublin, Graisberry and Campbell, 10 Back-Lane, 1808), p. 235.

people. This is the natural operation of the religion: for the ignorance of the people is the power of the priest; his temporal policy is therefore obvious.<sup>191</sup>

There is a significant amount of evidence to counter these charges against the clergy. First we have Coquebert de Montbret who was an objective writer, who made a strong claim for the complete lack of bigotry among the catholic clergy. In fact he asserted that they compared favourably with their protestant counterparts, who were ever ready to criticise them:

**Protestant ecclesiastics tell him this and that about the catholic clergy, but in truth he finds among them "much regularity in their way of life, together with a great deal more zeal, more enlightenment and less prejudice", than is to be found among their critics.**<sup>192</sup>

This claim was further substantiated by Thomas Newenham, a major in the militia and an Irishman who wrote in an objective, balanced way regarding the political, commercial and social conditions of Ireland in 1809. He stated:

**That the lower orders of the Irish are extremely illiterate and ignorant and that the roman catholic clergy successfully exert their influence in keeping them so are hasty assertions equally trite and untrue ... it is not evident, either that the roman catholic clergy take no pains to keep the lower class of their laity in a state of ignorance, or that their influence does not extend sufficiently for to do so...**<sup>193</sup>

It was to be expected that the catholic clergy would discourage parents from sending their children to schools whose aims were clearly to convert to the protestant faith, especially during a period of intense evangelising. There is evidence to suggest that priests did exercise their clerical influence in this regard. In 1812 Edward Wakefield noted that 'the catholic clergy have the power of interdicting children from attending protestant schools'<sup>194</sup>, and Glassford's assertion that the catholic clergy used physical

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<sup>191</sup>James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland*. p. 211.

<sup>192</sup>Síle Ní Chinnéide. 'A New View of Cork City in 1790'. In *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*. Part One, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 227. (Jan-June, 1973), pp. 8-9.

<sup>193</sup>Thomas Newenham. *A View of the Natural, Political and Commercial Circumstances of Ireland*. (London: T. Cadwell and W. Davies in the Strand, 1809), p. xix.

<sup>194</sup>Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland Statistical & Political*. Vol. II (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, Paternoster Row, 1812), p. 417.

force to keep children away from protestant schools and abused clerical privilege by denouncing the schools from the altar may well have more than a grain of truth in it. He reported that the Roman catholic priests in Ballinasloe 'by violent means and actual force, compelled the removal of children, by the parents, who had agreed to place them in protestant schools'<sup>195</sup>. In Kilchreest the priest denounced the protestant school from the altar, but despite his opposition, the school thrived and numbers soared, until finally, three quarters of the children who attended, were Roman Catholics.<sup>196</sup>

The clergy dealt just as ruthlessly but more successfully with indigent hedge schoolmasters who were forced through straitened circumstances to accept jobs, teaching Irish in the bible society schools. The clergy denounced them from the pulpit, thus bringing disgrace upon them and their families in the local community. Two such masters were Peter Gallegan (1792-1860) from Kells, Co. Meath and Michael Farrelly, an inspector of the Irish Society's schools, whose own school at nearby Rahood, was financed by the Irish Society. The parish priest in this instance was a Rev. Fr. John Halpin of Nobber. Not only did he condemn them from the altar but he also banished Farrelly's parents and brothers from the chapel, on the grounds that he could not possibly read mass in the presence of those related to the 'devil incarnate', the 'Bible-reading rascal, under the Irish Society'<sup>197</sup>. Peter Gallegan was to suffer also as a result of Fr. Halpin's action, as parents decided to boycott his hedge school, thereby cutting off one of his main sources of income. The two masters decided to defend their reputations by publishing written replies.

Gallegan put a notice in the paper subsequent to the holding of a large public meeting of the Irish Society in Kingscourt in 1827. In it he stated that poverty had forced him to accept employment with the Irish Society, that he strongly disapproved of their

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<sup>195</sup>James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland*, p. 269.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>197</sup>Séamus MacGabhann. 'Salvaging Cultural Identity: Peter Gallegan 1792-1860'. In *Ríocht na Midhe*, Meath Archaeological & Historical Society, (1994), p. 75.

resolutions and that he regretted a mistake he made in supporting them publicly. He then rendered an explanation for this action; and announced his decision to continue in the employment of the Society:

**Declaration of Peter Galligan (sic.), of the parish of Moynalty, in the presence of Rev. P. Kiernan, and Peter Cassidy, farmer. States he was master under the Irish Society ... is now resolved to continue being attached to the society as he is rather poor to give up the quarterly gratuities; is a Roman Catholic; wishes to remain one and is sorry that his poverty forces him to act contrary to Catholic principles; ... was at the meeting at which the resolutions were passed and did not distinctly hear the resolutions read, and consequently did not understand the meaning and import of said resolutions ... he was not aware of the evil tendency of the resolutions; he now regrets that his name should be published as an agent to support the resolutions which he does not approve or sanction.**<sup>198</sup>

Michael Farrelly defended himself and his colleagues in the Irish Society, in an eight page pamphlet, in which he castigated the Rev. Fr. John Halpin in tones which reflected clearly the prevailing tense and bitter atmosphere occasioned by the recent events.

**You first asserted, that they sold their immortal souls for ten pounds per year - that I was the devil incarnate - that they go to Mass on Sunday and to the devil on Monday - Roman Catholics to-day and devils to-morrow - that I offered ten pounds to a foolish young boy, in order to convert him from his religion. Your next manly and Christian-like action was to turn my parents and brothers out of the chapel because I was 'a devil incarnate', 'a Bible-reading rascal, under the Irish Society'.**<sup>199</sup>

Fr. Halpin won in the end, as the Irish Society's activities ceased in Co. Meath shortly afterwards.

When Thomas Reid travelled Ireland in 1822, the evangelical societies were very active, especially in the schools they had established. This prompted the comment from him that 'proselytism has ever been the bane of peace and social happiness in Ireland. It has been the end and aim of every school established'<sup>200</sup>. Allowing for a little exaggeration, he did nonetheless capture the spirit of the age, and like some of his fellow writers he

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<sup>198</sup>Ciarán Dawson. *Peadar Ó Gealacháin: Scríobhaí*. (An Clóchomhar Ttá, Éigse Oiriaila, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>199</sup>Séamus Mac Gabhann. 'Salvaging Cultural Identity', p. 75.

<sup>200</sup>Thomas Reid. *Travels in Ireland in the year 1822*, p. 365.

singled out the London Hibernian Society for commendation. Of the great many schools he had visited, the least objectionable to him was 'that instituted by the London Hibernian Society', which he felt 'should be encouraged and extended, until a better system'<sup>201</sup> should be devised. Varying levels of praise were heaped upon this society by writers with strong leanings towards conversion. The Rev. William Shaw Mason whose statistical account was drawn up from the communications of protestant clergymen, gave a report from Sligo which eulogised upon these schools. It read 'The schools established by the London Hibernian Society in this country, are likely to produce very beneficial effects'<sup>202</sup>.

Isaac Weld, in his *Survey of the County of Roscommon* was fulsome in his praise of the same society, as it operated in general throughout Ireland, not just in Roscommon. He wrote:

**The London Hibernian School for females, here, as in every other place where I have seen them, was admirable. The mistress, young, well-dressed, well-mannered, and thoroughly capable of teaching: the girls, clean and neatly dressed and deriving positive benefit from the example of their instructress.**<sup>203</sup>

James Glassford's visit to the London Hibernian School at Kilchreest was a positive and uplifting experience for him also, because when he examined several students they were able to 'repeat from eight to eleven chapters each of the Bible'<sup>204</sup>. Not only that but one boy outshone all the others by repeating 'correctly any passage required, from the Gospel of John'. Glassford's joy was complete however, when, during his visit, one of the 'readers' employed by the Society, came into school to teach the children the scriptures in Irish, a practice he considered to be most praiseworthy:

**By the domestic visits to the peasantry of persons of their own class, and speaking their own language; conversing with and reading the**

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid.

<sup>202</sup>William Shaw Mason. *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland*. (Hibernia Press Office, 16 Lr. Ormond Quay, 1816). p. 372.

<sup>203</sup>Isaac Weld. *Statistical Survey of the County of Roscommon*. (Dublin: R. Graisberry, 1832), p. 438.

<sup>204</sup>James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland*, pp. 272-273.

**scriptures to them - it makes little pretension, but brings the instruction home to their fires and bosoms.**<sup>205</sup>

Contemporary writers were unanimous in their condemnation of the charter schools [Ch. 1]. James Glassford who visited many of them, formed a very unfavourable opinion of them. Other contemporary travel writers such as Thomas Cromwell (1820), Bernard Trotter (1819), Thomas Reid (1823), and Edward Wakefield (1812), shared the highly unfavourable impressions gained by many of their predecessors.<sup>206</sup> Even Sir John Carr, a gentleman, who, as Kenneth Milne pointed out in his recent book on the charter schools, was 'by no means unfriendly to the establishment' yet described the charter schools as 'most infamous jobs ... scarcely productive of any good'.<sup>207</sup>

As leaders in the community the powerful hedge school masters were bound to come under sharp scrutiny by the contemporary writers and while the latter made many unsubstantiated claims against them, they did have some grounds for being sceptical about the masters' allegiance to the government and their loyalty to the crown. William Carleton (1794-1869), who was a past pupil of Pat Frayne's hedge school in Skelgy, Clogher, Co. Tyrone, claimed that 'disloyal principles were industriously insinuated'<sup>208</sup> into the minds of the children by the masters. Wakefield considered them to be entirely unsuitable for the profession for several reasons which he outlined as follows:

**The common schoolmaster is generally a man who was originally intended for the priesthood: but whose morals had been too bad or his habitual idleness so deeply rooted, as to prevent him improving himself for that office.**

Wakefield feared the consequences of entrusting 'persons of this kind' with the education of the poor. One likely outcome he could foresee was 'that their pupils' would 'imbibe from them enmity to England, hatred to the government and superstitious veneration for

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<sup>205</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>206</sup>Kenneth Milne. *The Irish Charter Schools 1730-1830*. (Four Courts Press, 55 Prussia St., Dublin 7, 1997), p. 303.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>208</sup>William Carleton. *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. (William Curry, Jun & Co., Dublin, 1843), Vol. 1.

\_\_\_\_\_ *'The Hedge School'*, p. 234.



old and absurd customs'.<sup>209</sup> In 1819 the Rev. William Shaw Mason expressed a view shared by many of his fellow writers employed by the Dublin Society that the government should try to get rid of the hedge school masters because of the threat they posed to the security of the state and should replace them with 'proper masters'. He wrote:

**It would be the wisdom of the government and the public to take it (ed.) out of the hands of persons ill-qualified to give it a proper direction, and to carry it on under some plan calculated to instil into children principles of moral and civil order.**<sup>210</sup>

The professional competence of the masters was called into question most notably by Sir John Carr and James Glassford, but in reality the masters had to have a considerable level of professional competence, in order to survive in a very competitive academic market and if they hadn't they would simply have had to close down their schools.

Finally, the hedge school masters were widely condemned throughout the 19th century for the reading material they permitted to be read in their schools. The education commissioners of 1806-12 and 1824-27, the bible societies, the education societies and of course the contemporary writers Dutton (1808), Wakefield (1812), William Shaw Mason (1816) and Glassford (1829) were all unanimous in their wholehearted disapproval and sense of outrage, that children should be exposed to such dangerous books. It is difficult to accept that the only reason they were so vocal in their disapproval was to discredit the masters in a bid to precipitate their replacement. A much more compelling reason would be the deep suspicion and displeasure works of fiction, fantasy and fairy lore aroused in the minds of many people living in a deeply conservative and illiberal age [Ch. 4] and in a country in the grip of the 'Second Reformation' or protestant revival. Even the learned Glassford displayed a narrowness of outlook in these matters one would not have expected. In a letter to the Earl of Roden

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<sup>209</sup>Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland*, Vol. II, p. 398.

<sup>210</sup>William Shaw Mason. *Survey of Tullaroan, or Grace's Parish in the Cantred of Grace's Country and County of Kilkenny*. (Dublin, Faulkner Press, 1819), p. 148.

in 1829 he expressed his dismay at the fact that the novels of Henry Fielding (1707-1754) and Tobias Smollett (1713-1768) were being read in the hedge schools, and indeed books which he considered to be even more objectionable. He stated:

**It is not unusual to find the children in these schools reading promiscuously some portions of scripture, along with the romances of Fielding or Smollett, or the works of authors still more objectionable.<sup>211</sup>**

The priests and the masters worked in close co-operation with regard to educating catholic children and with regard to propagating the catholic religion but when the masters transgressed the clergy were quick to use their clerical powers to reprimand them from the altar, banish them from a parish or bring about the closure of their schools. Later on in the 19th century, when Bishop Doyle, on behalf of the catholic church, sought grant aid from the government for catholic education, the church's attitude changed towards hedge schoolmasters [Ch. 1]. Doyle had no compunction then about accusing the hedge schoolmasters of ignorance and incompetence, just as Glassford and Carr had done earlier in the century. The church deliberately dismissed the professional ability of the masters to enhance its chances of securing badly needed funds. Glassford and Carr did so possibly through their own ignorance of what was actually taking place in hedge schools. A study of the professional status of the hedge schoolmaster will show that there was little basis for these allegations that masters were ill-qualified to teach. Hedge schoolmasters specialised in subject areas and very many of them reached such high levels of competency that parents conferred titles on them to acknowledge their professional status in the local community. The social status of the masters depended on their professional ability also and because of this their standing in the community was generally very high.

(vi) **The Professional Status of the Hedge Schoolmaster.**

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<sup>211</sup>James Glassford. *Letter to Rt. Hon. Earl of Roden on the Present State of Irish Education, 1829*, p. 39.

The village all declared how much he knew;  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,  
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge  
... While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amazed the gazing rustics rang'd around;  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.<sup>212</sup>

The Deserted Village (Oliver Goldsmith).

Next to the ministry of the priesthood, the teaching profession was regarded as a noble and elevated calling in 18th century Ireland and consequently both student teachers, who were aptly named poor scholars and hedge schoolmasters, were given special treatment in society. Irish society, for its part, demanded very high academic and professional standards from its educators and in order to meet these demands, poor scholars had to undergo a long and arduous training, under schoolmasters of repute. When the student had learned all that was possible, from the local hedge schoolmaster, he issued a challenge to him 'This challenge was generally couched in rhyme, and either sent by the hands of a common friend, or posted upon the chapel-door'<sup>213</sup>. The public viewed these contests with intense interest. If the student was defeated, he continued on in the school of his conqueror, but if he succeeded, he would seek out a more learned teacher. The success of the pupil was not, generally, followed by the expulsion of the master as this was merely the first 'of a series of challenges' which the pupil would have to undertake 'before he eventually settled himself in the exercise of his profession'<sup>214</sup>. During the course of his studies it wasn't unusual for the poor scholar to have to travel considerable distances to hedge schools of repute, especially if he intended to become a priest, in which case he would probably converge on the classical school at Faha in Kerry. As Robert Bell explained 'in that Province the classical scholars were always the best and most numerous, their ultimate objective was that of being admitted to the Romish

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<sup>212</sup>Donald Davie. *The Late Augustans*. (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 48, Charles St., London W1X 8AH, 1977), p. 60.

<sup>213</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274.

priesthood<sup>215</sup>. Fortunately, education was held in such high esteem, that the hospitality of the people, and the professional services of the master were offered gratuitously to him.<sup>216</sup> Carleton was the recipient of such hospitality when as a poor scholar he journeyed 'a learned knight errant, filled with a chivalrous love of letters' he was soon to discover that 'his satchel of books' was a passport to the hearts of the people.<sup>217</sup> The school at Faha, which was attended by the well-known poet and master, Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin had won for itself a national reputation, as it played host to many a student

**To such a school they were accustomed to come without books, without money, without a way of supporting themselves, to be guests at the hearthstones of these people.**<sup>218</sup>

This was a harking back to a happier age when Ireland and her monastic schools served as the university of western Europe and merited the title of 'Oileán na Naomh is na nOllamh'. The poor scholars in the Irish monastic schools were 'the young Anglo-Saxon strangers, who ... were welcomed by the Irish and supplied gratis with lodging, food and books'<sup>219</sup>.

The school at Faha came to be regarded as 'a sort of preparatory school for Salamanca,<sup>220</sup> while Louvain was the goal of many Kerry students because of burses which were founded in some universities, by and for Kerry men:

**John O'Sullivan, himself, a Kerryman and president of the Irish College, Louvain, founded a burse of 732 florins for his relations of the second degree ... this munificence was imitated by his nephew, Florence O'Sullivan, who was appointed President of the Irish College on his uncle's resignation in 1699. He endowed a scholarship of 1098 florins which, in effect, was also mainly for Kerry students, who wished to study theology, philosophy, law or medicine.**<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>Hyland and Milne. *Irish Education Documents*. Vol. 1, pp. 41-42.

<sup>216</sup>Mr. & Mrs. S.C. Hall. *Ireland, Its Scenery, Character etc.*, (London, How and Parsons, 1841), p. 240.

<sup>217</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, p. 288.

<sup>218</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 187.

<sup>219</sup>Rev. Edward Cahill. *The Native Schools of Ireland in the Penal Era*. Irish Ecclesiastical Record, (1940), p. 24.

<sup>220</sup>Sarah Atkinson. *Mary Aikenhead: Her Life, Her Works, Her Friends*. (M.H. Gill & Son, 50, Upr. Sackville St., 1879), p. 47.

<sup>221</sup>J. Anthony Gaughan. *Listowel and Its Vicinity*. (Cork, Mercier Press, 1973), pp. 210-211.

Many poor scholars remained in Ireland and continued their education in the hedge schools. The masters were pleased to extend hospitality to them as they served as advertising agents for their schools, when they returned home to their own provinces.<sup>222</sup> Having a poor scholar in his school enhanced the master's reputation and gave him added status. This was vital in such an insecure profession where a master could easily be deposed at any time, by a new challenger. When a poor scholar was finished his training in one school, it was customary for the schoolmaster to give him a letter of recommendation, to hand to his next-tutor. This was called a 'Pass'. The 'Pass' given to Richard Fitzgerald by the poet/hedge schoolmaster Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara (1715-1810) displayed a certain amount of professional snobbery as he instructed that the poor scholar should only be allowed to mix with the learned and the refined. Professional rivalry was also in evidence as he heaped scorn on his fellow professionals and competitors:

**I ordain and command that he be not forced to associate with illiterates, or cowherds, dog-boys, dog fanciers or cold-whistling fellows or with long, chilly, tiresome and talkative schoolmasters without culture, courtesy, or learning such as ... 'Giddyhead O'Hackett', 'Coxcomb O'Boland', and 'Buffoon O'Mahony', 'Tatter O'Flanagan', dirty puffy John O'Mulrooney, Bleary-eyed O'Cullenan and Giggler O'Mulcahy.<sup>223</sup>**

As soon as the poor scholar qualified as a hedge schoolmaster his first priority was to establish his own hedge school, where he in turn would enter into competition and rivalry with other hedge schoolmasters. The first step he took, on establishing himself in a school, was to write out in his best copperplate handwriting a 'flaming advertisement' detailing the subjects he had mastery of. He would then post it up on the chapel door for all to see. Carleton parodied this practice by claiming that Mat Kavanagh had proficiency in forty-nine subjects and assorted works, which included such novelties as 'stereometry, gauging, dialling, astrology, austerity, glorification, physics (by theory

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<sup>222</sup>T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*, p. 326.

<sup>223</sup>S. Hayes (ed). *A Slave of Adversity*. (Dublin, John O'Daly, 9 Anglesea St., 1843).  
Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Con-Mara, pp. 5-6.

only) and ventilation'<sup>224</sup>. When the reckless and wild Irish poet Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-84) opened his first school at the age of 18, at Gneevegiulla in Kerry, he was forced to flee the parish 'with a threatening priest behind him',<sup>225</sup> due to his indiscretions. Undaunted by this clerical rebuff, Eoghan requested the assistance of the benign Fr. Ned Fitzgerald, some 18 years later, to advertise 'from the altar that he was about to open a school at Knocknagree'<sup>226</sup>. The request was in the form of a poem entitled 'A Shagairt Ghil Cháidh'.

**Reverend Sir,**

**Please to publish from the altar of your holy mass,  
Where, the tender babes will be well off  
For it's there I'll teach them their criss cross;  
... For it's there I will teach them how to read and write;  
The Catechism I will explain  
To each young nymph and noble swain  
With all young ladies I'll engage  
To forward them with speed and care,  
With book-keeping and mensuration  
Euclid's Elements and Navigation,  
With Trigonometry and sound gauging,  
And English grammar with rhyme and reason  
With the grown up youths I'll first agree  
To instruct them well in the Rule of Three;  
Such of them as are well able,  
The cube root of me will learn  
Such as are of a tractable genius.  
With compass and rule I will teach them  
Bill, bonds and informations,  
Summons, warrants, supersedes  
Judgement tickets good  
Leases receipts in full,  
and releases, short accounts,  
with rhyme and reason  
And sweet love letters for the ladies.<sup>227</sup>**

Eoghan was prepared to cater for all age groups and to offer a wide curriculum including the writing of love letters. He was qualified to teach the classics also and being a talented Irish poet, he would no doubt have taught these subjects through Irish, but being

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<sup>224</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>225</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 189.

<sup>226</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>227</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

of a wayfaring nature 'the school did not last long'<sup>228</sup>. When Richard MacElligott (1756-1818) promoted his school at Crosby Row in Limerick city, he advertised in the *Limerick Chronicle* in a similarly boastful, extravagant style, like the one adopted by the fictitious Mat Kavanagh. One advertisement opened with the line: ... 'When ponderous polysyllables promulgate professional powers'<sup>229</sup>. In another he claimed that

**Richard MacElligott, observing with regret, the many years devoted to the Greek and Latin languages, and the very inadequate proficiency; and ever ambitious of a distinguished superiority in his pupils, has through much labour these years past, completed a plan which reduces the Greek and Latin languages to the level of the tenderest capacities ... Mac Elligott shall, in addition to the above, teach the English grammatically, and so that the entire language can be acquired by any boy of moderate talents and attention, with ease and accuracy in one year.<sup>230</sup>**

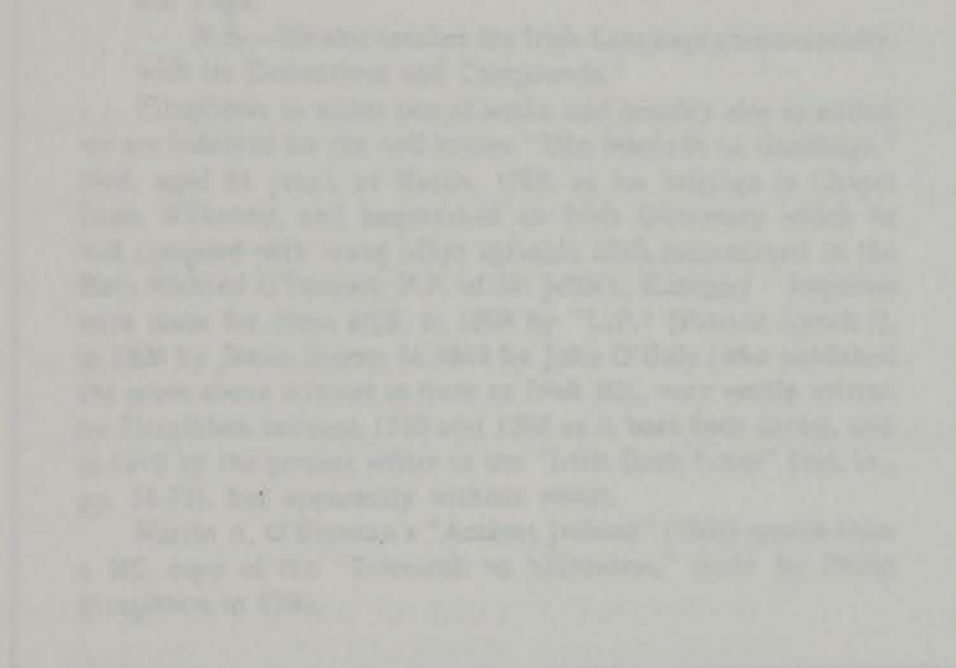


Fig. 1.1 Advertisement in *Finn's Limerick Journal*, Killybegs, in the issue dated 4-11 November 1736, of Philip Fitzgibbon, hedge-schoolmaster. Source: O.C. under 'Philip Fitzgibbon'. In *Journal of the Waterford & South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, January, 1926, p. 58.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid.

<sup>229</sup>Robert Herbert. 'Four Limerick Hedge-Schoolmasters', pp. 48-49.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

Philip Fitzgibbon.—The following advertisement appeared in the issue dated 8-11 November, 1786, of "Finn's Leinster Journal" (Kilkenny):—

"Philip Fitzgibbon, Kilkenny, Classic Teacher, and Professor of Book-keeping and Mathematics, these sixteen Years past, with the approbation of his Employers, in his private and public Capacity) has opened School in John street. He teaches English Grammar and Geography, the Use of the Globe and Maps, both plain and spherical, and to find the Bearing and Distance of Places by Multiplication and Division of tabular Numbers, of his own Formation, in one Page.

N.B.—He also teaches the Irish Language grammatically, with its Derivatives and Compounds."

Fitzgibbon to whose pen as scribe and possibly also as author we are indebted for the well known "Dán-Mholadh na Gaedhilge," died, aged 81 years, in March, 1792, at his lodgings in Chapel Lane, Kilkenny, and bequeathed an Irish Dictionary which he had compiled with many other valuable Irish manuscripts to the Rev. Richard O'Donnell, P.P. of St. John's, Kilkenny. Inquiries were made for those MSS. in 1808 by "L.P." (Patrick Lynch?), in 1826 by James Scurry, in 1844 by John O'Daly (who published the poem above referred to from an Irish MS., very neatly written by Fitzgibbon between 1750 and 1785 as it bore both dates), and in 1918 by the present writer in the "Irish Book Lover" (vol. ix., pp. 74-75), but apparently without result.

Martin A. O'Brennan's "Ancient Ireland" (1855) quotes from a MS. copy of the "Tuireamh na hÉireann," made by Philip Fitzgibbon in 1780.

**Fig. 1.1** Advertisement in Finn's Leinster Journal, Kilkenny, in the issue dated 8-11 November 1786, of Philip Fitzgibbon, hedge schoolmaster. Séamus Ó Casaide 'Philip Fitzgibbon'. In *Journal of the Waterford & South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, January, 1920, p. 50.



It was common practice for masters to refer to themselves as 'Professors' or 'Philomaths' in their advertisements. Mat Kavanagh was a 'Philomath and Professor of the Learned Languages'<sup>231</sup>. Philip Fitzgibbon (1711-1792) placed an advertisement in Finn's Leinster Journal in Kilkenny in an edition dated 8 - 11 November, 1786, in which he referred to himself as 'Philip Fitzgibbon ... Classic Teacher, and Professor of Book-Keeping and Mathematics'<sup>232</sup>.

The professional status of the hedge schoolmaster was usually determined by his reputation for erudition and his success as a teacher. His immediate aim however, was to achieve a name for wit and learning and to this end he was forced to engage in ludicrous pedantry in order to live up to parental expectations. This he achieved by a timely use of crambos, which he kept stored in his mind 'for accidental encounter' ones 'which would have puzzled Euclid or Sir Isaac Newton himself'<sup>233</sup>. He spoke on an exalted plane, in words which were 'truly sesquipedalian' and which were 'dark and difficult to understand'. Mat Kavanagh gave a display of his classical learning, in the presence of a parent visiting his school, knowing the reverence which such a display of learning could excite:

**Lanty Cassidy, are you gettin' on wid yer Stereometry?  
Festina, mi discipuli, vocabo Homerun, mox atque mox.**

**Silence, boys - tace - "conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant"**.<sup>234</sup>

It was vital for the master's reputation that he should impress parents, so that they might spread his name, and thereby increase the number of pupils attending his school, as his very livelihood depended on the fees they paid. R.L. Edgeworth, who was a member of the Board of Education stated in a letter to the Lord Primate, that 'the best teacher ... soon attracts all the scholars, and the inferior master is soon obliged to give way'<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, p. 296.

<sup>232</sup>Séamus Ó Casaide. 'Philip Fitzgibbon'. In *Journal of the Waterford & South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, January 1920, p. 50.

<sup>233</sup>op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>235</sup>The Fourteenth Report of the Board of Education 1806-1812. App. No. 3, p. 238.

which meant that the hedge schoolmaster lived with a sense of insecurity, as he never knew when a rival was going to set up in opposition to him, having offered him a challenge, that he might lose. A situation such as this occurred when two poet/hedge schoolmasters were competing to attract the same pupils to their schools, as in the case of Peadar Ó Doirmín at Forkhill, Co. Antrim, who did not relish the idea of Muiris Ó Gormáin setting up in opposition to him. He decided to resort to the ancient bardic tradition of satirising the weaknesses of a rival. He did this in a bilingual poem called *Suirí Mhuiris Uí Ghormáin* in which he poked fun at Muiris's poor command of the English language.

**'What is your name, or (what) town was your home?  
 Fhreagair mé scéimh na cruinne go léir.'  
 'Me is christened Moresius Gormáin cóir.  
 I is very schoolmaster, dar by me salvation  
 shall carry good favour for you go deo.'**<sup>236</sup>

After this professional insult Muiris fled the district. Some masters however adopted a more diplomatic approach in order to stay in business. Peter Daly excelled in this particular art, as the following flattering stanzas will show, which were addressed to the parents of his students at Bohermeen, Navan. In it he made a subtle reference to his rivals, one of whom was probably Peter Gallegan, who were suspected of taking assistance from the bible societies, although there is evidence that he 'himself was something of a religious opportunist'<sup>237</sup>.

**With all the desires that Friendship inspires  
 I offer my thankful Endeavours  
 To those who have been my Friends in Boarmeen,  
 Conferring their generous favours-**

**In teaching the young our old Mother Tongue  
 At least I may venture to mention  
 I'm better than some who greedily thumb  
 The Bible-Society-Pension.**

**I'll never forget the moment I met  
 Those true - born sons of shillaly**

<sup>236</sup>Seán de Rís. Peadar Ó Doirmín. (Clóchuallacht L. & S. Mac Gabhann (É) Teo, Dún Dealgan, 1973), p. 29.

<sup>237</sup>Robin Flower. *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*. (William Clowes & Sons Ltd., 1926), p. 139. Egerton 208.

**With whom I would fain for ever remain  
Their dutiful Friend - Peter Daly.<sup>238</sup>**

It was poverty which forced Peter Gallegan to draw 'The Bible Society Pension', a situation he bitterly resented. Over a period of twelve years he had taught at 16 different locations, and for one third of that time he had no school at all.<sup>239</sup> Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (1766-1837) suffered from the same trials and tribulations, in a volatile teaching market.

**He had taken to teaching as a means of existence, and a precarious one it was at the time. In 1810 he was at Glanmire; in 1812-13 at Boherard. ... From 1815-1819 he taught in the city. In 1820 he went to Na Cloicíní, or Clogheen, at the Kerry Pike.<sup>240</sup>**

The rates of payment per subject varied, depending on the extent of the poverty in an area, but the normal rates were:

Literature	1/8	Reading	2/-
Writing	2/3	Latin	11/- to 12/-
Maths	4/- or 7/- depending on the master's reputation.		

Poverty was often so acute that the hedge schoolmaster did not get paid and was obliged on occasions 'to have recourse to the magistrate' to recover his 'miserable wages of 1s 8d per quarter'<sup>241</sup>. Sometimes he lived with a family or alternatively, travelled from house to house to teach the children 'for his diet'<sup>242</sup>. Carleton's teacher, Pat Skelgy, or the fictional Mat Kavanagh was paid in kind, with 'fitches of bacon, dishes of eggs, turf, poteen', and 'crate after crate of turf'<sup>243</sup>. One of the lowest payments recorded was 6d a quarter or 'rael sa ráithe' to the poet from Iveragh, Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin. Tomás was quite disenchanted with the people of Poll na nGeatairidhe who paid such a derisory sum to him, that he expressed his sense of humiliation in verse

**I bPoll na nGeatairidhe 'seadh fuaireas mo náire,**

<sup>238</sup>P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>239</sup>Ms. G. 809. 'Peter Gallegan - Collections in English and Irish, entirely written by Himself'. (National Library of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin 1), pp. 789-90.

<sup>240</sup>Tadhg Ó Donnchadha. 'Micheál Óg Ó Longáin', p. 230.

<sup>241</sup>William Shaw Mason. *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey*, p. 374.

<sup>242</sup>Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland*, p. 399.

<sup>243</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, p. 295.

**Ag múineadh páistidhe ar rael sa ráithe**

**In Poll na Geatairidhe I experienced humiliation  
Teaching children for 6d a quarter.<sup>244</sup>**

A contemporary Irish poet and classical scholar, Donnchadh Rua Mac Conmara (1715-1812) complained also that schoolmastering was an empty trade, in a poem called *Eachtra Ghiolla an Amaráin* or *The Adventures of a Luckless Fellow*.

**Múineadh scoile dob' obair dom laethibh,  
'S a rún don phobul gurbhfholamh an ceird sin.<sup>245</sup>**

**Teaching school was my daily work, and to  
tell you the truth, it wasn't a paying job.**

Complaints such as these were exceptional so that one can only assume that the status enjoyed by the master, and 'the knowledge that a warm welcome awaited him whenever he pushed open the half-door of the humblest dwelling'<sup>246</sup>, was adequate compensation for any deprivations that he suffered.

The good character of the master was on occasions impugned by such writers as Wakefield, who accused him of immorality<sup>247</sup> and by the anonymous pamphleteer of 1820 who added 'inebriety to his other accomplishments'<sup>248</sup>, a claim supported by the Select Committee on the New Plan of Education in Ireland (1837), who described the master as being 'incompetent, of harmless character, but disposed to tipple'<sup>249</sup>. This charge might well have been made against the entire population because by the end of the 18th century 'tippling' had become a national hobby, and one which was encouraged by the government, because of the revenue received from the sale of spirits. In 1791 the amount of duty-paid spirits consumed by each member of the population, was over one

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<sup>244</sup>Séamus Dubh. *Amhráin Tomás Ruaidh. The Songs of Tomás Ruadh O'Sullivan – The Iveragh Poet (1785-1848)*. (Dublin, M.H. Gill & Son Ltd., 1914), p. 22.

<sup>245</sup>P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 121.

<sup>246</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>247</sup>Edward Wakefield. *An Account of Ireland*, p. 398.

<sup>248</sup>*Thoughts and Suggestions on the Education of the Peasantry in Ireland*, p. 13.

<sup>249</sup>Report from the Select Committee on the New Plan of Education in Ireland H.C. 1837, viii, Vol. I, p. 314.

gallon,<sup>250</sup> and this estimate didn't take into account the many thriving illicit distilling businesses spread throughout the country. It should be noted also that these allegations were never substantiated. A more reliable source would be the parochial returns from the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, which were filled in by clergymen, all of which vouched for the probity of the master. Right through the returns the teacher was spoken of as 'of excellent character', of 'good character', '... moral men' and 'of quiet, inoffensive habits'<sup>251</sup>.

Many of these men saw teaching as their mission in life. It was their vocation and they devoted their lives to learning and to teaching. For some of them, it was a hereditary profession - for Irish scholars such as Laurence Denn of Waterford and his son Pádraig, or Amhlaóibh Ó Suilleabháin and his father John, both of whom taught together at the Crossroads at Callan. They were well equipped to withstand the insults that were hurled at them or the competition that forever challenged them, because they had the privilege of being fêted locally and of having their academic achievements acknowledged. The people displayed their appreciation by conferring honorary titles on their finest poets and scholars, titles such as 'The Bright Star of mathematical learning', 'The Silver Tongue of Munster'<sup>252</sup>, 'Eoghan an Bhéal Bhinn', 'The Star of Ennistymon', 'The Great O'Baggott' and 'The Great O'Brien par excellence' [Table 3.1]. In these circumstances one can understand why the hedge schoolmasters possessed such an inordinate deal of professional pride. Even in retirement, they retained their status by travelling from school to school. Carleton recalled how selective his teacher, 'The Great O'Brien' was, about the schools he agreed to visit. He was not prepared to associate with his intellectual inferiors by accepting their invitations 'for he spoke of dunces, with the most dignified contempt, and the general impression was, that he would scorn to avail himself of their hospitality'<sup>253</sup>. He realised that a visit from him was considered an honour and

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<sup>250</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town Under the Georges*. (W. Tempest Dundalgan Press, Dundalk, 1949), p. 129.

<sup>251</sup>Rev. Martin Brenan. *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>252</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 279.

<sup>253</sup>William Carleton. 'The Hedge School', p. 276.

that it would raise the status of the hedge schoolmaster whose school he visited. Mr. and Mrs. Hall met an equally superior minded master in Kerry - the domine Mr. Devereaux - 'no Domine ever entertained a more exalted opinion of his own learning or held ignoraamus (as he pronounced the word) in greater contempt than Mr. Devereaux'<sup>254</sup>. He warned the poor scholar to maintain the highest 'classical' standards when he visited the ladies in the Big House. He was to address them in Latin, 'Greek was only to be given on request', which request was a real possibility as the poor scholar had the distinct advantage of being his pupil.<sup>255</sup>

(vii) The Social Status of the Hedge Schoolmaster.

**next to the lord of the manor, the parson and the priest, he is the most important personage in the parish.**<sup>256</sup>

The hedge schoolmaster was a central figure in the life of the community and his social status was therefore enormous. According to Carleton he was 'the master of ceremonies at all wakes and funerals and usually sat among a crowd of the village sages, engaged in exhibiting his own learning and in recounting the number of his religious disputations'<sup>257</sup>. Croker estimated that his standing in the community was almost on a par with that of the parson and the priest.

**In Munster the village master forms a peculiar character; and, next to the lord of the manor, the parson and the priest, he is the most important personage in the parish. His 'academic grove' is a long thatched house, generally the largest in the place, surrendered, when necessary, for the waking of a dead body, or the celebration of mass while the chapel is undergoing repairs; and on Sundays, when not otherwise engaged, it is used as a jig or dancing house**<sup>258</sup>

His status was enhanced by his displays of intellectual superiority:

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<sup>254</sup>Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall. *Ireland Its Scenery, Character etc.*, p. 265.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>256</sup>T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*, p. 326.

<sup>257</sup>William Carleton. *The Hedge School*, p. 322.

<sup>258</sup>op. cit.

**In an evening, assembly of village statesmen he holds the most distinguished place, from his historical information, pompous eloquence, and classical erudition.<sup>259</sup>**

He worked closely with the priest, not only in his capacity as coadjutor and Sunday School teacher but also in his role as self-appointed judge of religious values and morals. If a catholic converted or taught Irish in a bible society school, the master would reprimand him in verse and, the people feared the satire of the poet/hedge schoolmaster just as much as the priest's tirade from the pulpit. When Mr. Mahony of Iveragh, 'abandoned the ancient Faith', he had to bear many personal insults, but there was one which proved intolerable for him. 'I could stand them all' he claimed, 'but oh! to be sung about in the Cahirciveen fair by the villainous Tomás Rua'<sup>260</sup>. The teacher also filled the role of Parish Clerk, an honorary position which afforded him the patronage of the priest, and consequently greater security of tenure, as the priest had the power to drive him out of the parish. Errant hedge schoolmasters of poetic bent had been known to have been banished from areas by irate parish priests, poets such as Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784) from Gneevegiulla and Andrias Mac Craith (1710-1790) from Croom, Co. Limerick, Donnchadh Rua MacConmara (1715-1810) from Sliabh Gua in Waterford and Peadar Ó Doirmín (1704-1768) from Forkhill, Co. Antrim.

The master served his community in a multiplicity of roles, sometimes out of a sense of civic duty but more often still out of economic necessity. He was the village scribe employed by the unlettered. He was also the 'cheap attorney of the neighbourhood'<sup>261</sup>, who carried out an immense amount of legal work. Peter Gallegan, Eoghan Rua and a Cork diarist for the year 1793<sup>262</sup>, named John Fitzgerald, were all in a position to carry out legal transactions. An anonymous contemporary observer, with strong racial prejudice, doubted whether these teachers had the integrity to conduct such business

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<sup>259</sup>Ibid., pp. 328-329.

<sup>260</sup>Séamus Dubh. *Amhráin Tomáis Ruadh*, p. 18.

<sup>261</sup>Thoughts and Suggestions on the Education of the Irish Peasantry, p. 12.

<sup>262</sup>Cork Historical and Archaeological Society Journal. Series 2. Vol. XXIV, p. 154.

honestly. To him the master was little more than 'the fabricator of false leases and surreptitious deeds and conveyances'<sup>263</sup>. We know also that most of the masters were engaged in transcribing the manuscripts while others still were forced to work as part-time labourers 'for a subsistence'<sup>264</sup>. 'In the case of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, teaching was combined with intermittent bouts of activity as a migrant labourer'<sup>265</sup>. David Manson, the Belfast hedge schoolmaster was also a brewer while Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin had a drapery business. In Co. Kilkenny teachers, with special expertise at accounts, found ready employment as clerks in the collieries.<sup>266</sup> The master was also the village surveyor, a service considered to be vital in the community. J.E. Bicheno was bemused by this requirement of the Irish people, considering how little land they themselves had to measure. He contended that the reason why the teaching of arithmetic and geometry was carried to such lengths in the hedge schools was because of 'the practical application of them in measuring land, which is carried to such minuteness, as seems quite ridiculous to those who have been used to see farms of 500 and 1,000 acres'<sup>267</sup>.

Creative teachers with a gift for oratory, like the Waterford hedge schoolmaster Thomas Nash (1826-1847), who was a friend of Thomas Francis Meagher, (1823-1867) added sparkle to the political life of that city for over 20 years.

**During the days of the Catholic Rent, he was conspicuous.  
In Stuart's election which broke down the prestige  
and power of the Beresfords he was conspicuous ...  
In 1843 he emerged from his classic seclusion ...  
And appeared once more as a Demosthenes on  
the hill of Ballybricken, the Acropolis of Waterford.<sup>268</sup>**

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<sup>263</sup>op. cit.

<sup>264</sup>Hely Dutton. *Stat. Survey of the Co. of Clare*, p. 236.

<sup>265</sup>Louis M. Cullen. *Life in Ireland*. (B.T. Batisford Ltd., 4, Fitzhardinge St., London W.1., 1968), p. 100.

<sup>266</sup>W. Tighe. *Statistical Observations Relative to the County of Kilkenny*. (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, No. 10, Back-Lane, 1802), p. 514.

<sup>267</sup>J.E. Bicheno. *Ireland and Its Economy*. (London, John Murray, Albermarle St., 1830), p. 285.

<sup>268</sup>Arthur Griffith (ed.). *Speeches of Thomas Francis Meagher in Ireland 1846-1848*. (M.H. Gill & Son Ltd., 50, Upr. O'Connell St., Dublin, 1916).

\_\_\_\_\_ 'Meagher of the Sword', p. 281.



While Nash himself was a pacifist he was fondly remembered by the 1847 revolutionary 'Meagher of the Sword' as 'the schoolmaster' who:

**was full of humour, full of poetry, full of gentleness and goodness ... a patriot from the heart and an orator by nature. Uncultivated, luxuriant, wild, his imagination produced in profusion the strangest metaphors, running riot in tropes, allegories, analogies and visions.**<sup>269</sup>

Nash's social status was such that he could share a platform at a public meeting with 'The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Waterford and the Right Rev. Dr. Foran',<sup>270</sup> the catholic bishop of the city. Audiences enjoyed the 'audacity, humour and pedantry'<sup>271</sup> of his speeches, and they always reserved the loudest cheer for him. At one meeting he enumerated the evils which legislative union with Britain had produced, and he spoke eloquently and angrily against the Government's threats of coercion. He defied the Government, who were the enemies of his land, to come and fight

**'Let them come on', he exclaimed, 'let them come on; let them draw the sword; and then woe to the conquered! - every potato field shall be a Marathon, and every breen a Thermopylae.'**<sup>272</sup>

He was a confirmed O'Connellite but he understood why the Young Irelanders were frustrated with the Liberator's peaceful policy. In his customary charming style he spoke of the Young Irelander's newspaper *The Nation* in superlatives of praise. 'It was the greatest paper published! Nothing could transcend the sublimity of its teachings! The prose left the Dream of Plato in the background, and the poetry eclipsed the Iliad!' With touching humour he made his dying request 'to have the last number of *The Nation* stitched about me as a shroud, so that when I appear hereafter I may have something national about me'<sup>273</sup>, but unfortunately, like so many other hedge schoolmasters such as James MacElligott, Eoghan Rua and Seán Ó Coiléan, Thomas Nash was destined to die 'in utter poverty'<sup>274</sup>.

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<sup>269</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>271</sup>P.J. Dowling. *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, p. 113.

<sup>272</sup>op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>273</sup>'*Meagher of the Sword*', p. 288.

<sup>274</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

The poet/hedge schoolmasters were deep in the affections of the Irish people. The lyrical poet from Cork Seán Ó Coileáin (1754-1817) was so beloved by them that he was known as 'The Silver Tongue of Munster'<sup>275</sup>. Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin was to them 'Eoghan an Bhéil Bhínn'<sup>276</sup>, 'Eoghan of the Sweet Mouth', whose musical verse 'had for them the double gift of the drug: it put pain aside, and it raised vision'<sup>277</sup>. They entertained the people according to their own unique styles. Some of them were endowed with the ability to laugh at themselves and their own foibles. One such poet was Andrias Mac Craith, affectionately referred to as the 'Merry Pedlar', because of his reputation as 'the wildest of all the bards of that wild time'. He converted to the protestant religion for social advancement, but the protestant minister simply 'threw him out', of his church. Andrias was greatly entertained by the occurrence and decided to immortalise the event in verse 'Since he had ceased to be either Protestant or Papist he must needs become either a Calvinist or an Arian'<sup>278</sup>.

There were other innocuous forms that poetry took, composed as it was to release tension, and the ones that appealed mostly to the Irish were those which made the enemy appear ridiculous and which prompted laughter. Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara, the outstanding Irish and Latin teacher, who taught in Waterford composed a bilingual poem in which he used two complimentary lines in English, praising 'noble George', followed by two denunciatory lines in Irish against 'that brute', George, which the enemy could not understand. Like many of the poets he used the Irish language as a 'protecting hedge behind which' he 'could snipe at the English'<sup>279</sup>.

**We'll fear no cannon, nor war's alarms**  
**While noble George will be our guide,**  
*O Christ may I see the Pretender's arms*  
*Safe home from exile - and that brute destroyed,*<sup>280</sup>

<sup>275</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>278</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>279</sup>Vivien Mercier. *The Irish Comic Tradition*, p. 171.

<sup>280</sup>Vivien Mercier. *The Irish Comic Tradition*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 171.

Riocárd Báiréad (1739-1819) the talented song writer, satirist and hedge schoolmaster from Leam, Belmullet, Co. Mayo, who was reputed to have been able to teach at least four or five languages,<sup>281</sup> penned a poetic satire in the style of Swift, whom he greatly admired. In his mock elegy called Eoghan Cóir - Owen the Honest and Humane, he told of the deep sorrow felt by the people because of the death of so lovable a person as Eoghan Cóir who was in fact a rapacious landlord, hated by the people. The chief mourners were in reality two bitter enemies of Eoghan, but 'The like of the bawling and keening was never heard in the land before'. Riocárd Báiréad wasn't at all surprised by this phenomenon, in view of Eoghan's endearing nature. He ended his poem with an ironical sting as he prayed fervently that 'According as' Eoghan 'was to others, may Christ be the same to him'<sup>282</sup>.

There was little malice in their humour. Poetry and song was their palliative against the ills of the day and it was often the masters who taught their children, in the hedge schools, who supplied it.

(viii) Enterprise and cultural survival - the Role of the Hedge Schoolmaster.

**... and all the time there was a soul under the ribs of this death; that the music which was the life of that soul had strength and beauty in it.**<sup>283</sup>

The Irish peasantry were a spirited, tenacious people who survived and sometimes thrived by being enterprising and resilient. They knew that if they were to provide their children with an education, they had to employ some imaginative strategies for making money, because hedge schoolmasters relied mainly on the fees paid to them by the poor, for the continued existence of their schools.

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<sup>281</sup>T.F. O'Rahilly. 'A Song by Richard Barret', In *Gadelica: A Journal of Modern-Irish Studies*, Vol. I. (1912-1913), pp. 112-126.

<sup>282</sup>op. cit.

<sup>283</sup>Daniel Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 19.

Some resourceful parents used their 'rude habitations' to provide a board and lodgings service. They advertised by placing a board at the side of the cabin door, which read 'dry lodgings and tobacco'. Sometimes it was just 'good dry lodgings' which were offered, other times it was 'lodgings and snuff'. Some families advertised the sale of a single item, for instance, when they wished to advertise the sale of milk, they hung out a white rag on a stick.<sup>284</sup> Philip Luckombe described these cabins as 'despicable hovels'<sup>285</sup> and he doubted very much whether the guests were ever afforded, what could reasonably be termed 'dry' lodgings. Richard Twiss was equally sceptical. Upon observing a board with the words 'Good dry lodgings' placed over the door or chimney, as the same opening served for both, he decided to continue walking on.<sup>286</sup>

Some poor people had sufficient resources to establish themselves as inn keepers, but here again, visitors to Ireland were generally critical of the quality of service they offered. As Jonah Barrington explained 'the poor people did their best to entertain their guests, but did not understand their trade; and even had it been otherwise, they had neither furniture, nor money, nor credit, nor cattle, nor customers enough to keep things going well together'.<sup>287</sup> However bad Irish inns were, Barrington was convinced that they were still better than 'the "Red Cow" in John Bull', and that 'whatever might have been the quality, there was plenty of something or other always to be had at the inns to assuage hunger and thirst'.<sup>288</sup>

Another business venture entered into by the peasantry was the lucrative if somewhat risky, illicit distilling trade, the profits from which helped to pay the rent, tithes, dues and the master's fees. Great secrecy usually surrounded these activities and it was

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<sup>284</sup>Philip Luckombe. *A Tour Through Ireland*, p. 43.

<sup>285</sup>Ibid.

<sup>286</sup>Richard Twiss. *A Tour in Ireland in 1775*. (J. Robson, New Bond St., 1776), p. 73.

<sup>287</sup>Jonah Barrington. *Personal Sketches and Recollections of His Own Time*. (Blackwell Publishing, 26 Eustace St., Dublin 2, 1997), p. 62-63. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1829.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

essential for its success to involve people who could be trusted and to find a location for the still, which wouldn't draw down the attention of the excise officer. The poor people of Erris Co. Mayo, approached the most trustworthy person they knew, who was their local priest and sought his permission to use his chapel as a distillery. He co-operated for three reasons, because he saw it as a guarantee that his dues would be paid, he knew also that it would lead to the steady growth of oats and barley, but above all, he knew it would result in a steady cash flow into the pockets of his flock. The distillery was discovered in the chapel by an excise officer with a fine social conscience, he knew that 'to leave it standing, would be contrary to the fiscal statute' but 'to level it would be sacrilege'.<sup>289</sup> Obviously, the majority of excise officers had no such scruples because between the years 1802 and 1806, no fewer than 13,439 unlicensed stills had been seized by the government.<sup>290</sup>

The daily challenge which poverty posed did little to dampen the spirits of the people or to diminish the humanity and good nature of a people who were ever willing to welcome the visitor and share the little they had. It is true that sometimes they were suspicious of strangers, fearing that they 'might be excise officers or members of the press gang in disguise',<sup>291</sup> but John Bush, an Englishman, was greeted with the utmost civility: 'Miserable and oppressed, as far too many of them are, an Englishman will find as much civility, in general, as amongst the same class in his own country'.<sup>292</sup> Arthur Young was impressed by their hospitality, especially when he considered their own abject condition, 'their hospitality to all comers, be their own poverty ever so pinching, has too much merit to be forgotten'<sup>293</sup>. Coquebert de Montbret was convinced that the catholic religion had this effect on the people, 'a religion that encourages politeness and leniency'<sup>294</sup>. Not only were they kind to strangers but they gave charity with such an air of politeness as to

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<sup>289</sup>Rev. Caesar Otway. *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly*. (Dublin: Wm. Curry Jn. & Co., 1841), p. 362.

<sup>290</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 129.

<sup>291</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 152.

<sup>292</sup>John Bush. *Hibernia Curiosa*, p. 26.

<sup>293</sup>Arthur Young. *A Tour in Ireland*, ed. C. Maxwell, p. 202.

<sup>294</sup>Coquebert de Montbret, 'A New View of 18th Century Life in Kerry', p. 98.

avoid humiliating the recipient. When De Latocnaye arrived at the door of a miserable cabin in Waterford, owned by a poor woman whose sailor husband had gone to sea three years previously, not alone did she offer him shelter but also 'a few potatoes, part of the alms she had received during the day'<sup>295</sup>. He had to share the cabin with half a dozen nearly naked children, a pig, a dog, a cat, two hens and a duck. The novelty of his situation amused him. He 'felt as if transported to the ark', and believed himself 'to be Noah'<sup>296</sup>. He had great difficulty getting the poor woman 'to accept a miserable shilling'.<sup>297</sup>

In the 18th century it was the custom, throughout most of the country, for 'peasants to sit with their doors open at meal-times as an invitation to those that were passing to partake of their homely fare'.<sup>298</sup> This practice obviated the necessity for poor laws in Ireland until as late as 1838, as the poor regarded it as their duty to look after beggars. Coquebert noted that 'the best place at the fire' was 'reserved for the poor man'.<sup>299</sup> Neither did they believe in class distinction but welcomed the gentleman<sup>300</sup> as well as the pauper, and shared their bowl of potatoes with him. The 'pig' was 'turned out to make room for the gentleman' according to Carr. S.C. Curwen, the retired M.P. for Cumberland, on visiting Ireland in 1818 praised the generosity of the peasants and confirmed that 'any stranger entering at meal times' could 'without ceremony, sit down and partake with the family'.<sup>301</sup> Curwen was surprised at the high spirits and the warm atmosphere that filled these miserable cabins. Contrary to one's natural expectations, there exuded from these unlikely quarters 'warmth of heart - an overflowing of the

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<sup>295</sup>John Stevenson. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*, p. 68.

<sup>296</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>298</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, 2nd ed., p. 152.

<sup>299</sup>John Stevenson. *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland*, p. 69.

<sup>300</sup>John Carr. *The Stranger in Ireland in 1805*. (Richard Phillips, No. 6, Bridge St., Blackfriars, 1806), p. 252.

<sup>301</sup>John P. Harrington. *The English Traveller in Ireland*. (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 68 Mountjoy Square, 1991), p. 220.

kindest domestic affections, and of the purest joys of life'.<sup>302</sup> Like Coquebert de Montbret, Curwen was struck by the affection they displayed for their families.

**In no country are conjugal and parental affections exceeded, more warmly or powerfully felt, or more sincerely and unaffectedly exhibited, than in Ireland, it is these and these alone, which communicate to the wretched cabin an interest and a charm which recompense the cottier's toil, and compensate all other privations.**<sup>303</sup>

Though poor in worldly possessions, the peasants had a rich treasury of folk culture, which had been handed down to them by previous generations and which was carefully nurtured for them by their poets and hedge schoolmasters.

The hedge schoolmasters did much to raise the spirits of the people during the dark days of the penal laws and indeed through subsequent natural disasters. The songs of Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin, the postmaster, turned hedge schoolmaster, allowed the people of Iveragh, Co. Kerry to release their pent-up anger, at the high-handed approach of tithe proctors, those 'men of evil'. It helped them also to celebrate when the 'poor widow's cow', 'was rescued from the tithe proctor'.<sup>304</sup> On a winter's evening large gatherings of people would assemble around the turf fire in a cabin to hear the contents of what T. Crofton Croker was pleased to call 'monotonous olios' but which the poor looked upon as 'a treat of the highest order'.<sup>305</sup> Coquebert de Montbret was quite impressed with the peasants' pre-occupation with cultural pursuits. He hadn't expected to find such an appreciation of poetry among the poor, that in one Gaeltacht area he visited in Munster, he met a beggar-woman, who appealed for alms in verse.<sup>306</sup> This same reverence for tradition was to be observed also in Dungiven and remote parts of the north. William Shaw Mason conducted a small experiment to test the accuracy of the old seanachies,

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<sup>302</sup>S.C. Curwen, M.P. *Observations on the State of Ireland*. (Baldwin, Cardock & Joy, 47 Paternoster Row, 1818), p. 169.

<sup>303</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>304</sup>Séamus Dubh. Amhráin Tomáis Ruaidh. *The Songs of Tomás Ruadh O'Sullivan - The Iveragh Poet (1785-1848)*. (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son Ltd., 1914), p. 18.

<sup>305</sup>T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*, pp. 331-332.

<sup>306</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A New View of 18th Century Life in Kerry', p. 100.

while they recited 'poems attributed to Ossian, and other Bardic remains'. He engaged the services of a young mountaineer, named Bernard Mac-Loskie, who was a good Latin scholar and well acquainted 'with the native traditions, customs and language'<sup>307</sup>, who wrote down eight Ossianic poems as they were recited. Later on Mason compared their accuracy, against those published in a volume entitled *Transactions of the Gaelic Society*, 'and strange as it may seem, they were found to agree together word for word'<sup>308</sup>, with a few minor exceptions. The reason for 'the accurate preservation of these ancient poems' was the professional approach adopted by the seanachies themselves. They frequently met to recite their traditional stories and if anyone repeated a passage, which appeared to another to be incorrect, he was immediately stopped, the matter was then debated, and the dispute was 'referred to a vote of the meeting, and the decision of the majority' then became 'imperative on the subject for the future'.<sup>309</sup> Little wonder then that the oral tradition was so strong and that the written account of it was preserved so accurately.

Love of music and dance contributed in no small measure to the vivacity and cheerfulness of the people. Arthur Young considered them to be much more sociable, personable and extrovert than his fellow-countrymen. He wrote:

**the circumstances which struck me most in the common Irish were, vivacity and a great and eloquent volubility of speech ... They are infinitely more cheerful and lively than anything we commonly see in England, having nothing of that incivility of sullen silence with which so many Englishmen seem to wrap themselves up, as if retiring within their own importance.**<sup>310</sup>

Young couldn't understand how a poor people could set such a high value on art and culture, that they would actually pay dancing masters 6d a quarter to teach their children to dance. Neither did the masters display any narrowness of outlook and while they taught the Irish jig which was danced 'with a luxuriant expression', they also taught

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<sup>307</sup>William Shaw Mason. *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland*. (Dublin: Hibernia Press Office, 16 Lower Ormond Quay, 1816), p. 317.

<sup>308</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>310</sup>Arthur Young. 'A Tour in Ireland'. In *A Stranger in Ireland*, p. 202.



minuets and country dances, and, there was even 'some talk of cotillions coming in'.<sup>311</sup> In the late 18th century the dancing masters' creative talents reached new heights when they incorporated quadrilles, into the native Irish jig and reel steps, by the adoption of faster rhythms. The Irish style quadrilles which had been introduced into Ireland by the soldiers who had returned home from the Napoleonic Wars were to become the most popular dance in the Irish countryside for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>312</sup> The cultural survival of the people depended to a large extent on the hedge schoolmasters as it was in the hedge schools that the people developed an appreciation of music, song, dance, poetry and drama. It was this love of the arts which raised their spirits and sustained them through very difficult times. Travellers to Ireland were surprised by the spirit of the people and their capacity to rise above their miserable living conditions. Charles Topham Bowden, the English officer, touring Ireland in 1791, was at a loss to understand how 'Amidst the unspeakable miseries'<sup>313</sup> the peasants could 'enjoy in a very exalted degree poetry and song'<sup>314</sup>. Providence, he felt 'had given them the talent of soothing woe'.<sup>315</sup> Even though he did not understand the Irish language, he found the Irish airs haunting in their beauty. He often 'sat under a hedge and listened to the rustic songs of those peasants, while at labour, with a pleasure that transcended any "he" had ever felt at Vauxhall'.<sup>316</sup> John Carr echoed Bowden's sentiments. He too found the peasantry 'uncommonly attached to their native melodies'<sup>317</sup>, some of which Carr felt were 'exquisitely beautiful'<sup>318</sup>.

There were occasions during the 'long peace', which marked the period between the Williamite wars and the 1798 rebellion, when the upper classes in Irish society shared some of the cultural pursuits of the lower classes<sup>319</sup>. Nowhere was this more apparent

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<sup>311</sup>Ibid.

<sup>312</sup>Breandán Breathnach. 'The Dancing Master'. In *Ceol*, iii (1970), p. 117.

<sup>313</sup>Charles Topham Bowden. *A Tour Through Ireland*, p. 165.

<sup>314</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>315</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid., pp. 165-166.

<sup>317</sup>John Carr. *The Stranger in Ireland*, 1805, p. 253.

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>319</sup>Sean Connolly. 'Ag Déanamh Commanding', p. 11. In *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850*.

than in the attendance at that great institute of élite culture - the theatre, by the lower classes and in the attendance at, and participation in, the national game of hurling, by the upper classes. With regard to the theatre, Dublin had 'a vigorous stage' in the 18th century. Philip Lucombe (1780) mentioned two theatres and singled out the one in Crow Street for particular praise. He wrote:

**Among the other amusements of this Metropolis are two theatres. The old house in Smock Alley, not so large as the new in Crow Street, which is nearly the size of that of Drury Lane, is one of the most elegant and best constructed theatres, for the advantage of both audience and actors, of any in the three kingdoms.<sup>320</sup>**

Aspiring actors trained firstly in the Dublin theatre before departing for the bigger theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane in London. Successful English actors and actresses preferred to come to Dublin after their triumphs, rather than to Edinburgh or Bath. The best known theatrical names at the time were 'Garrick and Mrs. Siddons, Samuel Foote and Tate Wilkinson, John Edwin, George Anne Bellamy, Mrs. Abington and the Kembles'<sup>321</sup>. It is interesting to note that among the books read in the hedge schools were ones on some of these famous thespians, for instance *Apology for the Life of George Anne Belamy*, *History of Tate Wilkinson*,<sup>322</sup> *Life of Garrick*<sup>323</sup> and a book on the playwright Farquhar entitled *Memoirs of George Farquhar*<sup>324</sup>. Attendance by all classes at the theatre didn't denote their equality. On the contrary, class divisions were highlighted by the social stratification maintained at the theatre by means of prices charged and places allotted. According to an account written by an anonymous writer in 1748, theatrical audiences were divided up as follows:

**In our playhouse at Dublin, besides an upper gallery for abigails, serving-men, journeymen, and apprentices, we have three other different and distinct classes. The first is called the boxes where there is one peculiar to the Lord Lieutenant and the rest for persons of quality and for ladies and gentlemen of the highest rank, ... The second is called the pit where sit the judges, wits and censors ... In common with these sit the squires, sharpers, beaux and bullies ... The third is distinguished**

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<sup>320</sup>Philip Luckombe. *A Tour Through Ireland*. (J. & R. Byrn, Sycamore-Alley, Dublin; 1780), pp37-38.

<sup>321</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Dublin Under the Georges*, p. 185.

<sup>322</sup>First Report of the Commissioners of Education 1825, XII, App. No. 221, p. 557.

<sup>323</sup>Ibid., p. 558.

<sup>324</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

by the title of the middle gallery, where the citizens' wives and daughters etc. commonly take their places.<sup>325</sup>

Admission prices were 5s 5d for a box, 3s 3d for the pits, 2s 2d for the gallery and 2d for the upper gallery.<sup>326</sup>

The two cultural worlds interacted through the game of hurling also. An advertisement which appeared in *Finn's Leinster Journal* for the 30th July 1768 illustrated gentry involvement in the sport.

**A grand hurling match will be played between the counties of Kilkenny and Tipperary, on Monday next, the 8th of August, at the Fair-green of Urlingford for 20 guineas; some of the principal gentlemen of both counties are concerned.**<sup>327</sup>

The poor approached the game with great energy and enthusiasm, so much so that Arthur Young 'declared it to be a testimony to the nourishing properties of the potato',<sup>328</sup> but he dismissed the game as simply 'the cricket of savages'<sup>329</sup>. Coquebert de Montbret on the other hand, was fascinated by the sport, and familiarised himself with the Irish terminology for the game 'The coumáne or hurley, is the flat curved stick with which they chase the liarode or balle à jouer'. He attended a match in Kerry in 1790 and in Galway in 1791, and he gave full credit to the masters for having taught the skills necessary to play the game. He called them the 'special teachers' who taught 'this cudgel game'<sup>330</sup>.

As the political situation in Ireland became more tense in the years prior to the 1798 rebellion 'the government and individual members of the ruling élite' began to 'look with new suspicion at the amusements and cultural traditions of the common people'.<sup>331</sup> The

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<sup>325</sup>Patrick Fagan. *The Second City-Portrait of Dublin 1700-1760*. (Branar, Dublin, 1986), p. 68.

<sup>326</sup>Sean Connolly. 'Ag Déanamh Commanding', p. 11.

<sup>327</sup>Liam P. Ó Caithnia. *Scéal na hIomána*. (An Clochomhar Tta., Baile Átha Cliath, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>328</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 156.

<sup>329</sup>Constantia Maxwell (ed.). *A Tour in Ireland*. (Cambridge University Press, 1925).

Arthur Young. 'A Tour in Ireland with General Observations on the Present State of that Kingdom made in the Years 1776, 1777 and 1778', p. 202.

<sup>330</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A New View of Eighteenth-Century Life in Ireland', p. 99.

<sup>331</sup>Sean Connolly. 'Ag Déanamh Commanding', p. 21.

gentry withdrew their patronage of Irish cultural activities and withdrew from participating in popular games. But it wasn't just because of the volatile political situation that this occurred as it was a development which had already taken place in England and France by the early 17th century. The culture of the ordinary people was to be spurned by yet another powerful group in Irish society in the late 18th century - this was the catholic hierarchy, who were forbidden by a church undergoing reform from attending weddings, banquets, station dinners at the houses of parishioners, horse-races, theatres, public houses, or other places of amusement. The easy familiarity once enjoyed by the poor people with their priests was now gone especially after the priests were directed to adopt a distinctive clerical dress, which as S.J. Connolly noted in his book *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845* (1982) 'provided the outward symbol, as well as being an effective guarantor, of the new social distance between the pastor and his flock'.<sup>332</sup> There was church opposition also to such quasi-religious celebrations as the pattern, which was the festival day of a saint to whom a well or a shrine was dedicated, a day on which thousands of people assembled for religious devotions at a holy site but which sometimes degenerated into a scene of 'dancing, drinking, roaring and singing'.<sup>333</sup> During the 1770's and 1780's bishops attempted to dissuade people from engaging in such practices. In 1797 Archbishop Bray of Cashel prohibited 'all unbecoming, disorderly and irreligious assemblages of people at patrons, wheresoever held in their diocese of Cashel and Emily', under pain of excommunication, but the people chose to ignore these warnings.<sup>334</sup> Irreverent behaviour at the traditional 'merry wake' was hardly likely to meet with church approval either as the normal amusements of an Irish social gathering were also to be found at the wake-house. There was dancing, story-telling, singing, excessive drinking and match-making. In 1748 Bishop Gallagher of Kildare prohibited 'unchristian diversions of lewd songs, and brutal tricks called fronsy fronsy' which formed part of the 'merry wake', but the people

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<sup>332</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845*. (Gill and MacMillan Ltd., Goldenbridge, Dublin 8, 1982), pp. 58-74.

<sup>333</sup> Thomas Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*. (Dublin, 1981), pp. 280-281.

<sup>334</sup> S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People*, p. 141.

continued with the custom regardless of subsequent edicts of synods of the church or bishops' pastoral letters.<sup>335</sup> By 1800 the Archbishop of Cashel and Emily was still warning his flock against shameful practices at wakes, which he maintained were 'growing in strength daily'<sup>336</sup>, even though the penalty for such behaviour was excommunication.

The hedge schoolmasters remained close to the people. They respected their popular beliefs and religious customs. It was of course in the masters' interests to support the poor as they relied heavily on their patronage, but it is also true to say that the hedge schoolmasters, for the most part, shared the same cultural outlook as the people. According to an anonymous pamphleteer of 1820 the hedge schoolmaster was 'imbued with the same prejudices, influenced by the same feelings, subject to the same habits'<sup>337</sup>. This was certainly the case with regard to the 'merry wake' when the masters not only participated in it, but on occasions supplied the wake house to many a poor family who lacked suitable accommodation. According to Crofton Croker, the hedge schoolmasters 'academic grove' was 'a long thatched house, generally the largest in the place, surrendered when necessary, for the waking of a dead body'<sup>338</sup>. Carleton also declared that the hedge schoolmaster was 'the master of ceremonies at all wakes and funerals'<sup>339</sup>.

Another popular quasi-religious custom which caused offence to visiting travellers such as Young (1780) and Reed (1815) and the catholic church was the traditional 'Irish cry' or 'keen', the latter term being derived from the Irish 'caoineadh' or lament, which was a eulogy in poetic form, on the fine qualities of the deceased. The lament was also interspersed with loud wailings and cries of grief, which were 'pronounced at intervals over the corpse, first at the wake and later at the funeral procession and during the burial

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<sup>335</sup> Seán Ó Súilleabháin. *Irish Wake Amusements*. (Cork, 1967), pp. 146-154.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>337</sup> *Thoughts and Suggestions on the Education of the Peasantry of Ireland*. (London, 1820), p. 12.

<sup>338</sup> T. Crofton Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*. (Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 47 Paternoster Row, 1818), p. 326.

<sup>339</sup> William Carleton. 'The Hedge School', p. 322.

itself'.<sup>340</sup> Keening was in fact a highly developed ancient art form and up to the 19th century it was a common practice for people to hire specialist keeners who would do full justice to the occasion.<sup>341</sup> Coquebert de Montbret, journeying from Castlemaine to Tralee in 1790, attended an Irish burial at the ancient church of Rath Tass. He was greatly impressed by the professional keeners, as they improvised verses in Irish praising the deceased, in which they recalled his deeds of valour and the glory of his ancestors. He also made a reference to the popularity among the keeners of Kerry, for the lament composed for Art Ó Laoghaire. He wrote 'the song of Mme. O'Leary on the death of her husband is praised above all others'<sup>342</sup>. His widow Eibhlín Dubh an aunt of Daniel O'Connell, composed this widely acclaimed *Caoineadh* in 1773 after Art had been shot dead for not complying with the penal laws, by refusing to part with his horse when Morris, the High Sheriff, offered him £5 to sell it to him.

The reformed catholic church of the 18th century had nothing but antipathy for manifestations of popular ancestral religious feeling. Edicts against the practice of employing the services of keening women at wakes and funerals continued to be issued in the 18th century and the 19th century - from Kildare and Leighlin (1748), Cashel and Emily (1900)<sup>343</sup>. The bishop and clergy of Kildare and Leighlin protested in 1748 that keening was a 'heathenish' and 'anti-christian' practice and in 1806 Archbishop Bray of Cashel roundly condemned 'all unnatural screams and shrieks and fictitious tuneful cries and elegies at wakes, together with the savage custom of howling and bawling at funerals', activities which he described as 'pagan practices, so unmeaning and so unbecoming christians'. Once again the people ignored their spiritual leaders and the practice of keening continued long after the famine so that by the end of the 19th century it was still being opposed by the catholic clergy.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup>S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People*, p. 157.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid.

<sup>342</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. 'A New View of Eighteenth Century Life in Kerry', p. 92.

<sup>343</sup>Seán Ó Súilleabháin. *Irish Wake Amusements*, pp. 138-141.

<sup>344</sup>S.J. Connolly. *Priests and People*, pp. 162-163.

Excessive drinking was said to have taken place at patterns and wakes, but it wasn't confined to these quasi-religious occasions. Young (1780) and Carr (1805) among other travellers, condemned 'the excessive drinking of whiskey as a great national evil, and many petitions were presented to the Irish parliament asking for some restriction on the sale of spirits'. In 1791 the parliament responded by raising the tax on spirits and lowering it on beer, but this was only a temporary measure in view of the fact that the government badly needed all the revenue it could produce, to assist in the war effort against France.<sup>345</sup> In this year also the amount of duty-paid spirits consumed by each member of the population, was over one gallon.<sup>346</sup> By 1811 the quantity of spirits charged with duty in Ireland had practically doubled since 1791 and by 1828 the consumption of home-made spirits was actually estimated at 11,775,067 gallons.<sup>347</sup> Whiskey was so cheap in Ireland, that according to Arthur Young's calculations 'a man might get drunk for fourpence'<sup>348</sup>.

The people found many mediums for releasing their tensions and for easing their burdens but not all of them met with the approval of the travellers to Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries. Fights would appear to have formed part of most social gatherings in Ireland throughout this period. According to de Montbret 'a game of hurley' invariably ended 'in a fight' and people arrived at patterns armed with batons.<sup>349</sup> De Latocnaye witnessed a 'vigorous fight' at a funeral in Killarney in 1796<sup>350</sup> when both sides of the family fought over burial rights and William Reed maintained that this was a regular occurrence at funerals in Ireland.<sup>351</sup> Faction fights consisted of a display of ritualised aggression, by members of feuding groups or families. They were an accepted feature of Irish life in the 18th century, right up to the first quarter of the 19th century. They were

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<sup>345</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Dublin under the Georges*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>346</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 129.

<sup>347</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>348</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Country and Town*, p. 129. (2nd ed.).

<sup>349</sup>Coquebert de Montbret. *A New View*, p. 99.

<sup>350</sup>De Latocnaye. *A Frenchman's Walk in Ireland*. tr. John Stevenson. Re-print ed. 1984, pp. 105-106.

<sup>351</sup>William Reed. *Rambles in Ireland*, p. 41.

not acceptable to the English traveller Henry D. Inglis who explained how the barbarous practice operated.

**The O'Sullivan's are as distinct a people from the O'Neills, as the Dutch from the Belgians. The factions have chiefs, who possess authority. Regular agreements are made to have a battle; the time agreed upon is generally when a fair takes place; and at these fights, there is regular marshalling and 'wheeling' and as for its being a crime to break a 'boy's' head, such an idea never enters the brain of any one.**<sup>352</sup>

William Carleton, in his story *The Hedge School*, attributed the extraordinary dearth of knowledge in the parish of Aughindrum to the faction fights. Likewise, the other party in the faction fight, 'The Young of Findramore were parched for want of the dew of knowledge'<sup>353</sup> because 'These two factions, when they met, whether at fair or market, wake or wedding, could never part without there being on each side a dozen or two of bloody coxcombs'<sup>354</sup>. Humphrey O'Sullivan, hedge schoolmaster and author of *The Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan 1827-1835*, told of many faction fights in 'Callan of the Ructions', in Co. Kilkenny. He recorded in his diary for 8th April 1833: 'A rough fight between the Townsends and others. They were throwing stones at each other'.<sup>355</sup> It was agrarian violence which was at the heart of the faction fight recorded in his diary, for the 11th January, 1834.

**If it ever was 'Callan of the Ructions', it certainly is now, for cursed crowds on either side of the King's River are throwing stones at each other, every Sunday and holiday night - the Caravats on the south side ... and the Shanavests on Faiche an nGard ... if they are not stopped someone will be killed.**<sup>356</sup>

Carleton's novels, though works of fiction, were based on actual practices and events of the time. His readers would have had experience of faction fights and would have accepted them as part of a way of life, which at that stage was dying out. Humphrey

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<sup>352</sup>Harrington. *The English Traveller in Ireland*, p. 228.

<sup>353</sup>Carleton. *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. Vol. I. (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd., Gerrards Cross, 1990), p. 281.

<sup>354</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>355</sup>R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. (Penguin Books, 1989), p. 292.

<sup>356</sup>Tomás de Bhaldraithe. *The Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan 1827-1835*. (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 25 Lower Abbey Street, 1979), p. 131.



O'Sullivan's diary recorded the faction fights at Callan as if they were commonplace events, a means of releasing pent-up anger or tension, a way of settling old scores.

Other escape routes chosen by the poor to withdraw from the cares of daily living were also disapproved of by contemporary observers, the main one being their partiality for works of fiction, fantasy, fairy lore and criminal biography and what were considered by some to be licentious and immoral books [Ch. 4]. Despite strong objections to these chapbooks by contemporary writers, conservative clergymen and bible societies, education societies and education commissioners, the hedge schoolmasters held firm and once again supported the parents' choice and allowed the children in their schools to read from those books in class, because they were supplied by their parents. The Irish had another great passion also, this was for gambling. George Cooper in his *Letters on the Irish Nation*, written during a visit to Ireland in 1799 observed that

**The public streets of Dublin are filled with lottery offices beyond the conception even of a Londoner ... In these shops are crowds of the most miserable ragged objects (of which Dublin contains more than any other city in Europe) staking their daily bread on the chance of gain. I have often heard of the families of industrious mechanics and manufacturers driven by their frauds into the streets to beg their bread ... but yet these are all trifles when compared with the extent to which the evil of lottery offices is carried on in Ireland.**<sup>357</sup>

The lottery draw was held in a hall in Capel Street, Dublin, where the poor gathered 'many of them having sold or pawned all their possessions in order to try their luck'<sup>358</sup>. Not only that but according to Richard Twiss, (1776), Irish lottery tickets were even sent to England to be sold 'in open defiance of Acts of Parliament'<sup>359</sup>. In 1792 the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Knowledge and Practice of the Christian Religion was formed in Dublin to counteract the spread of dangerous French principles in the wake of the 1789 French Revolution, but more especially for the suppression 'of licentious books, consumption of spirituous liquors, betting and

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<sup>357</sup>George Cooper. *Letters on the Irish Nation*. (T. Bensley, Bolt Court, London, 1801), pp. 33-34.

<sup>358</sup>Constantia Maxwell. *Dublin Under the Georges*, p. 147.

<sup>359</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.

gambling<sup>360</sup>. The Association commissioned William Watson, the evangelical printer from No. 7 Capel Street, to re-publish the 'excellent tracts of Hannah More', the great evangelical writer of religious tracts in England, in order that they might serve as an antidote to the chapbooks 'which were of the most immoral kind and inculcated principles the most pernicious'<sup>361</sup>. One of the More tracts was entitled *The Wonderful Advantages of Adventuring in the Lottery*<sup>362</sup>, which was a salutary tale recounting the misfortunes of a husband who became addicted to playing the lottery. He brought ruination upon himself and misery to his wife and finally ended up with his head in a noose [Ch. 4]. Just as the chapbooks were read avidly in the hedge schools, so too were the Cheap Repository Tracts of Hannah More, as complete liberty of reading was allowed.

The hedge schoolmasters played a significant role in keeping the spirits of the people high through turbulent and trying times. They supplied them with the coping skills and the education necessary to rise above their miserable conditions and helped to brighten their lives by giving them an appreciation of music, song, dance, poetry and drama. They supported their customs and traditions long after the gentry, the catholic middle classes and the clergy had withdrawn from them. They fed the imaginative life of their young by allowing them to enjoy works of fiction. The role of the masters in maintaining the morale of the people and in ensuring their cultural survival cannot be overstated.

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<sup>360</sup>Ibid.

<sup>361</sup>J. Warburton, Rev. J. Whitelaw and Rev. Robert Walsh. *History of the City of Dublin*, Vol. II. (London: W. Bulmer & Co., Cleveland Row, St. James's, 1818), p. 891.

<sup>362</sup>More Tracts 2. *The Wonderful Advantages of Adventuring in the Lottery, or The History of John Doyle*. (Dublin: William Watson, No. 7, Capel St., n.d.), pp. 3-22.

(ix) Conclusion

The picture that emerges from the foregoing study of the social conditions in Ireland throughout the period under review, is one of great misery and deprivation for the mass of the population, with elite groups in Irish society enjoying a very comfortable lifestyle. Those in a position of power who could have altered the unjust system of land tenure were the ones least likely to have done so as it would have seriously affected their own personal wealth. The Anglo-Irish gentry and the high ranking church officials of the established church were of the landed aristocratic class, the ones with political power, and while humanitarian members from both groups tried their best to ease the lot of the poor, these efforts were only piecemeal and could never have solved the problem in the long term.

The hedge schoolmaster who set up his school on private speculation educated the children of the poorest labourers for a modest sum or for payment in kind. He also provided private tuition for the children of the aristocracy and the children of the catholic big farmers. It was an essential part of his survival in a competitive profession that he could break down class barriers and be assured of a welcome at the Big Houses of the gentry just as he was at the cabins of the poor or the catholic big farmers.

It was in the master's interest also to work in close co-operation with the parish priest who could easily have had his school closed down, therefore he had very little to gain from either joining secret societies or revolutionary movements or by teaching Irish in the bible societies' schools. It is highly improbable therefore that very many of them did so and there is ample evidence to show that the relationship between the priest and the master was, for the most part, one of mutual co-operation, with the priests allowing their churches to be used as hedge schools and the masters helping the priests in the propagation of the catholic faith by writing religious verse and by satirising those who

converted to the protestant religion. However, by the late 1820's when the catholic church was seeking grant aid for catholic education, Bishop Doyle accused the masters of disloyalty, ignorance and incompetence [Ch. 1].

The close bond between the priest and his flock which developed during the penal era underwent changes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, firstly because the people resented paying priests' dues and secondly because they felt alienated from the church after the excommunication of Whiteboys in the 1780's and of revolutionaries in the 1790's. In the wake of the 1798 rebellion the priests regained their popularity with the people because several priests were killed when their houses were attacked by Orangemen and militia. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the people would follow the priests who offered leadership to them in Daniel O'Connell's campaign for catholic emancipation.

Eventhough the people supported the priests, the easy familiarity which they once enjoyed with their spiritual leaders was, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a distant memory as priests were now forbidden by the catholic church to attend weddings, banquets or station dinners at the houses of parishioners. This was due to a tightening of ecclesiastical discipline resulting from the reform of the catholic church. It also meant that the priests were precluded from attending such quasi-religious occasions as patterns and wakes which were important events in the lives of the people. The masters on the other hand remained close to the people, they played a central role at wakes and weddings and respected local customs and traditions. They shared a mutual respect with the people for Irish culture, and did much to ensure the cultural survival of the people not only by entertaining them with their poetry, music and song but also by ensuring the perpetuation of the tradition by preserving the manuscripts and by transcribing new ones.

The social and professional status of the hedge schoolmaster among his own people was acknowledged by a number of contemporary writers such as William Carleton, T. Crofton Croker, Coquebert de Montbret and Mr. & Mrs. Hall. However the reality of

the situation was that the masters were held in such suspicion by the majority of establishment writers and commentators and in particular by successive commissioners of education because of their alleged subversive activities and their chapbooks, that insufficient attention was paid to what was actually being taught in the hedge schools. The truth is that a very broad curriculum was taught as we shall now see, and often to a very high standard [Ch. 3], but the government of the day remained blind to this fact. The historian, Mary Daly's assessment of the hedge school curriculum was accurate when she concluded in her study of 'The development of the National School system, 1831-1840', that the 1824 education commissioners were seriously in error when they were dismissive of the hedge schools. She wrote:

**There is little doubt that in dismissing hedge schools as insignificant institutions the commissioners of 1824 seriously erred and that had they taken greater account of their existence and the nature of many of the hedge schools, the 1831 provisions might have been drafted differently and provoked less subsequent conflict.<sup>363</sup>**

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<sup>363</sup> Mary Daly. *The Development of the National Schools system, 1831-1840*, p. 162.









