

A History of Protestant Irish Speakers

Today the Irish language is associated with Catholicism and Irish nationalism. Yet at one point in Irish history anyone who could read and write in Irish was believed to be a Protestant. There were also two cultural movements – Irish Patriotism and the Celtic Twilight – within which both Protestant nationalists and unionists explored the Irish language together. In this article I trace the involvement of Protestant involvement in the Irish language from the arrival of the Reformation in Ireland until partition. This article is divided into four parts: native Gaelic-speaking Protestants, evangelists, antiquarians, and revivalists.

Native Gaelic-Speaking Protestants

There is much circumstantial evidence of Protestants who were native speakers of Gaelic, and other Protestants who became very fluent through everyday interaction with other native speakers. Many of these Protestant Gaelic speakers came from Scotland. During the plantations of Ulster in the early 1600s only ‘inland Scots’ were supposed to be settlers; this policy was intended to exclude Gaelic-speaking Highlanders, but failed to do so. When the Marquis of Argyll brought his troops to Antrim during the 1640s uprisings, most of them would have been Gaelic speakers, and many settled in Ireland when they had finished their military service. Overpopulation and the commercialisation of estates in Scotland also pushed people from Argyll to Antrim in the 1690s; sometimes the dispossessed were recruited for military campaigns in Ireland.

During the time of the Plantations of Ulster there was little difference between the Gaelic of many Scottish settlers and the Irish of the natives. The Irish of Antrim shared many features with Scottish Gaelic, and the Gaelic of Kintyre and Argyll was very similar to Antrim Irish. Robert MacAdam wrote the following in 1873:

Even yet the Glensmen of Antrim go regularly to Highland fairs, and communicate without the slightest difficulty with the Highlanders. Having myself conversed with both Glensmen and Arranmen, I can testify to the absolute identity of their speech (Ó Baoill 2000: 122).

There are some fascinating accounts which prove that some of the Protestant settlers in Ulster spoke Scottish Gaelic. John Richardson (1664-1747), rector of Belturbet in County Cavan since 1693, wrote some interesting letters on the subject.

In 1711 a correspondent of Richardson, J. Maguire, noted the following:

I met many of the inhabitants, especially of the baronies of Glenarm, Dunluce and Kilconaway, who could not speak the English tongue, and asking them in Irish what religion they professed they answered they were Presbyterians ... I had the curiosity to go to their meeting on the Sunday following, where I heard their minister preach to them in Irish at which (though I think he did not do it well,) they expressed great

devotion ... His audience, (as I understand) was composed of native Irish and Highlanders (Richardson 1711: 16).

Richardson noted that many Highlanders had settled in deserted lands in Inishowen and Antrim after the Williamite conquest, and as they spoke no English, were supplied with Gaelic-speaking ministers from Scotland:

In the Northern Parts of the County of Antrim, which being also deserted by the Irish, upon the landing of the English army near Carrickfergus in 1689, many families from the Western Isles of Scotland, who understood no other language but Irish, settled there. At their first going over, they went to church; but not understanding the divine service celebrated there, they soon went over to the communion of the Church of Rome, only for the benefit of such exhortations, as the Popish priests usually give their congregations in Irish. And when they were asked the reason, why they did so? They said, 'It was better to be of their religion, than none at all' (Richardson 1711: 28-9).

Some of these Scottish settlers were Anglican. When Presbyterian government was established in Scotland in 1689, disaffected Scottish Episcopalians came to live in North Antrim (Ó Snodaigh 1995: 33). Cathal Dallat notes that Rasharkin was settled by Anglican Highlanders who petitioned the Bishop of Connor to provide them with a Gaelic-speaking minister (1994: 38-9).

Richardson noted that the Bishop of Down provided North Antrim Presbyterians with the Gaelic-speaking Reverend Archibald Mac Collum, who

... has taken such effectual pains with the Irish and Highlanders of them, that by the blessing of God he has not only brought back numbers who had fallen off from our Church to that of Rome, but brought over several who were originally Irish Papists, and is every day gaining upon them (Richardson 1711: 14).

Scottish Gaelic speakers settled in many areas of the North. A souvenir booklet of Loughgall Presbyterian Church in Armagh notes the Scottish origin of the congregation, and continues, ' We glean that the Scotch settlers here still used the Gaelic of their native Scotland, a language spoken also by the Irish in the district. The Rev Archibald Macclane, who hailed from Argyle, and was a fluent speaker in the native tongue, preached in Loughgall meeting house in Gaelic in 1717' (1954: 3-4).

There is also evidence that many Protestants are descended from Irish-speaking native Catholics who converted either from conviction or to maintain their property. In the present congregation of Saintfield First Presbyterian Church there are families bearing the old Irish surnames of the district: Hanvey (*Ó hAinbheith*), Connolly (*Ó Conghalaigh*), Hayes (*Ó hAodha*) Peak (*Mac Péice*) and McVeigh (*Mac an Bheatha*) (Adams 1986: 120). It is likely that members of this Presbyterian congregation spoke both Irish and English up to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. It has been noted that the old Session book of Templepatrick Presbyterian Church, covering the years 1646 to

1744, contains many who bore purely Irish names such as *Meive O Conalie*, *Shan O Hagain*, *Oyen McGouckin*, *Rory O Crilie* and *Patrick O Mory* (Blaney 1996: 17).

It is probable that Protestants also learned Irish to haggle at fairs, through intermarriage, and by having Irish nurses for their children. Settlers who lived among large numbers of Irish speakers would have found it expedient to learn their language. So the language groups among the early Protestants in Ireland included:

- ❑ Speakers of Scots Gaelic
- ❑ Irish-speaking converts
- ❑ Those who had learned Irish
- ❑ Speakers of English and Scots

It appears that many Protestants learned Irish for utilitarian purposes. The *Ordinance Survey Memoirs of Ireland* attest to the widespread use of Irish in the 1830s. For example, the volume on the Roe Valley Central notes the following in the parish of Drumachose:

The parishioners are very anxious to obtain books from the Irish Bible Society. They have also a wish for some acquaintance with the Irish language, as they feel their ignorance of it highly inconvenient, not only in their intercourse with some parts of the county, but also in visiting other counties to purchase goods. In the markets where Irish is spoken those unacquainted with the language are regarded as foreigners, and to cheat them is considered a praiseworthy deed. This wish to learn that language prevails in all the surrounding parishes (Day and McWilliams 1991: 84).

Irish was spoken as a community language in remote parts of present-day Northern Ireland until the 1950s and 1960s. The Rev Coslett Quin, of the Church of Ireland, learned the Irish of Tyrone and Antrim in the 1930s. Aodh Ó Canainn wrote that at this time some of the best speakers of Irish in Antrim were Protestants (Ó Glaisne 1996: 61). On Rathlin Island Rev Quin learned an Irish language song from Miss Annie Glass, another member of the Church of Ireland (Místéil ed. 1994: 27). The song is called '*Ard a' Chuain*'/ '*Articoan*' and is attributed by some to John McCambridge (c.1793-1873). He was the last Gaelic poet in Antrim, a Protestant and uncle of Sir Daniel Dixon, the first Lord Mayor of Belfast.

Irish survived in County Down into the nineteenth century in a long strip of territory north of the Mourne, from Ballynahinch to Newry; Irish Society (see below) reports of 1823 mention a school in Fofanny, near Castlewellan, in which 15 children excelled at reading the scriptures in Irish, 'with the exception of one or two, who were not in the habit of speaking Irish (De Brún 2009: 504) In the 1800s Protestants in Newry talked Irish to the incoming country folk on market days (Ó Duibhín 1991: 23). In the early 1900s the author Seán Mac Maoláin recalled meeting a Protestant baker from Newry who recalled learning Irish from country people when he was young, including the toast

'Slanty go seel agad agus ban er du veen ugat' (Mac Maoláin 1969: 47). This translates as 'Health and long life and the woman of your choice.'

At the beginning of the eighteenth century few people in Ireland could have gone about their daily business without hearing Irish spoken. When Irish was spoken as a native language by Catholic friends and neighbours in Ireland, Protestants would have perceived the language as part of everyday life, rather than a vessel of Catholic or nationalist ideology. Many learned Irish to travel, to communicate at fairs, and Protestant ministers even learned Irish to give sermons, as we shall see.

Evangelism in Irish

Motivations of Evangelists

Evangelism has four main characteristics: a personal and conscious conversion experience; an emphasis on the Bible as a manual for life; a focus on Christ's death as atoning for sin; and activism, which stems from a positive belief of one's own salvation and the command of the Bible to tell others, so they may share this experience. Evangelists were always looking for innovative forms to bring their message to others, in contrast with the rather staid established churches which preferred to minister to their own flocks.

There were various approaches among Protestants to the evangelising of Catholics. Some hoped that increasing the influence of Christianity would bring peace to Ireland and heal divisions. For example, Dr Whitely Stokes (1763-1845), lecturer of medicine in Trinity College, joined the United Irishmen in 1791 but was deterred from radical politics by the 1798 rising. He believed the basic Christian message would teach Catholics and Protestants to tolerate one another. He urged Catholic priests to use Irish language scriptures and arranged for the publication in Irish of the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles in a bilingual form, with the Irish rendered in a form amenable to the English language.

For some, particularly those who accepted that salvation was possible within the Catholic Church, preaching the gospel was an end in itself and did not represent a tactic for conversion. They measured success in terms of an increasing spirituality of their audiences and the abandonment of practices such as swearing, drinking and gambling. It is difficult at times to separate moral reform from proselytism, and a fair amount of ambiguity is to be found in the literature and the expressed opinions of those involved. Despite avowed intentions of moral reform, Catholic clerics remained suspicious of Protestant evangelists, interpreting any form of preaching to their congregation by Protestants as an attempt to poach their congregations.

Protestant ambivalence on the outcomes of preaching in Irish was informed by the belief that the Catholic Church was weak both in terms of doctrine and liturgy. Many Protestants believed that the Catholic Church kept its flock in spiritual darkness by withholding the truth revealed in the scriptures, for it was not part of Catholic tradition until the late nineteenth century to encourage the laity to read the Bible, as the Church did

not encourage individual interpretations which conflicted with canon law. Protestants believed that worship should take place in the vernacular of the congregation, and abhorred the Latin Mass as another mystification of God's word. The close relationship between print, the vernacular, and Protestantism became part of English national self-consciousness (Crowley 1996: 117). It was assumed that the teaching of the Catholic Church was so heterogeneous and self-contradictory that it would not stand serious examination. John Richardson recounted how a Catholic porter casually looked through a consignment of Irish prayer books in a Dublin warehouse, 'at which he was so much affected, that he promised that if he might have the use of such books, he would turn Protestant' (Barnard 1983: 257). Thus many Protestants believed in a kind of biblical determinism; if Catholics were to be exposed to the 'truth' of the Scriptures, they would be converted to Protestantism.

In England and Ireland the monarch was the head of the (Anglican) Established Church as well as the head of state; thus loyalty to the state became part of the Church of Ireland tradition. The view that politics and religion should be intertwined meant that it was desirable to convert the Irish natives to Protestantism for both theological and political reasons (Hempton and Hill 1992: 184). For example, a bilingual Church of Ireland Catechism, produced by in Belfast for Rathlin Island in 1722, contains the following phrases:

Kest. Gud e do Yhualus dot Chovarsan?
Quest. What is they Duty towards thy Nabor?

Fre. Onoir agus uvlachd do havart don Re agus da vuila keannas foy.
Answ. Obey the King and all who are put in Authority under him.
(Hutchinson 1722: 8-11).

Henry VIII's 1537 Act for the English Order, Habit, and Language proclaimed that all services of the Established Church should be held in English, and Elizabeth I's Act of Uniformity of 1559 ruled that services were to be conducted in English, or Latin for those who did not speak English. This seemed to contradict a central tenet of Protestant faith, since it denied to Irish-speaking natives access to the means of their salvation in the vernacular. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and a frequent visitor to Ireland, summed up official policy when he said that 'those who are born papists live and die as such, when the Protestants can find no better ways to convert them than penal laws and acts of parliament' (Milne 1994: 41).

Although revolts of 1641, 1689 and 1798 interrupted evangelism, in their aftermath missionaries redoubled their efforts, arguing that they were manifestations of the anarchic and destructive capacity of human sin (Holmes 1985: 100). Some Protestants even interpreted the famine as a divine punishment from God, creating fertile ground for their activities. While many Catholics and Protestants agreed that famine was the work of the devil, some evangelicals compared the Irish famine to God's wrath on the children of

Israel for their idolatry – the contemporary idolatry being Catholicism (Ó Mainín 1997: 70).

Opponents of preaching in Irish argued that greater use of the language would encourage, as one put it, 'disaffection to the King, and disincline to English connection' (cited in Crowley 1996: 120). John Richardson denied that the Irish language contributed to political divisions in Ireland, or that the use of it by Protestants would contribute to existing divisions:

The English, Welsh and Cornish tongues in England do not produce diversity of religion, among the people who speak them. So in Scotland the Highlanders and Saxons are for the most part of the same religion, notwithstanding that their speech is not the same ... The Irish language itself, is a harmless thing in Scotland, and hath not any marks of the Beast upon it (1711: 18, 21).

By demonstrating that 'Irish' was spoken in Scotland, he endowed the language with a potential Protestant image, as Gaelic was used by Highland Presbyterians as a medium of worship. Richardson denied that speaking Irish could influence one's opinion:

Preaching in the Irish language is not an encouragement of the Irish interest, any more than preaching in French in England is an encouragement of the French interest; For the Irish Papists who can speak English, ever were, and still are as great enemies to the English interest, as the Irish Papists who cannot speak English ... Wherefore it is very evident, that it is the Popish religion, and not the Irish language that is repugnant to the English interest in Ireland (1711: 6).

Inter-church rivalry was a motivation for some missionary activity. Richardson shared the Church of Ireland's fear of the spread of Presbyterianism in Ulster, and was alarmed by the General Assembly of Scotland's plans to send Gaelic-speaking missionaries to Ireland:

So that there is great cause to fear, that if we neglect to use the same means, the Papists of Ireland, instead of becoming an additional strength to the Established Church by their conversion, will be added to the great number of Dissenters in this kingdom, which would in great earnest be very destructive of the interest of the Church, if not of the English interest, in it (Richardson 1711: 7).

It was often alleged that preaching in Irish would encourage the greater use of the language. Richardson was of precisely the opposite opinion; proselytism in Irish represented 'the most effectual way to diminish the use of it hereafter', as converts would learn English in order to avail of the new opportunities for employment open to them (Richardson 1711: 21). Some proselytisers of the nineteenth century viewed the language in strictly utilitarian terms, as a means of conversion, and exhibited no desire to cherish or preserve it (Stothers 1981: 84).

Church of Ireland

In the Church of Ireland, which was characterised by a theological and organisational hierarchy, the efforts of a local clergyman to proselytise in Irish often depended on the goodwill of his bishop, and the efforts of a bishop depended on the goodwill of his archbishop. It was often the case that all three would not agree on the need to preach in Irish. For many years, the Irish church was weak and unable to pursue missionary activities. It was often served by absentee English-born bishops, who owed their positions to government favouritism; every eighteenth-century archbishop of Armagh was English by birth (Milne 1994: 38). The habit of preferring Englishmen over Irishmen in clerical appointments created a situation in which ‘countless English churchmen found themselves marooned among uncomprehending parishioners’ (Palmer 2001: 129). Anthony Raymond (1675-1726), Vicar of Trim from 1703 until his death, graphically illustrated the linguistic challenge of a parish only 25 miles from Dublin:

I have in my care 750 families and I venture to say 500 of them tho’ within 20 miles of the metropolis of the Kingdom are as great strangers to the English tongue as they are to the Coptick or Arabick (Harrison 2001: 58)

Nevertheless the Church (or rather, individual members of it) established a fine, if somewhat sporadic, record in publishing the scriptures in Irish. The first ever book in Gaelic, John Carswell’s *Foirm na nUrrnuidheadh* (1567) was a translation of Knox’s *Book of Common Order*, published in Edinburgh in the standard literary language of Ireland and Scotland, although it contains some Scotticisms (Williams 1986: 19). John Kearney’s (Seán Ó Cearnaigh) *Aibidil Gaidheilge agus Caiticiosma* (Gaelic Alphabet and Catechism) of 1571 contained translations from the only authorised liturgy, *Book of Common Prayer*, and pre-dates the first Catholic text in Irish by forty years.

Queen Elizabeth I, a keen linguist, showed an interest in Irish, and had a primer prepared for her. She also provided a Gaelic font for the translation of the Bible which became the basis for subsequent Irish Gaelic fonts. Elizabeth also encouraged the founding of Trinity College Dublin as she believed the promotion of learning would advance the Reformation. She was very impatient at delays in producing an Irish Bible and ironically the New Testament was not published until 1603, a year after her death.

Despite regal insistence on the importance of promoting the Reformation in Irish, royal edicts commanding the Gaelicisation of the Church of Ireland seemed as ineffectual as those banning the language. In 1620 James I (1566 -1625) ordered Trinity College to find and instruct in theology ‘towardly young men already fitted with the knowledge of the Irish tongue ... to catechise the simple natives’ and in 1623 ordered that the Book of Common Prayer and New Testament in Irish should be used in the parishes of native Irish (Ó Glaisne 1992: 8-9). However, during James’ reign the few ministers who could speak Irish preferred to stay in the more eastern Protestant and English-speaking eastern dioceses. Charles II (1630-1685) insisted that 30 out of 70 scholars at Trinity should be Irish natives, but there was no professor of Irish nor provision of books and lectures for them (Mason 1844: 7). The statute was abolished in 1840. There were common

complaints among evangelists about Trinity reluctance to provide resources for missionary activities in Irish.

The Archbishop of Tuam, William Daniel (Uilliam Ó Domhnaill) ensured the New Testament was published in 1603 and the Book of Common Prayer in 1608. This latter work did not include a psalter and lessons from the Old Testament were left out as they had not yet been translated. Daniel's purpose for translating the New Testament was to thwart 'the filthy fry of Romish seducers, the hellish firebrands of our troubles' (Ford 1997: 109). A very different cleric, the English-born William Bedell (1571-1642), Bishop of Kilmore, took on the more onerous task of translating the Old Testament into Irish. He appointed Irish-speaking clergy to his parishes, held weekly services in Irish in his cathedral, and supervised the translation of the Old Testament into Irish. He was loved by the native Irish for his simple lifestyle and kindness towards them. He died shortly after the rising in 1641 and a Catholic priest, Fr Farrelly, is said to have cried out at his funeral, 'O sit anima mea cum Bedello!' ('May my soul be with Bedell's') (Williams 1986: 52). The high standard of his translation, together with his popularity with Catholics, was to ensure his Old Testament would be the standard by which other bibles would be measured.

Robert Boyle (1627-1682), a renowned philosopher and devout Anglican who never learned Irish, decided to republish the scarce Daniel's New Testament in 1681 and published Bedell's Old Testament for the first time in 1685, forty years after the author's death. Thus Anglicans ensured the translation of both the Old and New Testaments, as well as basis for their services, the Book of Common Prayer. Yet despite the Convocation of the Church of Ireland considering evangelism in Irish in 1634, 1703, 1709 and 1710, little effort was made to pursue the policy on an effectual basis. The 1709 resolution, supported by Bishop Bedell, was passed by the Lower House of Convocation, which included parish clergy, but the Upper House, which contained many English bishops, was hostile. The 1710 resolution was rejected by the Upper House as 'destructive of the English interests, contrary to the law and inconsistent with the authority of synods and convocations' (Crowley 2005: 67). As in other matters Convocation deprived the lower clergy of any voice in the affairs of the Church.

John Richardson failed to convince the exchequer to fund Irish language publishing and preaching. Although Richardson claimed that Catholics were ripe for proselytism, he and other evangelists made few conversions. Most converts were of Catholic gentry, eager to maintain their estates during the Penal Laws (if the head of a Catholic family died, his estate was to be divided equally among his sons) and find careers for their younger sons in the legal profession. With the conversion of Alexander MacDonnell, the fifth Earl of Antrim, in 1734 there was virtually no Catholic estate of any significance left in Ulster (Bardon 2009: 241). Despite such high-profile cases, between 1703 and 1789 only 5,500 Catholics officially converted to the Established Church; Bishop Lindsay described Richardson's efforts as 'unprofitable amusements' and Richardson 'degenerated into an Irish language bore from which other clergymen discretely distanced themselves' (Barnard 1993: 256, 261). Dean Swift moaned in 1711, 'I am plagued with one

Richardson an Irish parson, and his project of printing Irish Bibles, etc., to make you Christians in that country. I befriended him what I can' (Jackson 1950: 14).

Another opponent of Richardson, the Rev E. Nicholson, used the following arguments against proselytism in Irish: the control of priests over their congregations would render the schemes ineffectual; the linguistic distinction would be maintained between the Irish and the English; English was spreading in use; and that a more effective scheme would be to educate children directly in English and Protestantism (Crowley 2005: 69-70). Nicholson's views reflected those of the Church, which did little in terms of the Irish language for a century after Richardson's death.

Richardson did obtain financial support from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) for printing 6,000 copies of the Irish language Book of Common Prayer and a Protestant catechism, together with 3,000 copies of his own history of missionary efforts in Irish. Yet in 1717 four thousand of his books languished in the SPCK warehouse in London and Richardson admitted that he had sold only four copies of his history (Barnard 1993: 256). Despite publications being made available, there were many problems with distribution, with copies rotting in warehouses, ending up in the hands of curious individuals, or even making their way to Scotland.

Methodists

Methodists were initially itinerant preachers who used dramatic and emotional performances to win audiences. They began their mission as an evangelical wing of the Church of England in 1729, but were distrusted by the Anglican hierarchy with its suspicious of 'vital religion' or 'religious enthusiasm' (Whelan 2005: 10). Their insistence on the Bible as the fundamental source of spiritual and moral authority was construed as a threat to episcopal power. Methodists were accused of being disturbers of the peace and John Wesley found that while in Ireland he had to protest his loyalty to the king (Whelan 2005: 7). However, in the early 1800s they became more acceptable and country gentry provided them with sites for preaching. The Methodists had a profound influence on all evangelicals in Ireland. They pioneered the preaching tour, which became the hallmark of other evangelical groups. Their work came to be mentioned with approval in the accounts of more orthodox Anglican evangelists.

Although Wesley personally found Irish spelling 'intolerable' and 'insufferable' (Ó Glaisne 1998: 15), he was very keen to encourage preaching in the language. By 1816 the Methodists had 21 missionaries, 12 of whom could preach in Irish. They endeared themselves to their audiences with their austere lifestyles and sympathy for the native Irish, and readiness to travel to the remotest parts of Ireland. Eileen Donnelly, a native of County Derry and a convert to Methodism, used to preach in Irish in the latter half of the eighteenth century in the market place in Lisburn (Adams 1986: 119). It is likely that she was preaching to people who spoke Irish in the rural districts near the town. The foremost Methodist preacher in Irish was Gideon Ousely (1762-1839) from Sligo, who at the height of his powers travelled 4,000 miles a year, preaching about 20 times a week. He

was accompanied by John Feely (Seán Ó Fithcheallaigh), who had trained to be a Catholic priest, and thus guaranteed curiosity wherever he appeared. Together they were known as the ‘black caps’ because of their close-fitting skull caps designed to protect their heads from stones; Ousely preferred to stand in front of apothecaries’ windows to deter missiles (Hempton and Hill 1992: 41). Ousely’s strange clothes, comical leer (the result of a shooting accident), and habit of ringing a bell to announce his arrival also ensured large audiences.

Although these preachers were at turns highly entertaining and moving, they made few Catholic converts. They had no support organisations to build upon their initial successes after they had left districts. Most of their conversions in Ireland were of other Protestants. By the mid-nineteenth century Methodists were leaving for America and the era of Gaelic preaching was over. The Methodists fell in to line with anti-Catholic conservatives as the nineteenth century wore on – Gideon Ousley opposed Catholic Emancipation and ended his career as an Orangeman.

In the early nineteenth century evangelists found a new ally with the growth of pan-evangelism and the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Hibernian Bible Society to translate and publish bibles for missionary work in the expanding empire and beyond. However, these societies still needed to be persuaded on the usefulness of publishing in Irish, which was achieved with the help of letters from Protestant clergy and laity in areas in which Irish was widely spoken. When persuaded, the results could be dramatic. The London Hibernian Society established charity schools and attempted proselytism, but abandoned preaching due to the hostility of Catholics. Yet the schools continued, for which the Society produced the first schoolbooks for the teaching of spelling and grammar in Irish, a milestone for the language (Whelan 2005: 102).

The Irish Society

The period between 1790 and 1830 heralded a revolution in religious affairs in Britain; an ambitious middle-class, empowered by the industrial revolution, led a reaction against aristocratic excess. Fear of the anarchism of the French Revolution also fuelled the ‘Second Reformation’ of the 1820s (Whelan 2005). The growing middle classes imposed puritan moral values on both the aristocracy and lower classes. This new morality demanded greater government intervention in social issues which would keep the revolutions at bay, and led to the fashionable trend for ‘improvement’ in charity schools, orphanages, and the abolition of slavery.

The defeat of Napoleon added to belief that British Protestantism was vindicated as the true religion and became a *raison d’être* for empire-building (ironically the Catholic Church had supported the British against the ‘godless’ Napoleon). Evangelical Protestants slowly became the largest faction in the Church of Ireland. Evangelised landlords donated land for schools, salaries for teachers, and bought bibles for free distribution. Certain evangelical landowners put pressure on tenants to send their children to Bible schools. Lord Ennismore of County Cork dismissed 23 labourers and servants as they refused to send their children to a school run by the Kildare Place Society, an

ostensibly non-denominational organisation that came under the influence of proselytising Protestants (Whelan 2005: 169).

In 1818 members of the Church of Ireland formed the *Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language* (the Irish Society). What is singularly remarkable about this organisation is that it existed until 1914, sixty years after the Presbyterians had abandoned evangelism in Irish. The Society survived late enough to witness the Home Rule crisis, and to offer its own distinctive solution to the political travails of Ireland. In April 1907 the Society minutes noted ‘the present momentous crisis through which Ireland is passing’ and spurred supporters ‘to continue unwearied efforts for the spread of the Gospel, which alone can confer true liberty upon the inhabitants of this island.’

The Society claimed to be interdenominational and respect religious differences; ‘the primary object was not proselytism from any particular sect: yet it was foreseen, that the sure result of the study of divine truth would be the abandonment of human error...’ (Mason 1844: 9). However, the organisation’s literature, often published to attract donations from England, demonstrates that the objective was one of conversion. Missionaries liked to concentrate on aspects of the Bible which they believed contradicted Catholic teaching. For example, Rev Moriarty, when questioning some pupils on the Blasket Islands, gives an account of a typical exchange:

But when we came to examine them in the scriptures, they were able to answer everything in an anti-Roman way too. ‘Repeat the second commandment’ was a question put to an intelligent boy of Romish parents. He answered, ‘Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image,’ &c. ‘There is Romanism expelled for you,’ exclaimed Mr. Moriarty to me in great delight. ‘Yes, sir,’ added one of the converts, and that is a Roman boy too’ (Ó Mainín 1997: 72).

Being ‘bibliocentric’, Protestant evangelists were troubled by widespread illiteracy of the native Irish, who were inclined to put more store in such ‘outward signs’ as holy wells and iconography. Thus evangelists placed a tremendous emphasis on education, which would allow the Irish access to the scriptures for the first time. The Society established charity schools to promote education through Irish. These schools were more often attended by adults than children and tended not to be held in regular schoolhouses but in the homes of the teachers or some of their scholars. The times of meetings were irregular, being held on Sundays, holidays, or in the evenings of the working week.

Catholic teachers were employed as few Protestants knew Irish. These teachers were prized for their local knowledge and the fact that they could draw upon networks of friends and family. These teachers were also cited as proof that the Society was not interested in proselytism, although the Society viewed them as the unwitting vehicles of scriptural truth which contradicted Catholic teaching. Henry Joseph Monck Mason, the secretary of the Society, wrote of the teacher James Reilly, of Kingscourt, County Cavan: ‘He would speak of religion with all the bigotry of Romanism, and then enthusiastically

and unsuspectingly read, from the Irish Testament, texts the most opposed to its errors' (1844: 25).

Teachers could be Catholics, but inspectors were Protestants. 'Periodical inspections' were greater affairs, at which large numbers of pupils and teachers were drawn together, and prizes were given to pupils for their performances. Initially the Society distributed Irish language primers for use in schools, but in 1825 decided to restrict the publication of material in Irish to religious works, as there were fears of providing more attractive alternatives to the Irish Bible (De Brún 2009: 105). Society publications were limited to the Bible and Book of Common Prayer, although the latter was treated as more controversial, and was to be distributed where it was requested (De Brún 2009: 106). This was hardly surprising, given that the book identified the Irish Society with proselytism. An 1861 bilingual version of the *Book of Common Prayer / Leabhar na nUrnaighe Comhchoitchoinn* made the political implications of Irish Anglicanism very evident, with its prayer for Queen Victoria:

That it may please thee to be her defender and keeper, giving her the victory over all her enemies;
We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Go mba toil leat a bheith 'do chosantóir agus 'do chomheádoir aici, ag tabhairt buadha dhi ar a huile naimhdibh;
Guidhmid thú, éisd linn, a Dheighthighearna (SPCK 1861: 88-89).

The decision to publish scriptural material alone was wise, given the suspicions of many Protestants for a 'barbarous' and 'seditious' language.

The Irish Society employed colporteurs to distribute Irish bibles in vans, and even toyed with the idea of erecting placards in Irish. The organisation also successfully campaigned for a professor/chair in Irish in Trinity College Dublin in 1844, and provided two Bedell scholarships for divinity students interested in preaching in Irish.

The first major action of the Society was begun in Kingscourt, County Cavan by the Rev Winning in 1822 with the enthusiastic support of the evangelical landlord, Lord Farnham. The Irish speakers there were often fluent in English, but the Society emphasised that the fondness for Irish spurred them on: 'It was chiefly their prejudices and their affections to which we sought to accommodate ourselves, and not merely their understandings' (Mason 1844: 33). The use of Irish bibles was reported to have led to as demand for the English version, called 'the construer' by locals, and the formation of lending libraries of orthodox Protestant divinity works (Mason 1835: 16). By 1825 fifty-one schools were instructing 927 pupils in the area.

Nevertheless, there were 'reverses'. Father John Halpin denounced the schools and threw the teacher Michael Farrelly and his family out of church for selling 'his immortal soul for ten pounds a year ... and being a devil incarnate and a Bible-reading rascal under the Irish Society' (Walsh 1994: 14). Monck Mason complained that Meath priests were

denouncing the black-bound Irish Scriptures as the 'Black Book', and were 'connecting it with the "powers of darkness"' (De Brún 2009: 122) Teachers were compelled to make statements alleging that they were duped by the Irish Society. Dr Logan, Catholic Bishop of Meath, forwarded the recantation of Peadar Ó Gealacháin, a teacher at Kingscourt, to the newspapers in 1827. It states he:

is a Roman Catholic; wishes to remain one, and is sorry that his poverty forces him to act contrary to religious principles (Walsh 1994: 14).

The Irish Society formed a widows' fund for teachers 'for the bereaved relicts of such of them as might suffer martyrdom for the cause' and in Kingscourt 'The Irish Teachers' Protection Fund' was founded to protect 'from slanderous aspersions of character, waylaying, abuse, and false imprisonments' (Mason 1844: 37, 70). It was claimed in 1834 that 100 wanted to convert in Kingscourt but were afraid of persecution, being 'too wavering or too timid for such an unequivocal step' (Mason 1844: 60).

Critics maintained that the enthusiasm for teaching Irish in the Kingscourt district was due to the collapse of handloom weaving in the area, following the rise of the cotton and linen industries. This forced literate locals to work for the Irish Society. The Catholic Bishop Doyle hired a Protestant liberal lawyer, George Ensor, to investigate Lord Farnham's account of hundreds of conversions on his estate. Ensor's reports of 1827 and 1828 did not count the converts, but claimed those who had become Protestant would reconvert in better days and compared them to birds 'which visit milder climates at intervals, and who return when the iron days are past and the sun cheers them home' (Whelan 2005: 180). The Kingscourt mission went into decline in from about 1844, and thereafter the Society decided to concentrate on more 'benighted' areas (De Brún 2009: 54).

Catholic resistance to missionary activity was fierce in many areas. The penance for talking to a convert or Protestant on the island of Aran was to walk around the island without food – 19 miles in all (Robinson 1999: 144). Ostracism was ordered by Archbishop MacHale, who insisted that Catholics should:

... separate themselves completely from intercourse with the Jumper ... not to speak to them, not to lend or borrow from them; not to allow them into their homes or on their land ... they were directed to sign themselves with the cross every time they met one in public or private (Moffitt 2008: 75).

In Kingscourt one teacher was murdered by assailants who cut out his tongue and shouted, 'He will preach no more of his Irish to the people' (Mason 1844: 26). After attacks on mission stations sectarian tensions reached such a fever pitch in Clifden in 1879 that public houses were forcibly closed on St Patrick's Day (Moffitt 2008 : 139).

The dreaded priest's curse was assumed to bring withered crops, the death of livestock and wasting diseases for the 'heretic'. In Tyrone several Bible teachers were

excommunicated; ‘the bell was rung, the candle was extinguished, and the book was solemnly closed’ (Mason 1844: 51). The Irish Society cheerfully (and rather unconvincingly) reported that excommunication had a positive effect, encouraging three or four Tyrone teachers to convert to Protestantism (Mason 1844: 52).

An alarming letter of February 1840 from a Society agent told of a group forced to emigrate to America; as large a number as one hundred left the ‘Monaghan, Tyrone, and Derry mountains’ (Mason 1844: 68). A witness wrote of a large-scale riot in Newry as teachers and students were passing through the town after an examination of 80 students, which resulted in one schoolmistress having her skull fractured:

The first that retired were the County Down men, about four o’clock they passed through Newry – at the half-way House they were assailed by a mob with sticks, stones and stones hammers; and a part of the Fews’ teachers, about twenty-five in number, following them, were assaulted in like manner, and most brutally handled. I am sorry to say that many have been severely injured ... the mountains were covered with a multitude, all stripped to their shirts ... by the time we reached the upper Park Gate-House, the mob were pouring over the hills by hundreds, yelling and shouting (Mason 1844: 92-93).

The ordeals of converts were believed to continue after death. Rev William Fisher reported from Cork of ‘fables’ of dead converts appearing to their neighbours,

... full of misery, either scorched up like a cinder, or with their teeth chattering with the cold, and without a stitch of clothing. In the latter case the apparition usually is represented as making a request of some relation or friend that a new cloak, or coat, or gown, should be brought and worn so many Sundays at mass in the name of the dead person, and for the repose of his or her soul; and if possible that the garment should be blessed by the priest. The living person selected for this service to the dead is someone whose mind is wavering between Popery and Christianity’ (Irish Society of London 1851: 90-92).

On occasions the police were needed at the funerals of converts and at public appearances by ministers who were converted priests (Ó Mainín 1973: 52-53). On the other hand Mason noted that Catholics sometimes left converts alone as they were convinced they would reconvert, especially close to death. The Irish Society had considerable success on Blasket Island; by 1847 there were 10 converted families, and of 56 children attending a school run by the Society, 30 were Protestants (Ó Mainín 1997: 61). Yet the first Protestant funeral of a Blasket Islander caused considerable surprise (Mason 1844: 82). Indeed, the accounts of proselytisers and their detractors contain unseemly accounts of clerical tussles concerning access to the dying; as death drew near, the struggle for the immortal soul increased. The 1848 account report of the London branch of the Irish Society contains accounts of the increased opportunities for work, given the large numbers of those dying during the famine. The introduction noted ‘the fearful famine... left the heart and the mind of the remnant of Irishmen open for the reception of the Truth,

proffered to them by Protestant England’ during ‘the remarkable and encouraging crisis’ (Irish Society of London 1848: 6-7).

The charity schools of the Church of Ireland suffered from state intervention in education in Ireland. The Statutory Commission of Enquiry into Education was established following Catholic complaints of Protestant proselytism in education. The commission recommended the building of proper schools, the professional development of teaching, a suitable curriculum, and respect for religious differences. The Commission was not impressed by the non-denominational cloak of societies such as the London Hibernian Society, particularly when individuals in these societies made it clear to the Commission that they wished to proselytise Catholics. Many of the new National Board of Education Schools of the 1830s had Catholic priests as managers, and some of the better employees of the Irish Society found employment in the National Schools System.

A more ambitious scheme than charity schools was the creation of Protestant colonies in Irish-speaking areas – namely Aughkeely (Co. Donegal), Kilmeague (Co. Kildare), Ventry (Co. Kerry), Doon (Co. Limerick), and on Achill Island. These were established by leasing land from a Protestant landlord on favourable terms. The aim of the colonies was to inspire by their industrious and spiritual example; schools were built and scripture readers employed. Converts were said to enjoy comfortable homes, rent-free land and enjoy improved career opportunities for their children.

Achill

The Achill Mission was founded after a visit by a young Church of Ireland minister called Edward Nangle (1799-1883), who had undergone a conversion to evangelism after reading the work of Christopher Anderson. In 1831 he arrived on Achill to help with famine relief, and although only being there for a day, he became convinced it was ripe for a mission, especially as there was no resident priest. He got official support of the evangelical Bishop of Tuam, Dr Power de Poer Trench (1770-1839), president of the Irish Society, who insisted every minister in his diocese speak Irish (when this proved impracticable, he encouraged the use of Irish-speaking scripture readers).

Public subscription made the Achill venture viable. Initially 130 acres were rented on the slopes of Slievemore mountain from Sir Richard O’Donnell for a fee of £90 and an annual rent of £1. The land was so poor locals thought it was useless. By 1842 the colony had 30 thatched cottages, a small hospital, grain stores, a church, schools and several larger houses for the clergymen and stewards (McNally 1973: 97-98). A printing press published *The Achill Missionary Herald and Western Witness* which trumpeted the success of the colony and ridiculed local priests for, among other things, charging for blessings, weddings and the last rites, which the *Herald* assumed was the principle cause of poverty on the island! (McDonald 2006: 202).

There was also a comfortable hotel which began the tourist industry on the island. Often it was the haunt of curious English evangelicals, the source of much-needed income for the colony; in 1839 the Mission received £910 from England and only £138 from Ireland

(McDonald 2006: 129). The Mission also had an orphanage, in which children of usually Catholic parentage were brought up as Protestants; this drew the particular fury of the Catholic Church. In 1851, the Mission bought three-fifths of the island from Sir Richard O'Donnell and became the most important landowner in Achill. The famine years brought charges of 'souperism', or giving food in order to obtain conversions; this term was coined in the Dingle area where food as well as the scriptures were distributed in the charity schools (Ó Mainín 1973: 55). The Catholic *Tablet* called Nangle a 'soul-buyer' (McDonald 2006: 154) and Father Michael Gallagher of Achill claimed that:

... poverty has compelled the greatest number of the population to send their children to Nangle's proselytising villainous schools; he has at this moment one thousand children of the Catholics of this parish attending ... They are dying of hunger, and rather than die, they have submitted (Whelan 1995: 148).

On the other hand Nangle was very much involved in famine relief. In 1847 he was employing two-thirds of the 6,000 islanders on a rotational basis, and his *Achill Herald* predicted disaster for the following year. He also travelled to England on a fund-raising tour. He presented his efforts as a propaganda victory, writing 'Who helps Achill now? Not Dr. McHale and the Roman Catholic priests but Protestants in the Settlement!' (McDonald 2006:149). In 1848 the *Achill Herald* reported that the islanders 'recognise the hand of God in the fearful visitation' (McDonald 2006: 161). Desmond Bowen, who discounted many accusations of 'souperism', wrote, 'it would seem probable that whatever relief came to Achill was given first to those who were at least potential converts or were nominally Protestant' (1970: 100). In contrast to Nangle's reputation, Dr Neason Adams, of the Achill Dispensary and Hospital, supported Nangle's evangelism, but campaigned for funds and dispensed relief to the distressed with no conditions attached. At his wife's funeral procession in 1856, the Roman Catholic priest followed the coffin, an indication of the respect with which she and the doctor were held (McDonald 2006: 189)

The Catholic Church awoke to the religious and educational threat, and during the 'devotional revolution' it gained lost ground. Archbishop McHale vowed to visit Achill every year and sent militant priests to the island who urged locals not to work at the Mission or trade with its occupants. Caer Otway recounted a sermon preached by Fr John Dwyer against the colony, urging locals to stone the 'heretics' and throw them into bog holes (Branach 2000: 36). In the 1850s the Catholic archbishop John McHale of Tuam, nicknamed 'the Lion of Judah', decided to retake the island, vowing 'There is no place outside of hell which more outrages the Almighty than the Protestant colony' (Branach 2000: 36). McHale dispatched two monks of the Order of St Francis to establish the first National School on the island in 1852. This illustrates how Catholic interest in education was sometimes stirred by Protestant missionaries; McHale had previously opposed the National schools as he believed they would be non-denominational, have schoolbooks with a decidedly British content and the Irish language would not be compulsory. McHale's National schools were established not throughout the island, but were confined to areas already occupied by Nangle's Mission schools. This resulted in numerous verbal and physical disputes, many of which were settled in court (McDonald 2006: 117).

In 1852 Nangle was transferred by the bishop to the Sligo parish of Skreen to establish a mission there. He was replaced by the Rev Joseph Barker, but the Mission went into decline, mostly through emigration – during two months in 1883 forty-two members of the Mission left for Canada, America and Australia. The Dingle colony suffered the same fate. Dr Foley, himself a convert, recounted addressing an audience of 400 in Boston, most of whom were converts from Kerry, or had converted since coming to America (Achenson 2002: 198).

Another blow to the colony in Achill came in 1883, when the Land Commission reduced the rents, and the estate's income fell from £1400 to £900. An appeal in England and Ireland only raised £300, which could only keep in going for six months, and the Irish Society stepped in to pay the teachers.

The charges of 'souperism' levelled against Nangle were replicated elsewhere during the famine. Several letters from parish priests complain about the practice. For example, Fr. Flannelly of Ballinakill (near Clifden) complained of apostate priests and lay people going from cabin to cabin 'proffering food and money and clothing to the naked and starving on condition of their becoming members of their conventicles' (Whelan 1995: 147). There are also numerous folklore accounts which recount the practice (eg. Póirtéir 1995: 166-181). Niall Ó Ciosáin suggests that the Irish Folklore Commission may have encouraged such tales, as questionnaires inquired specifically about souperism and instructed informants 'to distinguish between centres at which proselytism was carried on and those at which it was not' (cited in Madden 2005: 137)

Desmond Bowen, who has examined the charges of souperism in Mayo and Sligo (1970), found that most local Church of Ireland clergy disagreed with Dallas' approach. He discovered that many local parsons were latitudinarian in outlook, religious liberals who were tolerant of other views, which contributed to the ultimate failure of proselytisers in the west. In the absence of landlords, these long-established clerical families saw themselves as local 'resident gentlemen', in charge of the temporal and spiritual care of both Catholic and Protestant locals. During the famine they distributed food while the priests were constantly in the saddle, trying to reach the dying to give the last rites. Forty Church of Ireland clergymen died of fever or exhaustion in 1847 alone (Achenson 2002: 187). Furthermore, 'original Protestants' were alarmed by the activities of missions and the subsequent souring of Catholic-Protestant relations (Moffitt 2008: 38). Protestant magistrates were not reluctant to hand down severe sentences to scripture readers whose work caused street riots (Moffitt 2008: 94). Dallas' aggressive approach caused 10 years of bitter religious warfare in Connaught, and many ministers found they were retrospectively charged with souperism after the famine.

The Irish Society shared the Achill Mission's financial woes. The Society's published material, aimed at the general public including doubters and potential funders, is ebullient in tone, filled with glowing reports from visiting English clergymen and stories of marvellous conversions. Yet Society minutes of the late nineteenth century show mounting debts, infighting, and a system that was breaking down due to a lack of

funding. Throughout the Society's history periodical inspections were not carried out due to the dangers of gathering large numbers of pupils and teachers together. By the late 1800s, the inspections were not carried out for other reasons; in some cases the inspectors were too old or there were not enough funds to organise large gatherings. The Society claimed to have 30,000 on its rolls in 1852, which had fallen to 2,412 in 1897. The twilight years of the Society witnessed the sale of school buildings and property in Dublin, as well as the lapse of renting land for colonies.

The Society's work in Irish was threatened by alliances with other missionary societies in an attempt to survive. The first partnership was with Irish Church Missions (ICM), which was formed in 1848 by the Rev Alexander Dallas (1791-1869), an English evangelical who had been working since 1843 in the west of Ireland. Although Dallas could not speak Irish, he employed scripture readers fluent in the language, and used them to translate his own sermons into Irish. A convinced millenarian, he saw the famine as a sign that 'the end was nigh', and took the opportunity to evangelise the Irish in their impoverished state. In common with many English people, he was convinced God had sent the potato blight to punish Irish Catholics for clinging stubbornly to their religion. Dallas denied 'souperism', as he never distributed food in famine-stricken areas, but claimed he wished only to save souls through evangelism, offering the 'bread of life' to the starving. This was a rather unusual rebuttal of the charge of 'souperism'. Dallas gave a strange account of his visit to Ennismore:

It was impossible to lose the opportunity of telling the Gospel to these apparently dying men as they stood or sat around me like living skeletons. They listened with fixed attention, as if they were pausing on the brink of the grave to receive a message from heaven as to their journey beyond it (Bowen 1978: 223).

Despite Dallas' defence of his work, Miriam Moffitt's (2008) definitive study of the Irish Church Missions finds plenty of evidence of 'souperism'. The ICM held day, evening and Sunday classes with food and clothing being distributed afterwards. As Moffitt notes, 'Although this relief fund was kept separate from missionary income, food and clothes were distributed by mission personnel and the poor of Connemara would have been unaware of the distinction' (Moffitt 2008: 31). The schools were fervently anti-Catholic, teaching for example, 'twenty-four Reasons for leaving the Church of Rome' (Moffitt 2008: 28) as well as loyalty to the British Empire. One written address to Dallas from an ICM orphanage reads thus:

Welcome to the Saxon here
Whom once we learned to hate and fear
But now a happy and free band
We love and bless their noble land (Moffitt 2008: 46).

Moffitt notes that the ICM's work with destitute children saved the lives of 'hundreds, possibly thousands, of Connemara children.' (2008: 42). This did little to quell Catholic resentment, with an effigy of 'Dallas the Devil' being burned on a public bonfire in

Clifden in 1850 (Moffitt 2008: 70). Mission orphans were evacuated to England as their orphanages came under attack during the Civil War of 1922-3 (Moffitt 2008: 166).

The union of the Irish Society with Dallas' Irish Church Missions was not a happy one. Dallas' anti-Catholic tirades alarmed Society stalwarts who believed he would embitter the relations between both communities. The Dublin University branch of the Irish Society, which unsuccessfully opposed the merger, compared Dallas' English agents unfavourably with the Irish Society, who were 'Irishmen all', well acquainted with 'the habits, the prejudices, and the good qualities too, of their fellow-countrymen' (Bowen 1978: 250). For his part, Dallas was disappointed by the Dublin Society's opposition to 'open attack upon the errors of Romanism ... they adhered entirely to the simple means of teaching the people to read the Irish Scriptures' (Bowen 1978: 225). The ICM was also opposed to the use of Roman Catholic Irish teachers and had no time for education in Irish which did not achieve conversion. The Irish Society found it did not profit financially from the alliance, noted that ICM was ignoring missionary work in Irish, and broke the connection in 1856.

In 1904 the Irish Society amalgamated with the Scripture Readers Society (of the Church of Ireland) but the latter society wished no Catholic teachers to be employed and insisted that all readers and agents were to be 'spiritually-minded men'. This stipulation seems to have been ignored by the Irish Society and it appears the Society continued to employ Catholics. On January 27th 1914, the last amalgamation was announced – once again with the Irish Church Missions. Since a condition of this amalgamation was that £1,500 be used to pay off the workers of the Society, we can assume that evangelism by the Church of Ireland in Irish had been formerly brought to an end.

The Irish Society was a remarkable case of 'cultural lag' in the Church of Ireland, for the decline of evangelism in the Church had begun in the 1870s, with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland (which diminished the funds available for missions), the loss of support of the aristocracy, the emigration of leading evangelicals, and the assumption of the state of social welfare, undermining the role of the churches in that field. Evangelists in the Church were left to protest in vain at such trifles as the adoption of the Roman collar (Acheson 2002: 220).

Case Study: The Antrim Glens

Anthony Buckley has written an account of an Antrim Glens controversy which centred on Cushendall (1992). Catholic political agitation in the 1830s was alarming the Church of Ireland, which believed that widespread conversion of Catholics would solve the problem. The landlord, Francis Turnly and his agent Archibald Hamilton were alarmed at Catholic unrest. They established the Court School House in 1824 (which was to become the National School in 1833). The teacher, an Irish-speaking Catholic called Robert Campbell, was well-read and popular.

Campbell taught Irish in his school and also taught in Irish after Mass in the Catholic Church with Father McKenna's agreement. McKenna even turned up at a couple of lessons. However, the landlord's agent reported that Campbell was 'convinced of the errors of Rome' and was secretly a Protestant. Fr McKenna suspected this and summoned Campbell to his home, but he refused to go. In January 1837 the priest made a statement from the altar condemning the reading of Irish in schools. Following this Catholics left the school or refused to come forward when requested to read the scriptures. Hamilton wrote, 'When (Mr. Campbell) called for the catechism none rose or made answer. After a pause he took a Bible in his hand and asked if any would rise and read and none did rise' (Buckley 1992: 32). Campbell was very disgruntled and threatened to resign. He was persuaded to stay, but Irish teaching on the Turnly estate was suspended, although it seems Campbell resumed teaching Irish against the priest's wishes.

The landlord's agent decided to employ an Irish scripture reader to take the focus off Campbell. William Collins, a Protestant convert from Cork and member of the Irish Society was employed. The landlord was worried about the repercussions of his appearance and warned him to lodge with a Protestant and avoid the priest of Cushendall. Collins struck a rather strange figure in the Glens, where locals found his southern dialect to be totally unintelligible. Curiously, the landlord's agent noted that they could not converse in Irish, for as the agent reported 'I speak a mixture of Galic and Irish' (Buckley 1992: 34) – a perfect description of Antrim Irish.

In 1838 a new priest, Fr John Fitzsimmons, turned on Campbell, complaining to the National Board that he was attempting to proselytise the children in Irish, which was contrary to National School regulations. Campbell denied that a Catholic teacher would try to proselytise Catholic children. By this time Fr Fitzsimmons had two national schools under his control, in competition with Campbell. Campbell resigned his post in 1840 and attended the Church of Ireland. This led him to be estranged from his family and the enraged local Catholic population. He found employment as a schoolteacher in Manchester, much to his relief.

Presbyterians

Presbyterians also expressed an interest in missionary activities in Irish. Concentrated in the north-east of Ulster, the Presbyterian Church virtually constituted a 'state within a state' (Hempton and Hill 1992: 16). The Church was essentially democratic in nature; congregations selected their own ministers, who were allowed to follow their own judgement. However, this often resulted in factionalism and secession arising from doctrinal disputes which often interrupted missionary activities.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Presbyterians were divided between the 'Old Light' Calvinists, who adhered to the Westminster Confession of Faith and were inclined to believe they were Heaven's Elect, and subscribers of the 'New Light', who rejected the Westminster Confession of Faith (controversial since it was written by man, and its tenets did not appear in the Bible) and Calvin's concept of predestination, and felt that every man should be allowed to follow his own conscience. Elements of both groups

rejected proselytism; some 'Old Light' Presbyterians viewed Catholics as irredeemably damned, while followers of the 'New Light' thought it presumptuous to convert Catholics, as they felt they could attain salvation within their own Church; the Rev Isaac Nelson warned of 'a blasphemous claim of doctrinal superiority' (Rodgers 1990: 90). Bowen found Presbyterians to be more interested in poaching members of the Church of Ireland than converting Catholics (1978: 34).

With their Scottish Gaelic links, the Ulster Presbyterians were in a position to evangelise the Irish from an early date. Scottish Gaelic-speaking ministers arrived to minister to communities of Presbyterians who spoke the language; for example, two came to minister to the Gaelic communities on Inishowen in the seventeenth century. Others came as army chaplains in the 1640s. Some Presbyterian ministers found Ireland more attractive than remote parts of Scotland, and some ministers who fell out of favour in Scotland made their way to Ireland. Gaelic-speaking Scottish ministers also came to Ireland as they were suspected of being Jacobites in Scotland.

In its early years the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was not self-sufficient and depended upon ministers from Scotland. In 1716 the General Synod of Ulster wrote to the Synod of Argyll requesting a probationer who could speak Irish (Macdonald 2006: 195). The Synod also requested that the Scots return a number of Irish bibles, proving the failure of the Church of Ireland to distribute bibles in their own country. However, the non-subscribing controversy which split the church in 1725 ended many missionary activities.

Patrick Simpson of Islay came to Dundalk in 1713 to serve the Scottish Gaelic-speaking congregation of Ballymascanlon. This congregation was served by Scottish Gaelic speakers until 1785, and afterwards by two Irish speakers from Belfast and County Down, Andrew Bryson (d1797), who was minister from 1786 to 1795, and Dr William Neilson (1774-1821), who was minister from 1796 to 1818 (Scott 1993: 26). Simpson also preached in Dublin to groups of Highland soldiers and the native Irish. In 1717 the Ulster Synod recommended that he preach in counties Down, Armagh and Monaghan. This great distance demonstrates how few native Presbyterian clergy were Irish speakers and how dependent the Irish church was on the Scots (Macdonald 2006: 214).

As the Counter-Reformation gathered strength, the Scottish Kirk preferred to retain its precious few Gaelic-speaking ministers. Fiona Macdonald estimates that between 1690 and 1760 eleven or twelve Episcopalian and Presbyterian ministers came to work in Ireland, but 31 Irish Catholic missionaries went to work in the Highlands and Islands (Macdonald 2006: 217). Therefore, the Scottish Kirk wished to keep its Gaelic-speaking ministers to combat the Counter-Reformation at home. As it matured the Irish church slowly cut its ties with the mother Kirk. This trend worked against further use of Scottish Gaelic-speaking ministers, and by the nineteenth century the Gaelic communities of Presbyterians had been assimilated to English. As most of the Scottish immigrants were lowlanders, the Gaelic-speaking Presbyterians found themselves in a minority, and switched to English faster than many Irish-speaking Catholics.

New Light influence in the Presbyterian Church was very strong until the 1840s. New Light Presbyterians were relatively unconcerned with converting Catholics, but this did not mean they were opposed to using Irish to encourage moral reform. One such individual was Rev William Neilson, minister to the Ballymascanlon Gaelic-speaking Presbyterians and later classics professor of the Royal Academical Institution. He was a Moderator of the General Synod in 1806 and supported Catholic emancipation. He wrote a popular grammar of the Irish language, *An Introduction to the Irish Language* (1808). His work contains words useful to a Presbyterian, such as ‘*ceangal*’ for ‘covenant’, although he avoids the customary Mariolatry in his greetings, ‘*Go mbeannaidh duit dhuit, a dhuine mhaith*’ (‘God save you, good man’) and the response *Go mbeannaidh an ceadna dhuitse* (‘May the same bless you’: ‘Dialogues, pg 37’). While examining Neilson’s work, Jim Stothers noted the absence of words and phrases necessary for preaching, such as ‘salvation’, ‘redemption’ and ‘repentance’ (Stothers 1981: 71-2). There is even a sentence which recognises the authority and title of a priest, ‘*Deantar do thoilse, athair Phadruig*’ (‘Your will be done, Father Patrick’, Dialogues, pg 28).

Neilson’s *Grammar* was used widely in the Belfast Academical Institution, in order to enable Presbyterian ministers to converse with the Irish in Gaelic, but not apparently to convert them. A similar publication, *Casán na Gaoidhilge: An Introduction to the Irish Language* was published by George Field in 1841; the title in Irish means ‘The Path to Irish’. This was an unusual publication which aimed to simultaneously serve Irish-speaking monoglots and learners of the language (Blaney 1996: 172). Although this was published with the express wishes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, it was a largely secular work.

A very different figure to Neilson, Dr Norman Macleod, minister of Campsie in Argyll, was appointed to preach in Ireland in the 1830s. He was known as *Caraid nan Gaedhael* (‘Friend of the Gaels’) in the Scottish Gaeltacht. In Ireland he wrote of his horror at the ‘blind idolatry’ of the masses (Stothers 1981: 62-3), but was circumspect enough to urge the preaching of the gospel without attacking priests or creeds. He found that he could only be understood in simple conversations in Connemara, but was much better understood in Antrim. His greatest Irish work was the translation of the psalms into metrical metre, published in 1826. Macleod followed the Gaelic psalter of the Church of Scotland, and was helped with the translation by Thaddeus Connellan, a Protestant convert from County Sligo who worked for the Irish Society (although the Irish psalter contains many Scotticisms). The *Orthodox Presbyterian* hoped that the translation of the psalms would help Irish Catholics to look more kindly on Presbyterians:

Now by sending forth the Book of Psalms in a dress of Irish growth and manufacture ... may we expect, even in our own day, to be received not as a foreign and hostile church which made a violent settlement on these shores, but as a company of Christian ministers who wandered from our own land in search of freedom, and having found it here, bequeathed it a most precious legacy.
(*Orthodox Presbyterian*: November 1834 Vol VI: 66)

Although Ulster Presbyterianism could be riven by disputes, it does not appear that an interest in Irish was the preserve of the liberals, or a sign of unorthodoxy. ‘Hardliner’ Presbyterians in the Seceding Synod and Reformed Presbyterian Church wished to evangelise in Irish, but appear not to have had the means. In the 1820s Henry Cooke eventually persuaded the General Synod to eject New Light ministers by insisting all candidates for the ministry sign the Westminster Confession of Faith. Cooke was close to the landed classes and united conservative religious and political views in Ulster. However, he was not opposed to Irish and proposed a motion to the General Synod of 1832 to cultivate the language. He also supported the desire to make Irish compulsory for candidates to the ministry. He was not averse to peppering his speeches with phrases in Irish and invited members of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland to preach in Gaelic in Ireland:

And trust you may be spared to see the day, when on visiting the Synod of Ulster, you may adopt the tongue of your native hills in addressing us, and not be necessitated to enquire of any of us, ‘An labhrann tú Gaeilge?’ [‘Do you speak Irish?']... and the céad míle fáilte romhat [‘one hundred thousand welcomes before you’] with which Ireland will meet you, will flow as warm from her heart as from the spirits of your Highland clansmen (Blaney 1996: 90).

The Synod of Ulster agreed in 1710 and 1716 to use Irish in an attempt to win converts. But nothing appeared in Synod records until over a century later, in 1833, indicating official church disinterest. In 1834 the Synod made the study of Irish compulsory for students of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, which was attended by some of its students for the ministry. In 1835 this rule was made stricter ‘... no student will be received into the divinity class after this Session, who has not attended the Irish Class’ (Stothers 1981 82). Thus the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as the only church in Ireland to insist its clergy learn Irish. However, there were only three attending the class by 1847 and lessons seem to have been discontinued after this date.

In 1826 the Presbyterian Church decided to imitate the Home Mission, which in its early years concentrated on fellow Presbyterians in the south and west of Ireland. Until 1830 the mission received little funding, and complained of Synod indifference, partly due to a preoccupation with doctrinal disputes. The Mission sent out missionaries, employed scripture readers to visit people in their homes, and published and distributed bibles and tracts; for example, it produced an Irish language version of the Presbyterian shorter Catechism, *An Teagasc Críosduigh*, in 1837 (Blaney 1996: 169). Much of the Mission’s work was done in the medium of Irish.

In the 1830s the Home Mission established 30 charity schools in Irish-speaking districts of Tyrone, Antrim and Derry. These operated in the same manner as the charity schools established by the Church of Ireland’s Irish Society. Scholars learned to read with mechanical drills, then translated passages of the Irish Bible into English, and finally learned by rote set passages from the Bible. The Mission tended to avoid any teaching which could be perceived as explicitly Presbyterian in form. Bible societies donated 700 copies of the New Testament in Irish.

At the height of operations in 1841, the Mission claimed 120 schools were operating in Tyrone, 27 in Antrim, 14 in Mayo, and 18 in Galway (Rodgers 1990: 92) Cordial relations were established with the Irish Society, which in Ulster agreed to operate north of a line joining Stewartstown and Newtown Stewart while the Presbyterian Mission concentrated its activities to the south and took over Antrim. However, the Mission's schools were hampered by financial pressures as they were not supported by the Presbyterian Church's mission funds; rather they relied on donations from individuals and groups in Ireland and Scotland.

A stalwart of the mission was the Reverend Michael Brannigan (1816-1874), who was ordained by the Presbytery of Tyrone as a missionary to the south and west of Ireland. A converted Catholic and a fluent Irish speaker, he supervised schools operating in Sligo and Mayo. The Rev Dr John Edgar (1798-1866), a moderator of the Presbyterian Church and honorary secretary of the Home Mission, took a great interest in the schools in Connaught, and embarked upon a preaching tour there. Edgar's preaching seemed ambiguous regarding proselytism; he told his audiences never to change religion 'to please any man, or forsake it till convinced it was false' (Killen 1867: 232). Yet his preaching had Protestant overtones, as he declared 'justification by free grace, through faith, and the duty of an immediate and unreserved acceptance of Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient and only Saviour' (Killen 1867: 233). An account of the schools states, 'Ten females were examined, in conversational Irish, on the doctrine of the atonement, and the nature of faith and good works' (Killen 1867: 229). This would tend to suggest a Protestant viewpoint which emphasises personal faith in Christ as the sole means to salvation, a belief which challenged the Catholic belief in the efficacy of 'good works' and the intercession of saints. Yet Edgar wrote in the 1853 Home Mission report that success should not be estimated by counting converts, but changes in behaviour such as the abandonment of superstitions, drinking and swearing (Stothers 1981: 90).

Whatever his views on proselytism, Edgar was horrified by the famine in Connaught in 1846 and set aside his own evangelical zeal to campaign for aid for the starving. He announced in May Street Presbyterian Church, 'I hope soon to have an opportunity of directing public attention to spiritual famine in Connaught, but our effort now is to save the perishing body ... Our brother is starving, and, till we have satisfied his hunger, we have no time to inquire whether he is Protestant or Romanist' (Killen 1867: 217-218). The famine wreaked havoc in Connaught in 1846 and 1847, bringing an end to the work of the charity schools in that province. Dr Edgar's behaviour demonstrates that some evangelists abandoned their work during the famine. After the famine English-language 'industrial schools' were established by the Presbyterian Church in Connaught to stimulate local crafts. They had proselytising features, of which Dr Edgar wholeheartedly approved (Killen 1867: 248).

The Home Mission denied that it was interested in proselytism, often employing Catholic teachers, and claimed Catholic priests attended the lessons, although they probably attended as suspicious observers. As with the Irish Society, the Catholic teachers were paid after being questioned by an inspector who was usually a clergyman or a converted

Catholic. Several of these teachers eventually joined the Presbyterian Church. The pupils, who were mostly adults, often had to run the gauntlet of the community and the local priest. The teachers were even worse off, torn between the fear of excommunication and a need to alleviate their poverty through employment in the schools. The Rev Robert Allen, who had schools in Counties Tyrone and Derry, complained of four lines of attack on Presbyterian Mission teachers: slanders, such that Mission teachers must disfigure pictures of the Blessed Virgin; open denunciation of the teachers as Judases or apostates; the terrifying altar curse and accompanying illnesses; and direct persecution which refused friendship and threatened violence (Rodgers 1990: 93).

The Catholic *Belfast Vindicator* claimed the schools were a swindle and in 1844 Father Luke Walsh of the diocese of Down and Connor published *The Home Mission Unmasked*, in which he accused the Presbyterian Church of fabricating statistics about the schools and concluded, 'these airy phantoms of schools, if they have any existence, like the Protestant Church before Luther, are invisible' (Rodgers 1990: 94). Even Protestants, wrote Fr Walsh, would testify there were no schools in the Glens of Antrim. Walsh's campaign against the Mission included a tour of Scotland to publicise his exposé of 'some unprincipled persons who were taking the money as teachers though they had no schools; that these persons, if paid, would be as equally willing to teach the Koran as the Irish Bible' (O'Laverty 1887: 515).

The Mission directors defended themselves by claiming the irregularity of time and place of school meetings might confuse locals as to their existence, and insisted that the hostility of the Catholic Church compelled the air of secrecy. Rodgers, in assessing the claims, finds it difficult to believe 'that Ulster Presbyterians were more careless with the distribution of money than has ever been their wont' (1990: 95). Yet the directors were aware that a fool-proof system of inspection was scarcely practicable. It appears that the number of scholars rarely exceeded 2, 000 (Rodgers 1990: 101).

The schools were dealt a devastating blow in 1846, when Hugh O'Donnell claimed that in his capacity as an inspector in the Glens of Antrim for three years he had given false returns to his employers to secure his and the teachers' positions (Ó Buachalla 1978: 111). The revelation strengthened the hand of opponents of the schools, who thought that it was too risky to employ Catholics, and that little would be achieved in terms of proselytism.

Both Anglican and Presbyterian charity schools were felt to have been rendered redundant by the introduction of the national system of education in 1831, which permitted only English-medium education. Michael Brannigan became convinced that English-medium schools with scriptural instruction were more effective and by the end of 1847 had established 21 English-language schools in Sligo and Mayo (Killen 1867: 235). The expansion of English-medium education led the Mission to abandon its Irish language activities in 1854; thereafter the Presbyterian Church concentrated on English-medium agricultural and industrial schools. Dr Edgar attributes the abandonment of the Irish language to a variety of reasons:

Pious teachers of Irish are scarce; good Romanists would not bear scorn and hate for our pay; the system moved steadily and dark, and tempted to fraud. We preach in Irish to the old who know it only; but Irish is dying, and let it die: English is the language of our pulpit and of our school (Rodgers 1990: 96).

When the Presbyterian Church accepted that the Catholic Church was a Church of Christ in 1861, proselytisers were in a dilemma, recognising that the Catholic Church was Christian, yet at the same time attempting to evangelise the members of that church.

The Failure of Protestant Evangelism in the Irish Language

In some respects mission activity in Ireland struggled against widespread Protestant disinterest, a feature which has been noted elsewhere. Gustav Warneck gave three reasons for the lack of Protestant missionary activity in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Christ's command to 'make disciples of all nations' (Mathew 28:19) was perceived to be a task only allotted to the first-century apostles; belief that the end of the world was near, so there was little point in evangelism; and the theological conviction that God would convert peoples in his own good time (McGrath 2007: 176). Traditionally Protestant evangelism was perceived to be the duty of the state, not churches, as summarised by the dictum *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whoever rules the region decides its religion") (McGrath 2007: 175). We have seen how the British state was not enthusiastic for the conversion of the Irish.

By the late eighteenth century many Protestants believed that the Irish language was dying and it was unnecessary to proselytise in the language; by 1770 English was in the ascendant east of the river Shannon (Harrison 2001: 64). Enthusiasts for evangelism in Irish were placed in the ironic position of claiming that there were many speakers of Irish, but that evangelism in Irish would contribute to the death of the language. The government and Protestant churches doubted that many conversions could be effected, refused to contribute substantial sums to preaching or publishing in Irish, and the Presbyterian and Anglican congregations refused to shoulder the financial burden alone. Harrison notes the ambivalence of the Protestant public towards large numbers of Catholics converting to Protestantism: 'If the Irish changed their religious affiliation, there would no longer be an excuse to expropriate their land or to exclude them from political office.' (2001: 57). Stothers records Anglican fears of the Church of Ireland being swamped by native Irishmen, who would demand a native government (1981: 33). As Lord Drogheda put it,

'I shall be very glad to see the Protestant religion strengthened: but what will we do for hewers of wood and drawers of water, for labouring men to plough our lands, thresh our corn, etc?'(Barton 2009: 242)

Strong anti-Catholic feeling in Ireland, especially in the wake of warfare, mitigated against missionary efforts. Some proselytisers' hatred of Catholicism was so great that they gave the impression that Protestantism was a mere negation of Catholic teaching,

having sprung from a hatred of 'Popery' (Rodgers 1991: 17). The Irish Church Missions insulted the traditions of Connemara Catholics by, for example, building a schoolhouse on top of a ring fort (Moffitt 2008: 173). The invective and ridicule directed against the Catholic hierarchy by some proselytisers outraged Catholic congregations and their priests, and only served to sour relations between the Churches.

Others viewed preaching in what they felt to be the barbarous language of a backward people as an inherently repugnant activity (Barnard 1993: 245). The language was also associated with rebellion, and preachers who used it were regarded with suspicion, regardless of their political and religious credentials. In the tense atmosphere preceding the rebellion of 1798, the Rev William Neilson was arrested for incitement to treason after preaching in Irish to his Presbyterian congregation at Rademon, County Down. He was released when he translated the manuscript of his sermon. Ironically he eschewed the violence of the rebels and played a calming role in the insurrection (Blaney 1996: 57-58)

Barnard claims that converts were mistrusted as hypocrites, heretics and foreign agents (1993: 245). The Rev Charles Gayer of Dingle wrote in 1845, 'The trial that a convert has to undergo, to test his sincerity in the eyes of some who from their own profession ought to uphold him, is a fiery ordeal indeed ...' (Ó Mainín 1973: 50). In 1909 Errismore teacher Daniel Faherty remembered the church attendance of converts whose 'filthy raggedness raised disgust in the habitual worshippers' (Moffitt 2008: 158).

Protestants who understood no Irish fantasised about sinister hidden messages which Catholic translators inserted into their works, and regarded dabbling in the language as a form of contamination (Barnard 1993: 270, 272). For their part, many Catholics could not read the Irish language bibles and tracts which were distributed to them; many associated literacy with the English language alone. The delicate nature of inter-church relationships in the nineteenth century, given the growing political self-confidence of Catholics, contributed to the abandonment of evangelism by the Protestant churches. The main obstacle to proselytism was the strength of the Catholic Church and its widespread support among the Irish peasantry.

The Catholic Counter-Reformation was well-established in Ireland before English military supremacy was accomplished; 20 Irish colleges were established throughout Europe between 1590 and 1690 for the training of priests, the education of wealthy Irish Catholics and the publishing of anti-Protestant tracts and Catholic catechisms (Crowley 2005: 47). Catholic religious material was published in Irish on the continent, some by a Franciscan priest, Aodh Mac Aingil (Hugh McCaghwell, 1571-1626) from Downpatrick, who 'obviously believed that the Protestant publications were attracting Irish Catholics away from the old faith' (Kearns, cited in Ó Snodaigh 1995: 39). The Counter-Reformation of the Irish Franciscans was largely successful as it was directed at teaching Irish-speaking priests how to communicate Catholic doctrine effectively, whereas Protestant works in Irish assumed a reading ability in the public which was largely absent (Harrison 2001: 56).

During the Counter-Reformation the Catholic Church viewed the use of Irish as a medium of religious instruction and a bulwark of spiritual welfare against Protestantism, but by the nineteenth century the Church began to perceive it as a barrier to the temporal advancement of its congregation (Ó Huallacháin 1994: 24). As MacDonagh put it, 'The effect was partly to align Protestantism and Gaelic in one camp, and Catholicism and the expansion of English in another' (1992: 106). Furthermore, many secular Catholic leaders, such as Daniel O'Connell, argued that the native Irish could advance their positions by learning English. In the 1820s the Catholic Association politicised priests who were more than willing to combat Protestant evangelicals at every level, by setting up rival charity schools, for example. Some have even blamed Protestant evangelism in Irish for the demise of the language. According to the Rev Monsignor James O'Laverty, the reaction of the Catholic clergy 'destroyed along the Antrim coast the Irish language' (Ó Snodaigh 1995: 80). John O'Donovan reported from Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan,

The teachers of the Bible through the medium of the Irish language have created in the minds of the peasantry a hatred for everything written in that language, and the society who encouraged them could not have adopted a more successful plan to induce them to learn English and hate their own language. (Ó Snodaigh 1995: 58)

The hostility of the Catholic Church to Irish seemed to make Protestant proselytism in the language pointless. Catholics who did convert faced the hostility of their former co-religionists and many nominal Catholics often reverted to their original church; others were reconverted against their will, and deathbed confrontations between rival clergy often resulted in court proceedings (Moffitt 2008: 117-8). Many reconverted as conditions were improved and educational alternatives to mission schools were developed. 'Souper Birds' often moved to the more congenial Ulster and Dublin or emigrated to English-speaking countries, many joining the military throughout the empire (Moffitt 2008: 112, 171).

For the native Irish, theological issues were not the only ones at stake. Protestantism was the religion of conquest, dispossession and discrimination, and Catholicism the ancestral religion of sacrifice, suffering and resistance to an alien invader. Catholic folk tales about proselytisers describe sinister meetings in remote locations at which strange figures pay everyone present for agreeing not to attend Mass and to spit on a picture of the Virgin Mary (e.g. Ó Cnámhsí 1989: 44-53). Catholic writers linked the Protestant faith to English domination, with frequent derogatory references to the 'creed of Harry and Bess' (Moffitt 2008: 76). Irish language bibles were regarded as conveying heretical thoughts, and were destroyed upon receipt or handed to Catholic priests for safe disposal. Thus many Protestants regarded Irish language tracts as vehicles of sedition, and many Catholics perceived them to be heretical. Given such beliefs, it can be no surprise that proselytism in Irish failed.

Missionary efforts in Irish dwindled as many Catholics abandoned the language for utilitarian reasons. As the Penal Laws were relaxed, and urbanisation and industrialisation increased, Catholics discovered that prospects for their material

advancement were increasing. The greater social mobility of Catholics contributed to their rejection of the Irish language (Crowley 1996: 109). By the 1830s, school inspectors and teachers were noting the 'excessive zeal' with which parents co-operated with the national schools policy of Anglicisation by speaking whatever English they had acquired with their children (Ó Huallacháin 1994: 25). Many Irish speakers died during the famine, and other abandoned the language as they were desperate to emigrate to the English-speaking world.

By the end of the nineteenth century Protestantism was also on the retreat in the south and west of Ireland, and in the north it was becoming increasingly introverted and defensive. The New Light movement had been defeated in the Presbyterian Synod, leading to the convergence of Presbyterianism with conservatism, doctrinal orthodoxy and anti-Catholicism. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, educational competition, agrarian violence, the Home Rule movement, and the perceived danger of nationalism to the economic superiority of industrial Belfast led Protestants to fear that their whole way of life was threatened by an resurgent self-assured and politically active Catholicism. The work of missions was redirected at maintaining beleaguered groups of isolated Protestants. In this climate Protestant evangelism was more concerned with shaping Protestant identity and recapturing the leadership of the Protestant community than changing religious allegiance. Protestants of all denominations sank their differences in the face of the religious and political threat from the Catholic community.

In England anti-Catholic sentiments were stoked by waves of Irish famine emigrants and the restoration of a Catholic hierarchy in the country in 1851. Yet by the mid-1850s such fears had subsided and the outbreak of the Crimean War and the Indian mutiny of 1857 diverted Protestant missionary activity from Irish Catholics to 'heathens' in the east (Moffitt 2008: 91). The 1861 census demonstrated that the numbers of the established Church fell by 100,000 between 1834 and 1861; the exaggerated claims of conversions by the missions were even challenged by the Protestant press which wondered why the Protestant population had dwindled by twenty five per cent in counties Mayo and Galway when huge efforts were made to proselytise in these districts (Moffitt 2008: 97) The era of energetic Protestant missions ended with the outbreak of the First World War, which unleashed a 'tidal wave of nationalism' accompanied by economic and political uncertainties (McGrath 2007: 196).

Antiquarianism

Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism

Antiquarianism represented an aristocratic and scholarly approach to the Irish language which had many influences. It would be mistaken to draw a strict boundary between Irish-language evangelism and antiquarianism; the failed missions fostered enquiries into Ireland's antiquities and indigenous culture (Barnard 1993: 244). Henry Joseph Monck Mason, the secretary of the Irish Society, was a convinced proselytiser, who saw no

contradiction between his hatred of the Catholic Church and his membership of the Ibero-Celtic Society, which promoted Gaelic literature. The Rev James Goodman (1828-1896), a collector of songs and composer of hymns in Irish, found traditional *aisling* poetry to be a suitable medium for conveying novel concepts in Irish. He wrote a long poem in which a beautiful woman keens on a mountainside. This figure is not the personification of a suffering Ireland, as one might expect from Irish literature, but the Bible lamenting the Catholic Church banishing the truth from Ireland (Ó Mainín 1997: 68). At the conclusion of the poem a golden bible-reading age dawns on Ireland as the foreign Catholic faith or ‘an chaillig ghrána’ (‘the ugly crone’) is banished to Italy.

Protestant interest in translating the Scriptures into various vernaculars provided the inspiration for the development of linguistics in the seventeenth century (Leerssen 1986: 333). However, some antiquarians were clearly embarrassed by evangelical activity, as their activities increased Catholic suspicion of any Protestant interested in Irish. James McDonnell (1763-1845), chairman of the Ulster Gaelic Society (see below) and a founder of the Linen Hall Library, commented on Christopher Anderson's *Historical Sketches of the Ancient Irish*, ‘... altho’ the author be a Scotch Presbyterian ... there is none of those absurd reproaches cast upon the Papists, no predictions of their conversion, nothing said about the Antichrist, the Babylonesh Lady and the beast with ten horns’ (Ó Snodaigh 1995: 71).

Eighteenth-century Irish intellectual, cultural and fashionable life was dominated by England; booksellers mostly sold works produced in Britain, Irish theatres presented the latest London successes, and middle-class parents were concerned that their children should not have a distinctive Irish accent (McDowell 1991: 145). Yet indigenising forces were also at work. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the educated classes of Europe compared their civilisation to that of classical Greece and Rome. This interest was part of the European Romantic movement which drew on elements of archaeology, philology, literature and folklore. Eventually the indigenous heroes and tales of each ‘nation’ ousted those of ancient Greece and Rome.

The Romantic movement, coupled with political developments in Ireland, heralded a changing sense of identity among the Anglican nobility. In the early eighteenth century upper-class Anglicans (also referred to as the Anglo-Irish, or the Ascendancy) believed themselves to be Englishmen born in Ireland (Leerssen 1986: 340). However, in the latter part of the century they increasingly came to resent their treatment by their English counterparts as provincial colonial cousins, and some were driven to a degree of fellow-feeling with their fellow Irishmen. This led to the development of the Irish Patriot tradition, which professed loyalty to the British monarch but demanded greater autonomy for Ireland and concessions to the Catholic population. The Patriots sympathised with the Irish poor, and blamed their ‘backwardness’ on English economic policy. Widespread resentment was also caused by the English parliament's policy of using tariffs to curb the Irish economy where it competed with native English industry. The Patriots succeeded in achieving a degree of legislative independence, known as ‘Grattan’s parliament’ (1782-1800), although the administration ultimately remained in the hands of the lord lieutenant, appointed by the English government.

The Anglo-Irish expressed a love of Ireland through the study of landscape, art and Irish flora and fauna. Furthermore, they appropriated the Gaelic past for themselves. Scholars of Britain, France and Germany came to the conclusion that the Celts were one of the formative peoples of European culture (Hutchinson 1987: 197). In 1760 the publication of Macpherson's *Ossianic Lays*, based on Scottish Highland folklore, caused a sensation and stimulated an interest in the culture of the native Celts, which were idealised as a mystical race, unspoiled by the artificialities of urban society (Leerssen 1986: 396). Macpherson's work led to an enthusiasm among the intelligencia for reading Irish literature in translation. Philologists disputed the origins of the Irish language and its relationship to other European languages during the eighteenth century, but connections were made between Irish and Welsh, thus firmly establishing Irish as one of the Celtic languages spoken in the British Isles.

Anglo-Irish antiquarians believed that the essence and key to legitimacy of national or cultural identities was to be found in the past; to put it simply – the older, the better. If a language was shown to be purer than another, it was believed to be older and consequently to have more prestige. Antiquarians pitted the culture and history of Ireland against the brute force of British economic and military power. They were excited by enquiries into the warriors, seers and poets of Ireland's pagan past, and drew upon these discoveries to depict the native Irish as a heroic civilising people. Protestants were attracted to this era as it circumvented an Irish history that emphasised the Catholicism of Ireland; some members of the Ascendancy identified with the aristocratic warriors of Gaelic Ireland, and the Church of Ireland saw itself as the inheritor of the Celtic Christianity of Saint Patrick. By identifying with the ancient Gaelic heroes of Ireland, the Anglo-Irish laid claim to the leadership of the Irish people. They hoped to create a syncretic British/Irish identity which embraced the culture of the Irish natives, but validated Anglican rule in Ireland.

Irish was compared to ancient classical languages such as Greek and Sanskrit; some antiquarians went further, claiming that Irish was the pre-Babel language spoken in Eden (Crowley 1996: 99,108-9). Irish romantics stigmatised English as a language of crass materialism and commerce, and described Irish as a lyrical language of emotions, literature and poetry, associating it with a Rousseauesque vision of a rural idyll:

All that is necessary for me to remark is, that there is a sympathy in the Irish language and the Irish airs, so sweetly plaintive, as to appear the operation of the Deity in giving charms to a state of poverty and sorrow. I have sat under a hedge and listened to the rustic songs of those peasants, while at labour, with a pleasure that transcended any I had ever felt at Vauxhall ... [Ireland is] the most romantic island in the world (Charles Bowden, cited in Leerssen 1986: 80-81).

Translations of bardic poetry were used to augment the literary image of the language and endow it with historical validity. The Romantic movement elevated the status of peasant languages such as Irish by endowing them with a literary prestige. Anglo-Irish

antiquarians used the Irish language as a gauge with which to measure the national character of Ireland:

Where the language of any ancient nation is attainable, a criterion is discovered for distinguishing accurately, the more remarkable features of the national character (Charles Vallancey, cited in Leerssen 1986: 427).

The representation of the Irish language as a facet of the Irish national character is characteristic of the period. The Irish 'nation', which had been thought of by the Anglo-Irish nobility to consist only of the country's rulers, now came to embrace the 'natives' as well as the gentry (Leerssen 1986: 354).

The atmosphere of late eighteenth-century Belfast was 'enterprising, self-reliant, enlightened, philanthropic and self-improving' (Killen 1990: 5). The city experienced a Europe-wide movement of self-improvement through the foundation of learned societies, libraries and debating societies. However, the Belfast expression of this movement had a distinctive political dimension. Presbyterian intellectuals sought to establish a period of greater religious freedom and emancipation, resenting the political supremacy of the Anglo-Irish in the Dublin parliament. The Belfast Reading Society (established 1788) supported Catholic emancipation and included among its members the parish priest of St. Mary's, the first Catholic Church in the city of Belfast (Killen 1990: 13). It was felt that the Irish language could be used to achieve political aims; the radical Belfast paper, the *Northern Star*, remarked in 1795:

By our understanding and speaking it we could more easily and effectively communicate our sentiments and instructions to all our Countrymen; and thus mutually improve and conciliate each other's affections (Ó Buachalla 1978: 30).

Given the nationalist 'sentiments' of the *Northern Star*, Irish represented a means by which Presbyterian radicals hoped to introduce their nationalist philosophy to the native Irish.

Some Catholics and Northern Presbyterians, fired by the democratic ideals of the French and American revolutions, formed the United Irishmen, a revolutionary group dedicated to the establishment of a republic in Ireland. Some antiquarians distanced themselves from rebellious activities, and were more pro-British in disposition. The 1792 Belfast Harp Festival, a celebration of ancient Irish music, may have been timed to celebrate or provide a counter-attraction to the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille (Blaney 1996: 41).

While some United Irishmen spurned antiquarianism and cultural endeavours, there is evidence that others participated wholeheartedly in cultural activities, including Irish language ones. Some of the United Irishmen spoke Irish, including Thomas Russell (1767-1803), a librarian of the Belfast Reading society who was taught by Patrick Lynch, a native speaker from Loughinisland. But other United Irishmen such as Wolfe Tone and Henry Joy McCracken never learned Irish (Blaney 1996: 42). Although the United

Irishmen found translations of poetry celebrating Ireland's ancient glories useful to their cause, they did not promote the revival of Irish (Thuente 1994: 11).

Nineteenth-Century Antiquarianism

Following the defeat of the rebellion, the British government enacted the Act of Union in 1800, which abolished the Dublin parliament and introduced free trade between Britain and Ireland. Ireland's agrarian economy went into decline, but the industrial north-east of Ulster thrived, linking the economy of the region more to Britain than to the rest of the island. Many Presbyterians were happy with the development and became firmly unionist in outlook; the Irish nation fell 'by default' into the hands of politicised middle-class Catholics (MacDonagh 1992: 17).

Though the majority of Protestants now looked to Britain as the centre of cultural as well as political life, antiquarian interest in the Irish language continued in the first half of the century. Antiquarianism was put on a more rigorous footing, with less fanciful comparisons being made between Ireland and Egypt and India. The scientific analysis of Ireland was begun through the examination of documents, archaeology, and map making. Domestic tourism flourished as journeys to the continent were interrupted by the Napoleonic wars, and the resulting proliferation of guide-books, which enthused about Ireland's round towers and crumbling churches, created a sense of nostalgia for the past and a welcome antidote to the materialism of England (Patten 1991: 110).

Antiquarians were keen to disassociate themselves from the events of 1798 and banned the discussion of controversial political issues from their meetings (Ó Buachalla 1978: 48). Yet some cultural commentators have detected political motivations in this 'non-political' activity. Some enthusiasts saw the Gaelic past of chiefs and kings as a means of combating democratic principles and ensuring the continuation of Anglo-Irish rule (Ó Croidheáin 2006: 111). According to Lawrence McCaffrey, it was hoped that antiquarianism would have the effect of 'reviving deference for the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and gentry' and 'wean Catholics away from democratic nationalism' (Ó Croidheáin 2006: 134).

A number of cultural and intellectual organisations flourished in early nineteenth-century Belfast, including the Harp Society (1808-1831), the Literary Society (c1836-c1874), and the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society (1821-present). Another important organisation was the Belfast Reading Society (1788-present), later called the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge (now known as the Linen Hall Library), which by 1885 had collected numerous works in the Irish language, from the *Annals of the Four Masters* to numerous grammars and dictionaries (Killen 1990: 65). These cultural societies regarded themselves as respectable, an opinion shared by many members of the titled gentry who agreed to become their patrons.

In 1830 the Marquis of Downshire agreed to become the patron of a society explicitly dedicated to the study of the Irish language, the Ulster Gaelic Society/ Cuideacht Gaeidhlice Uladh, on the grounds that it would 'drive men's minds from speculative

discussions and political disputations from which this country has suffered so much' (Ó Buachalla 1978: 73). The Society prepared the path for the revival movement as it was interested in the contemporary language of the time, rather than the classical language of manuscripts. Members, who were mostly Presbyterians, organised Irish classes and were extremely active in collecting, copying and editing old Irish manuscripts. The organisation also published in Irish, translating Maria Edgeworth's moral stories, *Forgive and Forget* and *Rosanna*, into Irish in 1833.

Robert McAdam (1808-95), was a Belfast foundry owner and secretary of the Ulster Gaelic Society. He detested efforts to 'beguile the poor Catholics from their faith, the only result being that it has done more harm to the language than foreign persecution for 300 years' (Ó Snodaigh 1995: 78). He combined business trips with manuscript and folklore collecting. McAdam collected 400 songs in Irish, compiled a large English/Irish dictionary, and proposed the creation of an Irish language newspaper. He even prepared Irish language mottoes for the visit of Queen Victoria to Belfast (the motto appears on a plaque in the present-day Writers' Square):

Do mhíle fáilte a Bhanríoghain Éire
Go cathraigh éigseach chriche Uladh
Mas fuar síon ar mhullaigh a sliabh
Is grádhach díolos croidhe a bunadh.

1000 welcomes, Oh Queen of Ireland
To the poetic city of the land of Ulster.
If cold be the wind on its mountain-tops,
Its people's hearts are warm and loyal.
(Hughes 2006: 89).

It became common practice in nineteenth-century Belfast to include an inscription in Irish on public buildings (Ó Buachalla 1978: 92). Irish was used as a motto by the Protestant business classes on their buildings as an indigenous alternative to Latin. Some old branches of the Ulster Bank carry the motto *Lamh Dearg Eireann* (Red Hand of Ireland), including a branch in Bangor and what is now the Merchant Hotel in Belfast. The motto also appeared above St George's Market and on the lintel stone of the Ulster Hall (this was removed in the 1960s). An Irish and Latin motto was inscribed on the foundation stone of the Royal Victoria Hospital (1815).

In the nineteenth century the industrialisation of Belfast attracted a large number of Catholics to the city. Few Catholics had lived in the city previous to the 1830s, but by 1861 they comprised 34.1% of the population. Presbyterians had little fear of Catholics when their numbers were small and they remained unobtrusive; but by the middle of the century the demographic shift led to Protestant fears for their control of the city. Religious and political dissension increased, and sectarian riots broke out, often aroused by the inflammatory speeches of street-preachers. In 1864 the Protestant workers of Robert McAdam's Soho Foundry were involved in street fighting with Catholic navvies (Hughes 2006: 96). Societies which encouraged Catholic and Protestant co-operation

dwindled; the Ulster Gaelic Society seems to have ceased functioning in 1843, and after 1860 there is little record of Protestant interest in Irish in the city, apart from a few scattered individuals.

The Revival Movement

Antiquarians provided much of the iconography for Irish cultural and political nationalism; they proclaimed the superior qualities and antiquity of the Irish language, as well as representing the language as a key to the history and character of the Irish people. Furthermore, the belief that political and linguistic practices were legitimised by their antiquity was one that inspired the historicisation of the Irish national ideal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Revivalists expanded upon the theories of the antiquarians, but Protestant antiquarians, who preferred to talk *about* Irish, were eclipsed by a mostly Catholic movement dedicated to the cultivation of the language as a means of communication. The Anglo-Irish literary elite competed with a populist non-academic Gaelic revival to 'imagine' Ireland. The Ascendancy vision of a syncretic Irish-English culture was eclipsed by one dedicated to the cultural and political dichotomisation of Ireland and Britain.

The Struggle to 'Imagine' Ireland

Both nationalist and unionist members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy attempted to create an English-language literature based on the aristocratic legends and sagas of Ireland's pre-Christian heroic age. Whatever their political beliefs, many architects of the 'Celtic Twilight' were united in their belief that the Anglo-Irish were the natural leaders of the Irish people, both spiritually and culturally. These elitist and literary projects were eclipsed in the popular imagination by a revival movement which associated the Irish language with Irish nationality and Catholicism. German romantic nationalism, with its emphasis on the linguistic basis of national identity, had a profound influence on Irish language enthusiasts. The Protestant nationalist Thomas Davis (1814-1845) inspired a later generation of revivalists with phrases such as, 'A people without a language of its own is only half a nation' and 'To have lost entirely the national language is death; the fetter has worn through' (Ó hAilín 1969: 94).

Although antiquarian interest in Irish was swept away by the rising tide of political and religious agitation in Belfast, Irish language societies continued their work in Dublin. These societies had little impact and it was not until the formation of the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) in 1893 that a movement to revive Irish began.

In its early years the Gaelic League's aims were largely dominated by the philosophy of its first president, Douglas Hyde (1860-1945), a member of the Anglo-Irish nobility. Hyde felt himself to be a member of both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish worlds, and throughout his life affected the image of a country squire (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 1991: 74,146). As a young man he was fervently anti-English and in favour of violence to rid Ireland of British rule; he often linked the Irish language to this struggle. However, as

time went by, he became convinced that cultural regeneration, the core of which was the Irish language, was more important than political autonomy (Dunleavy and Dunleavy: xviii). Although he advocated Home Rule, a limited form of self-rule for Ireland, he felt that political independence without a Gaelic civilisation was meaningless (Hutchinson 1987: 2). He wished to rejuvenate Irish nationality by the cultivation of the distinguishing features of the nation, which were its language and customs:

Just when we should be starting to build up anew the Irish race and the Gaelic nation ... as within our own recollection Greece has been built up anew – we find ourselves despoiled of the bricks of nationality ... Imagine for a moment the restoration of a German-speaking Greece ... (Ó Glaisne 1991: 97).

For Hyde cultural revivalism was a moral end in itself; nationalism in the highest sense of the word, above creed or politics (Hutchinson 1987: 295). Hyde and other Gaelic Leaguers placed cultural emancipation before political independence:

Home Rule, no doubt, is of vital importance to Ireland, but whether it comes in this generation or succeeding generations, although important, is not of vital importance. It is possible for it to wait. *The cause of the Irish language cannot wait* (Martyn, cited in Crowley 1996: 126).

Advocates of cultural nationalism in the Gaelic League were contemptuous of separatists who put political independence, with its 'green flags and such exteriors', above the cultivation of nationality by means of the Irish language (Crowley 1996: 126). The object of the early Gaelic League can be summarised as follows:

The Gaelic League owes these great successes to the broad basis upon which it is founded. It recognizes in every Irishman a brother regardless of his religion or his politics. On its platform are found working side by side in a spirit of union and brotherly love - Catholic, Protestant, Dissenter, Nationalist, Unionist - and all are actuated by the same desire, to raise from the dust the Language, Music, Games, Traditions, Industries and Glory of Ireland (O'Leary et. al. 1905: 3).

The League differed from previous movements in that its principal aim was the propagation of '*caint na ndaoine*', the spoken Irish of the contemporary Gaeltacht. Antiquarian endeavours were felt to contribute little to counter the decline of the language or the sense of shame of its speakers. The League continued the work of Irish romantics by idealising the rural lifestyles of Irish-speaking peasants in the western Gaeltacht; this endowed the League with an anti-cosmopolitan ethos that permeated popular concepts of Irish culture and nationalism (cf. Crowley 1996: 135). The League embarked on an effective campaign to popularise Irish by organising meetings, establishing branches, and holding an annual festival *An tOireachtas*, which drew on the best talent of local *féiseanna* (festivals). Language classes were established, with teachers being trained in summer colleges in the Gaeltacht. The League rapidly became very popular, establishing branches throughout Ireland, and became a major force in

socialising young people away from the ideal of a British metropolitan culture to a vision based on the rural Gaeltacht (Hutchinson 1987: 291-2).

Three factions, namely clerical, separatist, and mild nationalist, jockeyed for position and influence within the League (Andrews 2000: 52). Hyde packed Gaelic meetings with members of the Catholic clergy, whom he hoped would influence their congregations to take an interest in Irish. However, the clerical influence on the League was to be at the level of ideology as well as personnel. The Catholic Church saw the League as a means of combating English popular culture and regaining its moral control of the nation. Many clerics believed in a form of linguistic determinism, viewing Irish as a vehicle of Catholic doctrine, and one even argued that the Gaelic mind was essentially Catholic and unable to express anti-Catholic thoughts such as 'No priest in politics' (Mac Póilin 1994: 19). English was symbolised as a language of morally decadent Protestant enemies (Crowley 1996: 142). The Gaelic League itself was influenced by imputed relationship between Catholicism and Irish, even producing a *Gaelic League Catechism* that mimicked the format and style of the Catholic catechism (Crowley 1996: 141).

The secular wing of the Irish nationalist movement was unnerved by the association of the Irish language with Catholicism, and viewed the Irish language as a non-denominational means of expressing Irish nationality. Secularists defended their position by alluding to the Protestant nationalist tradition in Ireland; for example, they drew upon the writings of Thomas Davis, who linked the destruction of the Irish language with the loss of nationhood and history.

Despite the wishes of separatists, Hyde maintained that the Gaelic League should be non-political, drawing on the energies and talents of every community on the island. Hyde recommended a consensual, rather than a conflictual approach to the British authorities. His approach was partly informed by his pragmatism, as Irish nationalist politics at the turn of the century was racked by internal dissension.

The government eventually allowed Irish to be taught in intermediate schools and provided for bilingual education for Gaeltacht children. Yet educational issues involving the Gaelic League aroused the enmity of the Anglo-Irish establishment and unionists, who regarded the increased status of the language in schools as the first step towards a separatist Irish-speaking civil service (*Irish News* 23 October 1990, p 7; reprint of an article first published on 23 October 1912). However, in the early years of the twentieth century, other campaigns brought the League into conflict with the state. The League agitated for the right to address mail in Irish and for permission to use the language on vehicle identifications. These and other issues indicate a shift in the League's policy from promoting the communicative use of Irish to its symbolic use (Ó Huallacháin 1994: 58).

The issue revolved around the level of institutional support which revivalists believed that the language should receive. Hyde and his followers stressed the need for communal regeneration and the irrelevance of state-centred politics. Others believed that the state had an important role in protecting the language. They argued that the language should have a high public profile and a large measure of institutional support to reflect its status

as a national language. Supporters of this approach were drawn to Irish separatism, believing that the British Government would never involve itself in a large-scale restoration of the language.

The adoption by the League of symbolic campaigns represented the first challenges to Hyde's authority, as he believed they did more harm than good, complaining that agitators for Irish-language national insurance stamps had 'political' motives, and were embarked on an enterprise that would do nothing to increase the number of Irish speakers (Ó Glaisne 1993: 399). In 1905 the Sinn Féin movement was founded to combat nationalist parliamentarians by advocating abstentionism and the creation of an Irish shadow-state. The movement wedded its demand for political independence to the Gaelic League's call for cultural revolution. Thereafter Hyde's conciliatory approach to the government was challenged within the League by non-parliamentarians who advocated a more aggressive stance. Sinn Féin accused Hyde of being a 'diplomatist', collaborating with government officials on a personal level (Ó Glaisne 1993: 394-5); rumours were even spread that he was a unionist (Ó Huallacháin 1991: 11). Hyde was also attacked by clerical dissidents who wished to replace him with a 'clerical Gaelic League with a Bishop at its head' (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 1991: 307). As Hyde's control of the League slipped away, he was reduced to a 'pandering type of constitutional monarch' (MacDonagh 1992: 113-4).

The association of Catholicism, political nationalism and Irish revivalism led to a dramatic expansion in the fortunes of the League; the number of branches rose from 120 in 1900 to 985 in 1906, with a peak membership of 75,000 (Hutchinson 1987: 178-179). Hyde and other Protestants tried to federate the Gaelic League with the Pan-Celtic movement, in an effort to reduce the influence in the League of Catholicism and radical nationalism (Hutchinson 1987: 124).

Opponents of republicanism were driven from the League by personal abuse and the slow progress of the language revival was increasingly blamed on the government (Garvin 1987: 59). In 1915 the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a republican secret society, decided to formally alter the nature of the League. At the annual convention of that year a majority voted for the alteration of the League's constitution to devote the organisation to work for a 'free Irish-speaking Ireland' and elected imprisoned republicans onto the national executive. Hyde resigned his presidency, feigning illness and departed, noting in his diary that he had 'a lighter heart than I had known for years' (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 1991: 328).

According to the Dunleavys, during Hyde's presidency the term 'non-political' implied 'opposing physical force', and 'political' suggested 'inclining towards physical force' (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 1991: 314). Hyde's supporters accused their opponents of politicising Irish by subordinating the language's interest to the movement for political independence. These motives were all the more 'political' if they were associated with the use of violence to end British rule in Ireland. Hyde's concept of non-political activity divorced promotion of the Irish language from the exercise of power. However, his critics

believed that the link between the language and Irish separatism was natural and consequently 'non-political':

The work of the Gaelic League is to prevent the assimilation of the Irish nation by the English nation ... That work is as essentially anti-English as the work attempted by Fenianism or the Society of United Irishmen ... The Gaelic League does not stand to take sides in the political differences that separate Irishmen into different parties, and therefore it is claimed to be non-political ... The Irish language is a political weapon of the first importance against English encroachment; it can never be a political weapon in the hands of one Irish party against another (Fergus MacLede, cited in Ó Huallacháin 1994: 66-67).

After 1915 the Gaelic League continued to insist that it was 'non-political' (Ó Huallacháin 1994: 74). Following Hyde's resignation from the Gaelic League the most influential revivalists were those who believed that political independence was necessary for the survival of the language. They assumed that 'culturalists' such as Douglas Hyde would come to the same conclusion.

Unionist speakers of Irish left the Gaelic League as they were disconcerted by the growing nationalist ethos of the organisation. For their part separatists could not conceive how unionists could take an interest in Irish and retain their allegiance to a government which had attempted to eradicate the language; Arthur Griffith, the leader of Sinn Féin, wrote, 'We won't stand for the King's Irishmen using Conradh na Gaeilge. These people are trying to divide the language cause from the country's cause' (Ó Fearáil 1975: 14). Six of the seven signatories of the Easter Proclamation of 1916 were members of the Gaelic League and all but two of those involved in the Easter Rising were members of the League (Ó Croidheáin 2006: 154).

The developments in the Gaelic League as a whole were felt in the Belfast branch. When it was founded in 1895, the branch had representatives from a broad spectrum of society: a Catholic bishop and a Protestant bishop; the Revd R.R. Kane, an Orange firebrand who was rumoured to sign his lodge minutes in Irish; Dr John St Clair Boyd, a liberal unionist; Frances Joseph Bigger, a Protestant nationalist romantic; and P.S. Ó Sé and P.T. McGinley, Catholics from Irish-speaking districts (Mac Póilin 2006: 115). Kane is believed to have been responsible for one of the last public unionist manifestations of the Irish language in Belfast, a sign (surrounded by shamrocks) declaring 'Erin go bragh' (Ireland for ever), at the Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892. This was a visible reminder of the Irish flavour of unionism before Ulster proto-nationalism took hold during the Home Rule crisis.

The Belfast League organised trips to the Irish-speaking districts of the Glens of Antrim, the Sperrins, Omeath and Donegal, and some members even tracked down Irish speakers in the Mourne. McGinley wrote the first play in Irish and it was performed in Belfast in 1900. However, the early years of the Belfast branch were characterised by a lack of necessity to speak Irish; the rule ensuring the branch would conduct its business in Irish was not enforced until 1933. Gradually the ethos of the Belfast branch changed from one

which was middle-class, romantic and inclusive to one which was more stridently nationalist, Catholic, and working class (with the exception of some schoolteachers and the Catholic clergy). This change seems to have been complete by 1900; in 1913, P.T. McGinley wrote in a Belfast League publication, 'It is because of the spirit of nationalism that so many of the people of Ireland are learning Irish and having their children learn Irish. And they have that right' (Mac Póilin 2006: 121).

In 1918 the lord lieutenant of Ireland, Viscount French, declared Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League to be 'dangerous' because they were 'a grave menace to and are designed to terrorise the peaceful and law-abiding subjects of His Majesty in Ireland' (*Irish Times* 8 July 2009). Although the organisations were not banned outright, their activities were curbed. In some cases *feiseanna* were banned, whereas in others, they were permitted to take place, but the speaking of Irish was prohibited. The League itself seemed more bemused than angered by the lord lieutenant's pronouncement. In a village *feis* near Youghal, the police threatened to move in when the opening speaker began in Irish. A local newspaper reported 'A professional gentleman then ascended the platform and sang two French songs' (*Irish Times* 8 July 2009).

Curiously, the League was ignored by the RIC in Belfast, which Seán Mac Maoláin attributed to the respectability conferred to the organisation by many of the schoolteachers attending its Irish classes (Mac Maoláin 1969: 77). Mac Maoláin also recounts trying to convince an RIC sergeant from Donegal who spoke Irish, that the League was 'non-sectarian' and 'non-political'. He replied, 'It is, in name, but not in fact. I'm pretty well sure that there would not be much welcome for me, if I went to any of your branches.' (Mac Maoláin 1969: 102).

When Comhaltas Uladh, the Ulster branch of the Gaelic League, was founded in 1926, twelve out of the 20-member executive were priests (Andrews 2000: 57). An RUC report on a League meeting the following year remarked, 'The local suspects and a large number of past and present members of the IRA were present' (Andrews 2000: 57). According to Liam Andrews (2000), Catholic communalism superseded a focus on language in the ideology of the language movement in the North.

Protestant Reaction to the League

The Gaelic League held little appeal for the majority of Ulster Protestants; the League never attracted more than five hundred members in the province in its early years (Bardon 1992: 421). Presbyterians based their culture on the Bible and were suspicious of 'frivolous' non-scriptural activities: preachers regularly attacked dancing and theatre-going (Hempton and Hill 1992: 113,117). Although the scriptural nature of Ulster Protestantism assured at best a cool welcome for Irish language revivalism, Protestants had utilitarian, religious, and political reasons to reject the Gaelic League. Unionists drew upon modernist ideology, opposing malign traditions and superstitions with a benign process of 'progress', manifested in increased industrialisation and economic growth. An article in a unionist newspaper, the *News Letter*, entitled *The Gaelic League: its aims and methods*, described Irish as:

to all intents and purposes, a dead language ... From a business point of view the Irish language is altogether unnecessary, and that it is worse than useless when it occupies time that could be more profitably devoted to other subjects (*News Letter* 28 May 1904, p.6).

Worse still, unionists claimed that the Gaelic League was attempting to eradicate the English language in Ireland, and make Irish 'the universal language of the country' (ibid.) For advocates of modernist ideology, it was sheer folly to replace the cosmopolitan language of progress with an obsolete one. The attempt to create an Irish-speaking Ireland also smacked of compulsion and cultural autocracy, which offended the Protestant devotion to freedom and individual choice (cf. Nelson 1984: 17). The *News Letter* article continued by deriding the League's claim that it was 'non-sectarian' and 'non-political':

... for at present the great majority of the local branches are hotbeds of political and religious agitation. Their meetings are usually held after mass, or on Sunday evening, and generally the local curate is in the chair. The chief business is usually an address from the chairman, an address bristling with hatred of England and everything English, with exhortations to his hearers to hold fast to the religion and language of their fathers. They are told to look to the future, to that happy day when the English language shall die out in Ireland; for, deny it as they will, the real aim of the Gaelic League is to create an Ireland peopled solely by Irishmen of the Gaelic league stamp, and cut off by impenetrable walls from all intercourse with the heretics without (*News Letter* 28 May 1904, p.6.)

Thus the 'real' motives of the League were attributed to a mixture of anti-English racism, Catholic supremacism, cultural and social isolationism, and nationalist and/or republican politics. The League's preoccupation with all things Irish seemed to be narrow-minded and insular to unionists, who looked outwards to Britain for social and cultural enrichment. The organisation's habit of organising events and meetings on Sunday was offensive to sabbatarians. Protestant parents also worried that as involvement with the League involved greater socialisation with Catholics, and that their children would marry Catholics and/or become Catholics themselves (Ó Glaisne 1990: 254).

A correspondent in the *Londonderry Sentinel* warned any unwary Protestant against becoming involved with the movement as he would be 'played as a decoy duck for all he is worth' (Hennessey 1985: 53). This phrase, which may have alluded to the fate of Douglas Hyde, warned Protestants against being used to provide the Gaelic League with a spurious 'non-sectarian' and 'non-political' camouflage.

Although unionists initially regarded themselves as Irishmen, the association of Irish national identity with Irish nationalism, coupled with the inevitability of partition, led to the articulation of an Ulster identity in contradistinction with that of the nationalist south of the country. Basil Brooke commented, 'I am not happy about being called an Irishman because of the 1916 rebellion' (Walker 1993: 14). The adoption of Gaelic revivalism by

Irish nationalism suggested that Ireland would be partitioned culturally as well as politically. By the time the British agreed to a form of self-government in Ireland in 1920 it was certain that Gaelic revivalism would become part of the official ideology of the new state.

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