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The Protestant Community of South Tipperary 1660-1815

PART I

by William Neely

In 1730 the work on the new Cashel Palace was finished and Archbishop Theophilus Bolton, founder of the Diocesan Library, took up his residence in the elegant and graceful Queen Anne style building, described in 1732 as a "large handsome new house". Up to that point in time the achievement of the Protestant community in Co. Tipperary had been of little note, but it now stood on the threshold of the century of its greatest influence and success.

The reformation had made little difference to the religious life of the area. The monasteries were speedily closed; but they had been in decline for years anyway, and few lamented their passing. The Anglo-Irish lords had been only too happy to increase their already vast and sprawling estates. Many churches had been long in ruins, and scant records give little indication that much care was taken to provide for the spiritual needs of the people. All the reformation seemed to do was to ensure that neglect would be compounded by even more neglect.

In 1539 that zealous but moderate Protestant, Archbishop Brown of Dublin, had preached to a congregation in Clonmel which included the Archbishops of Cashel and Tuam, and eight of the bishops of Munster. It was an elaborate stage setting in which they declared their acceptance of the royal supremacy over the church and their repudiation of the Bishop of Rome. Yet it amounted to nothing more. As far as the people were concerned everything went on as before, and no effort was made to teach them the doctrines of the reformation.

Canon Burke, however, claims too much in his idyllic portrait of the loyal truly Catholic people of Clonmel, faithful to church and Queen alike, until the *Bulla Regnans in Excelsis* declared Elizabeth excommunicated in 1569. Thereafter he saw this community as offering steadfast resistance to an ever-increasing persecution. If any town in the area was under royal authority it was the assize town of Clonmel. There must have been widespread conformity. Most would have been indifferent to Queen or Pope as long as old ways continued and family vested interest in the church land and patronage was not interfered with.

It is true that the Earl of Ormond, though a Protestant, did nothing to strain the loyalty of his clients and relations who persisted in the old ways; but that does not mean that there was not a good deal of lip service and apparent conformity. Persecution only began when new men from the West of England were used as the Queen's agents. These were often convinced Protestants, raised on Fox's Book of Martyrs to a hatred of Rome and Romish superstitions. Their interests were, moreover, in direct conflict with those of the old English. They saw the Jesuits and foreign priests as enemies to be wiped out.

So, towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, events occurred such as the execution in 1586 of Father Maurice Kenrechton for celebrating mass at the house of Alderman Victor White of Clonmel. However, the main persecution did not begin until the next century, when on one occasion 30 priests were rounded up for exile.²

There is little to suggest that much effort was made anywhere to convert people to the new ways, and certainly rural communities must have been left largely to their own devices. The very fact that



the citizens of Clonmel refused to join Hugh O'Neill's forces shows that there was no deep discontent in the town, and that in the end they stood by their loyalty to the Queen.

The trouble is that there is not enough evidence to prove anything conclusively about religious beliefs. Parochial records in the Archdiocese of Cashel were chaotic, and very little can be concluded from the scant remains, though one thing is certain: most churches and rectories were in ruins. The rural areas saw little religious change, whatever happened in the towns. In 1591 there was an attempt to root out those clergy who were opposed to religious change, when James Morrie, Rector of Knockgraffon, Eugene MacRory, Rector of Killvillane, and Darby Magher, Rector of Templetuohy, were all deprived of their livings.³

Before 1640 most parishes were kept vacant or a single curate was provided to serve a huge area. In an effort to reform, some curates were appointed in 1634 to Ballyskehan, Ardmayle, Borris, Moycarkey, Fethard, Holycross, Killenaule, Lismolin, Ballingarry, Moyne, Thurles and Kilfeacle. Even then a curate was appointed to two or more of these parishes. It was a bargain basement ministry on the cheap. A few parishes did seem to maintain a regular succession of Rectors, e.g. Tipperary and Kilvemnon.

It is hard to know what the actual Protestant population was before the outbreak of the rebellion in 1641. The Civil Survey lists only a handful of Protestant landowners and of these some lived outside the county — Richard, Earl of Cork, Sir Philip Percival of Dublin and Sir Jerome Alexander. The others were Robert Cox, William Kingsmill, Oliver Jones, Thomas Grove, Sir William Fenton, Sir William St. Leger and Lord Laurence Esmond. The only great landowner to be a Protestant was the Duke of Ormond; but the fact that he is listed as an "Irish Papist" must make it possible that political prejudice listed other Protestants amongst the old families as "papist".

There is, however, clear evidence to show that there were more Protestant families in the area than the list of landowners suggests. Some followed quite humble trades, like the shoemakers William Hall at Thurles or John Dan at Goldenbridge. When the rebels attacked Cashel they killed 15 or 16 English Protestants. Rowland Lyndser was told they killed his father for "eating roast beef". In all, 40 Protestant houses in Cashel were plundered and their occupants sent to Clonmel.⁵ So, though landowners were few there was a sizeable Protestant population in the town.

Elsewhere there were rural pockets of Protestants, as around Cullen Castle near Tipperary. Though not actual landowners, there were Protestants who must have rented land at a considerable scale, as witness the claim of George Carter at Thurles to the Parliamentary Commissioners for livestock valued at £835 and household stuffs to the value of £200. Thomas Whiteby at Cullen claimed for "cows, oxen, bullocks, horses, mares, and sheep, to the value of £350, stolen by rebels, and for household stuffe to the value of £30, corn and hay in the haggard to the value of three score and ten pounds, of corn in the ground to the value of... £200."

Mrs. Cooper, wife of a minister of the Gospel at Cullen, gave an account of the siege of the castle. No Cooper appears on any of the succession lists, which again is an indication of how fragmentary the records are. Mrs. Cooper names some of those who had taken refuge at Cullen; "Mr. Thomas Whitby, Mr. William Hobard, Mr. Richard Ely, now at Clonmel, merchant, Wm. Blake now a miller at Clonmel..., John Parker now in Clonmel, Margaret Dixon, John Jones, Katherine Jones." Their descendants would simply have merged into, and lost their identity in, the general classification of Cromwellians.

About 50 persons took refuge in the castle, which was besieged for more than a year before they surrendered in August 1642. Lord Roch "ordered every Englishman should be killed and every Englishwoman should be stript because his lady was stript by the English," but Derby Ryan refused to carry out the order. During the siege Whitby had lost a daughter, and a son who was captured and hung by the Irish. In the final assault two women and a man were killed.⁶



It is a graphic little story that became part of the folklore of the Cromwellians to feed their distrust and justify their hate of the Irish, who would also remember for their part how William Kingsmill and Sir William St. Leger in the early days of the rebellion had hunted down and executed 18 of the rebels. However, it made it easy for the Cromwellian families to believe that they had taken the land from Irish savages.

When Charles II returned to the throne in 1660 the government found it expedient, whilst restoring some of the old families to their lands, to confirm most of the Cromwellians in a good portion of what they had been granted. This now gave the county a population of resident Protestant landowners. Even under Cromwell it had not been easy to persuade soldiers to settle the land as farmers. Most of the common soldiers had sold out their land grants to their officers and the more astute of their own number.

What a different place Tipperary would have been had Cromwell carried out his plan to move the Ulster Scots to the county. As it was, the old English and native Irish remained in the area to provide the labourers and the tenant farmers that the new landlords needed. Quite a few of the Butlers survived the change and identified with the new community, as did a few other representatives of the old landowning families. Nobles like Lord Ikerrin, Lord Cahir and Lord Netterville found it expedient to conform to the established church.

The census of 1659 shows the relationship of the two populations. Slieveardagh Barony had 307 English and 2,101 Irish; Middlethird had 134 English and 3,778 Irish; Iffa and Offa had 223 English and 4,729 Irish; Clanwilliam had 180 English and 2,713 Irish. Despite the fact that the census returns may be regarded as households rather than individuals the area was thinly populated and, indeed, underpopulated; this undoubtedly was to account for its very slow economic recovery.⁷

All over South Tipperary the families that for the next 250 years were to dominate its life were established. These were to be found scattered throughout the region as minor gentry — Goings and Langleys in Ballingarry; Jacobs and Perrys at Killenaule; Taylors at Noan; Bradshaws, Jacobs and Ryalls at Fethard; Pennefathers at Cashel; Lanes and Langleys at Ballynonty; Ryalls, Hamertons and Pennefathers at Clonmel.

In Clonmel the great families were Marshalls and Bagwells. Most successful of all was Richard Moore, a glover from Barnstaple in Devon turned colonel in Cromwell's army, whose descendants were to be the great Stephen Moore of Marlfield and the Earls of Mountcashel. The merchant families of Clonmel graduated to the gentry with a degree of rapidity.

So the descendants of Hercules Beere, a Clonmel merchant, attainted by the Dublin Parliament of James II, were to live in Liskeveen Castle near Littleton and those of Phinehas Ryall, also attainted in 1685, were to be established as country gentlemen at Killenaule and Fethard. Not that their commercial background was quickly forgotten; hence the slightly sour joke when Colonel Bagwell led the Tipperary Militia on their march through Clonmel, that they were headed by "Marshal Saxe, commander of the flower of Tipperary".

Some of the families were slow to shed their Cromwellian prejudices. The Bagwells, even when they found it expedient to conform, long gave their support to the Presbyterian community in Clonmel. Then there is the curious story of Ann Greene, grand-daughter of the Cromwellian Colonel Eliah Greene, who settled in Kilcooley parish. She married Sir Richard Levinge, who came of a royalist family, and succeeded in completely estranging her husband by presenting him with a calf's head for dinner, on the anniversary of the royal martyr King Charles's execution.

This was a grim Cromwellian joke, but the interesting fact is that the dinner in question took place in 1729, and was regarded as sufficient ground for husband and wife to separate. Indeed, was always a preference for low church doctrine and practice amongst landowning families of this area.

One feels that a good deal of the spirit of Colonel Sankey, ex-Anglican clergyman turned soldier



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and preacher in the new Model Army and governor of Tipperary, survived into the 18th century. In Clonmel he hunted down priests and executed three of them. Was the judicial murder of Father Sheehy in 1766 just a hysterical reaction to Whiteboyism? It was surely more than grasping an opportunity to remove something unwelcome from the landscape when Edmund Sheehy, James Buxton, and James Farrell, three of the very few Roman Catholic gentry, were executed for the same supposed reason in the following year. One gets the feeling that a bigotry in the ascendancy character was being given its head.

Whilst not so violent as the notorious squireens of Kerry, there was nevertheless a tendency to conduct one's affairs with a high hand. Richard Moore's son Stephen was a noted duellist who killed his man in the county. When Lady Anne Levinge took over her husband's estate at Lurgoe at Killenaule in 1762, she found her house in the tenancy of Mr. Howley. He refused to vacate the house, and the redoubtable Lady Anne lead her servants to the attack with pistols in her holsters.

When direct assault failed because of brisk fire from the defenders, she settled down to lay siege, and after seven days the Howleys surrendered to be led off in triumph to gaol in Clonmel. Some years later the Howleys had their revenge when they held up her carriage, tied up her servants and cut the harness. The old lady was stranded for a day and a night in her own carriage before she was rescued!

Her father Samuel was member of Parliament for Cashel and made his home at Killaghy Castle, which on his death in 1710 passed by the marriage of his daughter Frances into the possession of William Despard, whose descendent Colonel Marcus Despard was executed for treason in the days of Emmet's rebellion. One wonders was there something of the republicanism of old Eliah Greene kept alive in the family tradition?

There is a delightful story that Lady Anne visited her sister at Killaghy Castle, and the night turning cold borrowed a splendid fur cloak from her. On the way home the carriage was overturned and the cloak ruined. She said she had no money to compensate Frances but gave her a fifty-acre field, which ever afterwards was known in Irish as "the rent on the cloak". Altogether her story reveals much of the reckless, violent hard-drinking spirit in which such families lived.

An even more distinguished Cromwellian family were the Taylors of Noan. They were descended from Rowland Taylor, chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer and Smithfield martyr. Major-General Nathaniel Taylor was an elder brother of the famous Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down, but unlike his royalist brother was a convinced Parliamentarian. He sat in the long Parliament as member for Bedfordshire, before coming to Ireland and making his home at Noan. In the 18th century his grandson Godfrey was a well-known local character, famed for his violent temper.

One story went the round of the county. He hated to be kept waiting, and when his butler failed to produce dinner on time he grabbed him and cut off his pigtail. The butler was of equal mettle and sued his master, who had to pay him £200 in damages, to the great delight of Godfrey's neighbours. When six robbers with blackened faces broke into Noan, Godfrey felled one with the poker, but the others overpowered him and wrapped him up in the carpet, not wishing to spill the blood of "so kind a gentleman". ¹⁰

Such violent events were only minor disturbances in an age which saw the Protestant ascendancy achieve the summit of their wealth and power in the county. In 1700 Dean Swift gave a miserable enough account of a visit to the area when he wrote to Mr. Brandreth: "A bare face of nature, without houses or plantations, filthy cabins, miserable tattered half starved creatures in human shape; one ignorant oppressive squire to be found in twenty miles riding, a parish to be found in a Summer's day journey".¹¹

Such facts are borne out in the history of the Kilcooley estate, where in 1709 William Barker had to lodge in the dark dank rooms of the old tower house at Buolick and the Cookes lived in the



decaying ruins of Clonamiclon Castle. The Barkers lived in the Abbot's lodgings in the ruins of the old Abbey until as late as 1770.¹² A surprising number of tower houses may well have been inhabited prior to 1740.

Cashel Palace was one of the first of the houses that were to mark the new-found prosperity of South Tipperary. It is the only one to be associated with any architect of note, for the tradition is that it was designed by Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, the architect of the Parliament House. None of the houses are outstanding examples of Irish Georgian architecture, though the best favoured the spacious lay-out of the Palladian style of large central block, flanked by outlying pavilions.

It was in this style that Sir William Barker built Kilcooley around 1770, and some years later Colonel Bagwell built Marlfield. Sir Robert Maude adapted Dundrum to the same style, and the Earl of Donaghmore even managed to give a Palladian look to Knocklofty.

Houses were constantly adapted to the taste of new generations. One of the oldest, built after the restoration of Charles II, was Thomastown Castle, the home of George Mathew, half-brother to the Duke of Ormond. This eventually was to be transformed into a Gothic fantasy by his descendant, the 2nd Earl of Llandaff. The great bulk of Stephen Moore's house at Barne was to be remodelled into a French chateau with a new roof in the 19th century. One of the loveliest of these fashionable houses was the example of the *cottage ornee*, the Swiss Cottage, built by the Earl of Glengall in Cahir Park around 1780. This rare example in Ireland of Georgian romantic taste has been rescued from ruin by a recent renovation.

However, the broadly based wealth of 18th century South Tipperary is not to be seen so much in the large houses as in the numerous solid Georgian houses to be found in every district of the Riding. This was a land of resident landowners, each holding his own small estate, prosperous enough to build solidly the houses that still lend charm to any road that one may choose to travel in the region today.

There are also a good number of two-storey farmhouses, a record of the prosperous tenant farmers of the period who were for the most part also Protestants. Every town also had it population of Protestant shopkeepers and merchants. The Quakers were foremost in milling, and both Clonmel and Cahir were centres of well-to-do Quaker communities, whose leading families were the Grubbs and Fennells.

The Tipperary that Swift described in 1700 was in sixty years' time to be completely changed. For this there were two prime causes. Firstly, the great sheep walks, which curiously enough made "the long grass country" the chief source of supply of Dublin's mutton. Secondly, the grain that supplied the sixty-odd mills of Clonmel and Cahir. The county was one of the main beneficiaries of the corn subsidy which the Irish Parliament introduced in 1757.

Long convoys of wagons earned their bounty on the road to Dublin. The improvement of the navigation of the Suir was also to make Waterford an important outlet for the produce of Tipperary. The demand for these products created the wealth that doubled rent in twenty-five years and yet made the renting of land attractive to the yeoman farmers and assured the gentry of a steady income from men well able to pay.

Arthur Young in 1776 chronicled the agricultural movement that was stimulated by this prosperity. The greatest of all the innovators was Stephen Moore of Marlfield. His father had ruthlessly corrupted the freemen of Clonmel and turned the town into a family pocket borough, though not without sustained resistance from the Bagwells, Robert Hamerton, Robert Marshall and other leaders of the Protestant community. They gained a brief victory in 1755, when Bagwell captured the Parliamentary seat; but the hold of the Moores was too strong to be broken. Stephen Moore had achieved his end by using the position of Mayor in 1724 to create his own roll of freemen voters and to expel his opponents.



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Stephen Moore the younger gained a very different reputation from his duelling father. Young spoke of him as "celebrated in Ireland for his uncommon exertions in every branch of agriculture". In 1770 he built a great mill at the then huge cost of £15,000. It contained nine stones for grinding wheat and flour for oatmeal. By 1776 he was producing 20,000 barrels of flour and oatmeal a year, one-third of the total production of the area. "He sends flour to Dublin, a bounty which rather more then pays his expenses of carriage at 6d per cwt". His mill employed between 700 and 800 persons.

Yet that was only one of his interests. Like all the agricultural innovators he was a turnip man: he introduced the stall feeding of cattle in winter, Leicestershire sheep, Berkshire hogs and new machinery. He even purchased bulls from the famous English breeder Robert Bakewell. He kept a home farm of 2,000 acres. He attached a piggery for 30 sows and 600 pigs to his mill to use up surplus bran and fed his work horses only on bran. He used it also to fatten store cattle.

He established a starch manufactory and grew rape, extracting the oil and exporting the seed to England and Holland. He exploited every angle, building eight ovens in which, as Arthur Young records, "Mr. Moore contracts for biscuits which he bakes in large quantities and bread for the whole town of Clonmel". Stephen Moore, like many another, over-reached himself, lost a good deal of money and had to sell the lease of his house in Stephen's Green to Sir William Barker in 1780.

Arthur Young also noted the extensive planting of trees, commenting on how splendidly Francis Mathew had planted 1,500 acres at Thomastown so that it was "as fine as any parkland in England". He remarked with equal pleasure on Lady Clanwilliam's planting and garden, and the Earl's hopes to build a fine new house.

He visited Lord de Montalt at Dundrum and saw with approval the great garden with its "parterres, parapets of earth, straight walks, knots and clipt hedges", all swept away to be replaced by a landscape park in the style of Capability Brown. He was also an improving landlord who gradually reclaimed rented land into his own care, limed it and drained it and then when in good heart rented it again to a tenant. He had already processed 2,000 acres in this way.

Sir William Barker at Kilcooley established his Palatine colony in the Slieveardagh hills to introduce better farming and to reclaim hill land for agricultural use. These were Protestant gentry, but one of the most noted farmers in the county was the Roman Catholic Keating. Young wrote about "Macarthy and Keating sons of the two greatest farmers that ever were in Ireland". He noted that on the whole farms were large in the South Riding, 30-400 acres, but that Keating farmed 10,000 acres near Springhouse. He commented: "the country is all under sheep and that so prosperous were the farmers that they rented land in Limerick "where every Tipperary grazier has a farm to fat". ¹⁴ Sir William Barker was fortunate that his large estate near Adare could so complement his home estate at Kilcooley.

It was natural that some of these people should take an interest in the new Royal Society's activities. Sir Richard Levinge was one of the first benefactors of the Society, leaving it £2,000 in his will after his death in 1747. Amongst the first members of the Society in 1733 were Colonel James Butler, Stephen Moore, Lord Netterville, Archbishop Bolton and Sir Richard Levinge. In 1769 Lady Clanwilliam was one of the first patrons of the Society's silk warehouse, established to provide custom for Irish produced silk.¹⁵

The Religious Census taken in 1766 by order of the Irish House of Lords gives some indication of the size of the 18th century Protestant population. However, not all rectors made their returns, so the figures are not complete. The Rector of Kilcooley was one of the defaulters. Those returned, however, show a Protestant population in the Archdiocese of Cashel of over a thousand families. This excludes the important Protestant centre of Clonmel, which belonged to Lismore Diocese. The towns were the chief centres of Protestant residence.



	Protestant families	Roman Catholic
Tipperary	101	555
Cashel	116	402
Thurles	89	1,103
Fethard	86	836

Rural populations varied considerably.

	Protestant families	Roman Catholic
Clonoulty	7	108
Horeabbey	20	339
Clonbeg	14	228
Knockgraffon	12	160
Cullen	49	469 16

Though most of this population depended upon agriculture for their living, Lewis, in the *Topographical Dictionary* (1837) does give indications of other sources of wealth in the 18th century. Of the Coalbrook colliery he wrote that it "has been worked for more than a century by the family of the present proprietor and was the only mine of any importance kept open previously to the Mining Companies' undertaking. The first steam engine in this part of the country was erected in it." He also mentions that prior to 1800 stuffs and ratteens had been manufactured in large quantities and that the area had been noted for blankets and flannels "much prized for warmth and durability." Thurles had been a centre for woollen weaving.¹⁷

He wrote that in the 18th century flax and linen had been produced on a small scale, and that in more recent years (1817-1823) grants had been made for scutching mills. The Countess of Glengall planted 50 acres of flax, but despite these efforts the area never really became a successful region of linen production. Sheep and flour were too ready a source of income for the wealthy, and not enough was done to help the poor, who too often through enclosures were the victims of the demands of the new agricultural methods.

This produced the first really serious unrest of the century in the area, the Whiteboy movement. It began as a protest against the clergy claiming for the first time a tithe on potatoes; but its real cause was the clearing of small holdings to make way for the new farms. The movement began in Clogheen, where Father Sheehy was priest. It was very active in Tipperary as early as 1762, when as W.E.H. Lecky records in a contemporary account, "that above 200 men frequently assemble with shirts over their clothes, doing whatever mischief they please by night under the sanction of being fairies as they call themselves. The fairies are composed of all the able young fellows from Clonmel to Mitchelstown".¹⁸

Wherever they could, they levelled the fences of the enclosures and in general terrorized the farmers into doing what they wished them to do. The movement was savagely put down by a frightened propertied class, who saw little remedy other than cruel punishments for the evil. Though repressed, it broke out again at regular intervals, a reminder that there were dangerous forces at work behind the facade of prosperity.

Sadly, very few landowners followed the example in practical wisdom and humanity of Sir William Osborne. Arthur Young cited him as an outstanding example of what a good man could





Killaghy Castle near Mullinahone, originally the seat of the Tobins and later (during the period covered by this article) occupied by the Greenes and the Despards.

(Photo courtesy of Kickham Centenary Committee).

do when he followed the policy that Young urged upon the gentry: "employ them, don't hang them".

It all began when a chance meeting with a landless labourer led Sir William to build a cabin for him and rent him five acres of mountain land. He also advanced him £4 to buy stock and limed his land free of charge. The man given this encouragement prospered and soon rented 12 acres. Sir William, seeing the success of his experiment, bought back the lease of the mountain from his tenant who had found no use for it. He then established a community of 22 families on it.

He was prepared to give even ex-Whiteboys a chance, convinced as he was that desperation lay behind their acts. He built each family a house at a cost of £6 to himself, and in 1766 sweetened their land with a thousand barrels of lime. He also provided for them loans for stock and taught them the value of crop rotation — potatoes, rye, oats, fallow. He encouraged them to protect their cattle from the mountain damp and cold by building byres. The women were helped to become spinners and the children were paid for clearing the land of stones. As an experiment it was so successful that Young believed that many others should follow his example. The Osbornes' lovely home at Newtownannah outside Clonmel was not built on the sorrow of the dispossessed, but on the compassion of a wise man whose example all too few followed.

FOOTNOTES

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