

*North Tipperary in the year of the Fenian rising – Part 2**

By Clare C. Murphy

When the 1867 Assize Commission for the north riding of Tipperary was opened and the Grand Jury was called over and re-sworn, the 23 names gave credibility to critics of the jury system. Prominent among those names were many of the leading landlords whom the Fenians had been accused of attacking in the March Rising. Sir William Osborne of Beechwood Park was named as foreman, while others included John Trant DL of Dovea, Capt. Anthony Carden JP of Barnane, Caleb Going JP of Traverston, William Head DL of Derrylahan Park and Henry Poe JP of Solosboro. They were told that 99 prisoners stood charged with participation in the Fenian outbreak, and it was claimed that the criminal business of the whole county could be discharged in a day were it not for the crimes arising from fenianism.⁶⁴

Although there was a £10 fine for non-attendance, only 55 answered their names when the long panel was called over. Patrick Lahy was charged with treason felony.⁶⁵ The Solicitor-General reminded the jury that in the north riding bodies of armed men had assembled at various places and attacked police barracks and defenceless private homes. Head Constable Thomas Talbot swore that the object of the conspiracy was to overthrow the government and establish a republic in its place, to seize and divide the property of the country and to seize coastguard stations and police barracks. The names of the gentry had been taken down and a return of men and arms made to Fenian headquarters in Dublin.

There were (Talbot claimed), As, Bs and Cs (colonels, captains and sergeants), and secret oaths had been taken and allegiance sworn to the Irish Republic. He admitted he had been involved in covert operations and, although a member of the Established Church, had attended Mass as part of these duties.

John Darmody, a boy of 18, was brought forward to give evidence for the Crown, but a woman in the gallery (said to be his sister) startled the court with a wild shout, exhorting him to suffer any penalty rather than swear against the prisoners. She said if he gave evidence she would hang herself. When the book was offered to Darmody he refused to be sworn and told the judge he would accept any punishment. Conor Maher, "of weak intellect or feigned to be so", told the court he did not care what the judge intended doing with him.

However, Patrick Grady, a labouring man, gave evidence against several prisoners and described how Charles Burke had armed his men and how Michael Sheehy (who wore a sash around his waist and a green band round his hat) was armed with a pistol and was called Captain. James Butler, a cooper, had a gun, while Patrick Nolan the tailor had a pike. The bands of men had gone together to the cross of Pallas Hill where they separated, one party going under the command of Sheehy, the other under Burke.

When Grady's party arrived at Ryan's house they met up with Denis Sweeney, "the General", who had been working as a servant in the neighbourhood. When they reached Reardon's yard Grady claimed that Sheehy had fired a shot. At this point the witness Butler

**Part 1 appeared in THJ 1995, pp. 108-116. Footnote-numbering in Part 2 is continued from Part 1. – Editor.*

admitted that he had instigated the shooting of Gore Jones, for which Phil Hayes had undergone transportation for 20 years.

John Reardon testified that he found his servant Patrick Tracy dying – “his brains knocked out”. He had also found a stone with blood and hair on it in the room, as well as a bullet. He stated that Charles Burke had called on him by name to open his door so that his premises could be searched, and when he refused Burke broke the window where Tracy was killed. Reardon lived 300 yards from Roskeen barracks, which he saw burning to the ground the next morning. Then the jury retired; after an hour a verdict of guilty was returned, with a sentence of five years’ penal servitude for Lahy.⁶⁶

The trial of John Howard, a tailor, accused of grievous bodily harm to John Carroll, a suspected Fenian informer, also took place at Nenagh Summer Assizes. Howard claimed it was the Fenians who had attacked Carroll, because he was the only man of a group of suspects who had been released from custody, and that he had merely tried to protect him and was in turn threatened. Carroll maintained that the only person who had inflicted his wounds was Howard.

The jury found Howard guilty, and the judge said the prisoner was but a sample of “the sort of fellows” who would have the upper hand if fenianism succeeded. He added: “A tailor like him that would on mere suspicion brutally stab a man with his scissors . . . would be just the sort of fellow to create a new dynasty . . . he would be governor of the county of Tipperary”. Another five-year sentence was handed down.⁶⁷

A farmer, James Butler, was indicted for treason felony; again John Darmody was produced as a witness. The same female who had disturbed the court the previous day exhorted him not swear, threatening suicide. She was carried out by three policemen, one holding her mouth! Darmody looked towards the gallery and, with a shake of his head, said “don’t fear me” and was then removed. A verdict of not guilty was returned.⁶⁸

Michael Sheehy was not so fortunate. Judge Morris in his address to the jury had said that if there was no other evidence than that of Grady, “a self-accused murderer”, he would direct an acquittal. It was pointed out that when arrested Sheehy said he was a Tipperary boy, that his was an honourable cause and had called for three cheers for the green flag. After an hour the jury found him guilty. Sheehy said he wanted his money and clothes given to his mother. The judge accused him of being an active leader, the murderer of Tracy and engaged in the rising. “You and the like of you, the off-scourings of society, can keep the country in hot water”. Sheehy got 20 years.⁶⁹

Fresh Fenian Frenzy

Fenian excitement, which had become almost a frenzy in and around Thurles during the unsettled days of March, appeared to be returning in the early Summer as crowds ran bewildered from street to street with the rumour that hundreds of Fenians, who had kept themselves out of reach of the police, had held a secret council and decided to surrender. Twenty men went to Thurles police barracks and gave themselves up. They were said to have looked worn out with fatigue and destitution and had been told through friends that the Fenian General, Thomas F. Bourke, had had his death sentence commuted.

However, it was not expected that Capt. Joseph Gleeson or others facing high treason charges would surrender. A Fenian demonstration had been attempted in Thurles when the news of Bourke’s commutation was received. Preparations had commenced for an illumination, and in half-an-hour lighted candles were placed in many windows in the town. The police had them extinguished and dispersed a large crowd.⁷⁰

A batch of 41, almost all young, men had been indicted for the rising at Drombane. They claimed they had been at a wake and thoughtlessly joined the really guilty party. Thirty-four were released on bail, but seven held in custody. One was a carpenter, five farmers' sons and one a labourer. Denis Long pleaded guilty and got 10 months. Thomas Hayes, a boy of 15, got two months' hard labour and the remaining five, who pleaded guilty, got six months' imprisonment.⁷¹

Fenianism remained a burning issue throughout North Tipperary during that year. Andrew Kennedy, who had been a non-commissioned officer of the North Tipperary Militia before becoming a Fenian captain for part of the Nenagh district, returned to Nenagh in September. He had sworn informations implicating 30 people, but refused to follow up his depositions. He had been removed from an English prison that held leading Fenians like Luby, Kickham and O'Donovan Rossa and, because of an attack of bronchitis that had resulted in the loss of a lung, had had his term remitted.⁷²

Around the same time Matthew Dwyer appeared at Nenagh Petty Sessions charged with declaring himself a Fenian. Martin Gorman appeared at Templemore petty sessions in connection with the Fenian conspiracy. When arrested he had £64 in gold and American coins on him.⁷³ All the available men of the two police stations in Nenagh were sent secretly through Toomevara, Ballymackey and the neighbouring district to search the homes of Fenian suspects.⁷⁴

A tramp was arrested in Thurles who fitted the description of an assassin of a policeman in Dublin. The Fenians were suspected of the killing, and a reward of £1,000 had been offered for the assassin's arrest.⁷⁵ John Brady, a painter from Cork, was arrested while "idling" through Nenagh and remanded on suspicion of being a Fenian.⁷⁶ Another man, calling himself John Harold but supposed to be a Fenian suspect James O'Donnell, was committed to Nenagh jail.⁷⁷

The authorities at national level were advised of a Fenian assassination committee, whose object was to kill eminent public figures. Two policemen had been stationed near Lord Derby's residence in Doon in Co. Limerick after the execution in Manchester of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien.⁷⁸ The hanging had triggered off several demonstrations and condemnation from the press. The *Tipperary and Clare Independent* believed that the execution would do more to foster Fenianism in England than if the heads of that party were allowed to hold open council within sight of Westminster.

As these protests gained momentum through the country, the Lord Lieutenant, on the advice of the Irish Privy Council, issued a proclamation against Fenian processions.⁷⁹ John Martin and his associates were among the first to be prosecuted. The *Tipperary and Clare Independent* claimed that Samuel Anderson, the Crown Solicitor's son, was the Government of Ireland and that such prosecutions only played into the hands of processionists.⁸⁰

It was claimed that every Catholic farmer in North Tipperary had been invited to contribute towards the expenses of staging mock funeral processions for the three executed Fenians, and



Michael Sheehy, a North Tipperary Fenian, photographed in jail in 1867. The card hung round his neck reads: "7634 - Michl. Sheehy".

that preparations for monster gatherings in Nenagh, Clonmel and other Tipperary towns were being made. A printing press in Nenagh would publish placards announcing the times and venues.⁸¹ Religious services for the Manchester trio took place, though at one in Leeds the bishop said he hoped the Leeds procession for them would be abandoned.⁸²

After the explosion at Clerkenwell prison, which killed three and injured 42, many planned demonstrations in both islands were abandoned.⁸³ However, Fenian attacks in Britain continued. A policeman was shot in Kennington Lane in London.⁸⁴ The British Cabinet now decided to ask parliament to extend to England the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act.⁸⁵ At a meeting in Oldham Gladstone gave his views on fenianism. "They must look to the root of the evil and deal with it, for . . . had Ireland been fairly and judiciously administered, fenianism would never have existed".⁸⁶

The Manchester executions had also evoked indignation throughout the United States. Some leading newspapers there were draped in mourning, while Congress discussed the possible impeachment of the American Minister in London for not interceding for American citizens involved in fenianism. In New York there was a procession on a much more extensive scale than those in Ireland.⁸⁷

Meanwhile in North Tipperary Fenian sympathisers continued to be brought before the courts. Caleb Going and Henry Poe, two Nenagh magistrates, tried James Hayes for assaulting police and shouting against the "murderers" of the Manchester convict Allen. Patrick Dea of Falleen, a Fenian sympathiser, was charged with avowing himself a Fenian.⁸⁸

Around this time the church establishment question was a significant issue, the settlement of which would, it was felt, be a major cure for many ills. The proportionate revenue expenditure for the different religious groupings in county Tipperary was a debating point in relation to the established church. Up to the passing of the Church Temporalities Act, 1833, the United Dioceses of Cashel and Emly were under the Anglican Archbishop of Cashel, when that see (as well as that of Tuam) was downgraded to mere episcopal rank. Cashel and Emly united with Waterford and Lismore, and these four sees were held by Rt. Rev. Robert Daly (brother of Lord Dunsandle, a wealthy landowner), who was appointed in 1843.⁸⁹

On October 5, 1867 the *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* published a tabular statement of the absolute and relative strength of the communities in this Anglican division.

The two parishes of Thurles and Tipperary in the Cashel diocese contained 14,951 Catholic inhabitants, exceeding by more than 1,000 the whole Anglican population in the four united dioceses. It was argued that numerically the latter did not warrant the financial outlay from public funds they had been receiving, and that they were over-endowed with both clergymen

TABLE

Diocese	Total	Anglicans	Catholics	Presbyterians	Other Protestants
Cashel	120,011	4,721	114,831	215	244
Emily	62,196	1,414	60,707	49	26
Waterford	43,506	2,943	39,472	297	794
Lismore	145,265	4,775	139,759	333	387
TOTAL	370,978	13,853	354,769	894	1,451
PER CENT	—	3.7	95.6	0.2	0

and churches.⁹⁰ At the same time the diocese of Cashel and Emly had a 96% Catholic population, with 87 churches for 175,583 people. These churches were exclusively the fruits of the voluntary subscriptions of the people, chiefly the pence of the poor and working classes, and owed nothing for their creation or maintenance to government grants or fixed public levies.

The Catholic clergy had often found it difficult to obtain a site for a chapel or school, and more difficult to obtain a small farm for a pastoral residence in a central position in a parish. This often resulted from the legal inability of the owner to grant the requisite lease, or from unwillingness to give facilities for Catholic worship. It was argued that this indicated a necessity for legislation to enable people to have the same facilities to secure the outward means of public worship as were given to speculative companies requiring land for personal profit.⁹¹

Another major grievance complained of in almost every part of Ireland was the bare-faced intimidation practised by the appointment of officers under the Poor Laws.⁹² On Thurles Board of Guardians a medical officer for the workhouse had to be elected, and intimidation was alleged to have been used by some landlords. One guardian said another told him if he did not vote with his landlord his house would be "tumbled over his head". Three guardians had stayed away under coercion; another three attended under landlord coercion.

Another important issue at stake was the principle of the vote by ballot. At the Thurles Board of Guardians meeting Samuel Cooke of Brownstown in Meath, long identified with the popular interest in Tipperary, introduced the ballot, and his motion was carried by 21 to 17. The popular candidate, Dr. Hanly, was defeated by six votes. But the principle of the vote by ballot had received its first public trial in Tipperary, and its advocates claimed that "Thurles of the Synod" had struck the first blow in the Irish battle of the ballot. It was hoped that every Poor Law Union in the county would soon follow.⁹³

Intimidation was also alleged at the election of a dispensary doctor in the Cappawhite district. It was claimed that the landlords met and then "ran through the country ... threatening with destruction any ... tenants who are members of the dispensary committee if they did not vote for the man of their choosing".⁹⁴ With the exception of one or two, the tenants stayed at home and did not vote.

Catholics Victimised

It was claimed that Catholics were excluded from all offices in Abbeyleix workhouse, and the *Tipperary and Clare Independent* commented: "as it is Abbeyleix, so it is in Roscrea". In Roscrea Union it claimed that "the incubus of ascendancy paralyses everything Catholic and popular". The master, matron, clerk, porter and doctor were all Protestants. The dispensary doctors of Roscrea, Ballybrit, Shinrone and Moneygall were Protestants, but in Bourne (also in Roscrea Union) the doctor and infirmary nurse were Catholic – so that out of 18 paid appointments only the latter pair were Catholics.

It was argued that, while the Catholic population of Roscrea stood at 93%, they were ignored in the dispensation of offices connected with the Union. A letter to the *Freeman's Journal* from a doctor stated that in six Dublin hospitals supported by Catholic money there were 40 Protestant officers, but only two Catholics.⁹⁵

Disproportionate representation in other sectors of employment in Roscrea was also highlighted. In the Petty Sessions all the magistrates, the clerk, the summons-server, court-

keeper and postman were Protestants. At the Bank of Ireland the agent, sub-agent and tellers were "all of the dominant creed"; at the National Bank it was "ditto, three times repeated".

In the post office the postmaster held a monopoly of situations – stamp distributor, clerk of the union, nuisance inspector and other posts – which netted him £400 a year. The postmaster's assistant was a Protestant, as were the town's letter-carrier and several other letter-carriers. At the Loan Fund the treasurer, first and second clerks, two porters and committee of management were all Protestants, except three priests on the committee who considered it useless to attend because of the overwhelming Protestant element on the committee. Another on the committee, a country gentleman, did not attend for the same reason.⁹⁶

However, in some Poor Law Union boardrooms other topics were reaching the agenda. The land question was slowly coming to the surface. Isaac Butt dwelt on it in a pamphlet. The Celtic occupier, he argued, still regarded himself at war, and those wishing to understand the condition of Ireland had to realise that all the rights of landed property rested on confiscation, "not upon confiscations of remote antiquity, like those . . . of the Normans into England . . . but . . . confiscations following a contest which has never been fully fought out". For Butt it was not easy to keep separate the political and the social causes contributing to the occupation of land in Ireland.⁹⁷

There were admittedly exceptions to this overall picture of gloom. In Richmond, Nenagh the tenantry of Richard Gason celebrated his 21st birthday. He assured his tenants he would always be on the best footing with them. He believed it was his duty to be "fair, honest and liberal" with them.⁹⁸

Other tenants had little reason for celebration, however. At Nenagh Quarter Session 50 ejectments were before the court. The *Tipperary Advocate* denounced some of them as "unjust, heartless and tyrannical". It claimed they had been brought not for non-payment of rent but for non-title. Gill's newspaper refrained from giving details of each case. The chairman of the bench gave every assistance on technical points to dismiss the ejectments, but stated that the law was against the tenants.⁹⁹

In Toomevara Fr. Hurley complained that agents of absentee landlords were over-zealous. He warned of the crop of crime likely to follow: "Threatening notices, feud and outrage and maybe even murder, that the bits of land taken from one given to a more favoured neighbour, in order to carry out the system of a capricious agent, would create jealousy . . . giving a pretext to rise up in sinful revenge".¹⁰⁰

Another Toomevara priest, Fr. Patrick Horan, also took up tenants' causes, arguing that as long as the "crowbar brigade" was allowed to "exterminate . . . peaceful subjects . . . so long will you have fenianism or some ism, and no wonder". He argued that the government had tried in vain to crush fenianism and that the more they tried the greater the crop that rose up "like martyrs of old". Horan cited the landlord Carden of Barnane, who sent two agents and three policemen to seek possession from six families at Killoshane.¹⁰¹

The last day of this eventful year of 1867 in North Tipperary witnessed a Declaration of Roman Catholic Clergy, inviting support for a committee just formed. The declaration stated: "We, having duly considered the state of this country . . . deem it a duty to the people, the government and our own consciences, to declare our unchangeable conviction that no permanent national improvement . . . is practicable except a restoration of the blessings of domestic legislation".

A list of names of parish priests and curates was attached; heading it was that of Dean O'Brien, Vicar General of Limerick.¹⁰² Eventually 1,600 signed this document which was confined to clergy. But only 13 Tipperary names were published, including those of Frs. Horan and William Shanahan.¹⁰³

Conclusions

In surveying the year 1867 and establishing where nationalism, in whatever form it presented itself, found its social support, it must be pointed out that the "Limerick Declaration" may present a false picture of advanced nationalistic tendencies among the clergy. Only a small minority of priests showed sympathy with the Fenians of the 1860s. Despite British claims, they were not involved in the rising; nor were any of them arrested for conspiracy. Individual priests like Horan frequently expressed anti-English sentiments, but these usually took the form of angry outbursts in response to events like evictions and the Manchester executions. Most clergy were kept well in line by their superiors.

However, the clergy was well represented in the National Association and, although their contribution to it was confined to electoral matters, they energetically promoted it as a counterforce to the Fenian movement. The NA was also heavily supported by wealthy landlords, prompting the charge from advanced nationalists that it did not deserve the name "National". The NA took credit for the fact that the clergy had been responsible for restraining violent response to dissatisfaction. It invited farmers' clubs to affiliate with them in 1867, when these were claiming that bad land laws were the source of discontent.

The National League, although failing to attract large numbers of its ranks, persevered in its advocacy of constitutional rather than revolutionary tactics in persuading England to relinquish her claims on Ireland. Its spokesman John Martin still clung to the Young Ireland notion of encouraging the support of the middle classes. It was hoped to win back the Catholic laity of those classes to the repeal policy. The numbers and ranks of those arraigned in 1867, when compared to those tried in 1848, show no "gentlemen", orators, poets or public writers.

The Poor Law Unions were being held up to ridicule in 1867 from some quarters because of disproportionate representation in employment and discriminatory practices. But in the PLU boardroom debates were being opened up to include issues like landlord absenteeism and home government. The Boards of Guardians and municipal groups would eventually be infiltrated by those with more advanced ideas on such issues; in some cases, meetings became platforms from which nationalists could put forward their views on issues like amnesty for Fenian prisoners.

Judge George at the 1867 Nenagh Assizes had claimed that the Fenians were the off-scourings of the towns and that no respectable farmers or labourers had been connected with the rising. He was wrong. While the majority of the farming classes had remained outside the Fenian ranks, those arrested in connection with the conspiracy show that farmers, their sons and servants – even a few wealthy farmers – had all participated in the movement. The most glaring example of this was in the Borrisoleigh district.

While undoubtedly the Fenians got most support in the towns and larger cities among artisans, shopkeepers, clerks, tailors, drapers' assistants, bakers, butchers and publicans, a few insurgents from towns would never, as they did, venture to initiate such a movement in rural areas were they not assured, if not of immediate active support, at least of the sympathy of the peasants. Also, many artisans and traders in the towns were themselves farmers and held lands in localities where disturbances had taken place.¹⁰⁴

One correspondent gauging support in north Tipperary, while being over-zealous in his estimations, observed that the rising had ramifications in both town and country.¹⁰⁵ Not only were there American Civil War veterans among Fenian ranks; many Irishmen serving in the British Army had also rallied to the call and were to prove among the most outspoken advocates of fenianism.

Despite rigorous policing and severe penalties, Fenian sympathisers had continued to demonstrate, most notably in the wake of the triple Manchester executions, and also when the Fenian leader, General Thomas F. Bourke, had his death sentence commuted. North Tipperary's jail-houses continued to be filled to capacity with Fenians and their sympathisers during the most active days of the 1867 rising and in its aftermath.

That year the press had not confined itself to reporting the events, but attempted to analyse a complex situation, with constitutional and revolutionary nationalism each vying for popular support. Within the press each strand had its own particular promoters, and some were soon to pay the price for being seen to be aligned with advanced nationalism. From 1867 and throughout the 1870s nationalism was to present itself in varying forms. In north Tipperary its most able and ardent supporter was Peter E. Gill of the *Tipperary Advocate*.

FOOTNOTES

Abbreviations in footnotes:

LR = *Limerick Reporter & Tipperary Vindicator*; NG = *Nenagh Guardian*; TA = *Tipperary Advocate*; TCI = *Tipperary & Clare Independent*.

64. NG, 31.7.1867.
65. TCI, 3.8.1867.
66. NG, 31.7.1867.
67. TCI, 3.8.1867.
68. NG, 31.7.1867.
69. *Ibid.*, 3.8.1867.
70. *Ibid.*, 1.6.1867.
71. *Ibid.*, 3.8.1867.
72. *Ibid.*, 25.9.1867.
73. *Ibid.*, 12.10.1867.
74. *Ibid.*, 16.10.1867.
75. *Ibid.*, 2.11.1867.
76. *Ibid.*, 9.11.1867.
77. *Ibid.*, 20.11.1867.
78. *Ibid.*, 27.11.1867.
79. NG, 14.12.1867.
80. TCI, 21.12.1867.
81. NG, 14.12.1867.
82. *Ibid.*
83. NG, 18.12.1867.
84. NG, 18.12.1867.
85. NG, 21.12.1867.
86. NG, 21.12.1867.
87. TCI, 14.12.1867.
88. NG, 7.12.1867.
89. LR gives historical account of Church Establishment (15.10.1867).
90. *Ibid.*
91. TCI, 17.8.1867.
92. TCI, 5.10.1867.
93. TCI, 14.9.1867.
94. TCI, 5.10.1867.
95. TCI, 7.12.1867.
96. TCI, 14.12.1867.
97. TCI, 7.12.1867.

98. NG, 24.7.1867.
99. TA, 6.7.1867.
100. TA, 16.11.1867.
101. TA, 1.2.1868.
102. LR, 31.12.1867.
103. O'Shea, p. 208.
104. LR, 2.7.1867.
105. Irishman, 23.3.1867.