

‘Positively afraid of their own landlord’: Landlords and Tenants; Farming Societies and Agricultural Shows in County Tipperary in the Nineteenth Century.

Part 2

By Denis G. Marnane

Introduction

As discussed in part one of this article, 1865 was something of an annus mirabilis for agricultural societies in South Tipperary. Tipperary Union Farming Society, founded a decade previously was the longest established and had the support of the earl of Derby and his sons (Ballykisteen estate), together with the count de Jarnac (Thomastown estate) – not run of the mill landlords. Derby was three times British prime minister (last period, 1866-68) and de Jarnac, a political exile from France, saw his fortunes change to become his country’s ambassador to Britain in 1875. With the support of viscount Lismore (Clogheen), the Clogheen Union Farming Society was established in 1861, though it based its activities in Cahir. Lismore also gave his support to the short-lived Cashel Union Agricultural Society, which also took in Fethard. Clonmel had the support of the Royal Agricultural Society when it staged a show in that town in 1865.

That year 1865, popular and official attention was much more focused on the Fenians. Not only was someone like Lord Lismore promoting agricultural societies, as a magistrate he was in the local line of defence against the Fenian threat.¹ He was also lord lieutenant of the county. This was local. Lord Derby however, founder and patron of the Tipperary Union Farming Society was actually prime minister during the Fenian risings in 1867 and subsequent episodes such as the Manchester rescue, the executions of Allen, Larkin and O’Brien and the Clerkenwell explosion.²



Memorialising the 'Manchester Martyrs, not least in Tipperary town, where the annual procession on the last Sunday in November, became a fixture and part of a view of the world that was very much at odds with the perceptions of those for whom the annual agricultural show was a key fixture.

Ballyhurst & Ballycohey

In the everyday world, the years 1865-68 were about what de Jarnac called 'the truly criminal outbreak of Fenianism' and its containment. Among the places that 'rose' in March 1867 was mid-west Tipperary. Rebels under the leadership of a returned Union officer from Fethard, Thomas Francis Bourke, staged a futile stand at Ballyhurst, just outside Tipperary town on the road to Cashel.³ A few months later the annual show and banquet of the Tipperary Union Farming Society took place as normal, with plenty of entries (though they were down on previous years) and in the words of a press report- 'the attendance of the gentry and farmers was large'.⁴ Owners of prizewinning livestock included local landowners like count de Jarnac, F. W. Lowe (Kilshane), Massy (Grantstown) and Thomas Butler (Ballyslateen) – all the usual suspects. In other categories, open to tenant farmers with holdings of various sizes, the same small number of names occur in the prize lists. There was an unsurprising overlap between landlords involved in the society and tenants from their estates.⁵

There was no question of that year's banquet being cancelled. If anything, preparations at the venue, the National School, were even more elaborate, as if in competition with the beliefs and emotions of the previous March when the Fenians struck, shamrock and harp motifs were in abundance. Count de Jarnac presided. The one hundred and fifty or so guests, included the local resident magistrate, Charles de Gernon, central in the response to the Fenian defeat locally. Because of his French background, de Gernon played a role in establishing agents in Paris and the main French ports to keep track of Fenian suspects.⁶ One may assume that there was interesting conversation that evening between de Jarnac and de Gernon. De Jarnac as chairman of the proceedings in his welcome briefly referred to the absence of officers from the military 'at present stationed in Tipperary'. They had been invited but 'had been called elsewhere by a military engagement', which turned out to be a ball at some other venue. Another speaker, Colonel Foley, a retired army officer and de Jarnac's brother-in-law declared with reference to the local garrison, that 'it was the cause of spending a good deal of money in a town and of creating much jollity and were a great addition (hear hear)'.⁷ Tenant farmers reading this (*Tipperary Free Press* was the largest circulating nationalist newspaper in the region) cannot have been encouraged to consider joining their local farming society and perhaps showing some of their animals at a future show.

Speaking about the farming society, in this their thirteenth gathering, yet again the absent were not so much remembered as criticised. 'He had hoped,' said de Jarnac, 'that someone or other of the large landed proprietors who were precluded by circumstances from residing amongst them, would avail themselves of this opportunity of evincing some concern in their agricultural welfare. (hear hear)' Apart from such landlords being present or not at the banquet, and there was an apology from Smith-Barry, who donated £5, a more important matter was the absence of financial support from these men. De Jarnac

was presumably making a point, when after mentioning Smith-Barry's fiver, he named and thanked a tenant farmer who had contributed a fiver. Lack of funds meant that prizes had to be small. In his report, the Hon. Sec. was more hard-hitting and citing the annual report of another farming society, gave examples of landlords giving substantial donations - £100 from the duke of Devonshire being a case in point. 'Now what reason exists why (our) landed proprietors,' asked the Hon. Sec., 'of whom they never saw anything except a few improvements they make in their property - why is it they had not some wish to promote the agricultural interests of this Union, as landlords have in other parts of Ireland?'

For the 1868 show held on 10 September, entries were up by around one hundred and a very fine day added to the feeling of success around that year's show and banquet, this time chaired by Colonel Bagwell Purefoy of Cappawhite. De Jarnac was present and referred to the 'tragical event which has lately cast so deep a gloom upon this district'. He continued: 'It requires no magic hand to trace upon your walls the ominous words of warning - it requires no prophet inspired from above to point out to you what must too often ensue when the kindly relations which should prevail between owners of your soil and their tenantry are suffered to degenerate into feelings of mutual and embittered hostility (hear).'⁷ The reference of course was to Ballycohey, a townland a few miles distant, where on 14 August, landlord William Scully's attempt to serve eviction notices was resisted by tenants and two men were killed.⁷

No doubt the speaker's sense of outrage was genuine. De Jarnac went on to state that what their society could do was limited. 'All we can do is to draw together, as far as we can, the friendly ties which unite the two leading classes of your community.' Citing Bagwell Purefoy as an example, the speaker mentioned how once when he was threatened, his tenants rose in his defence.⁸ The world as it should be, rather than the world as it is. The point about Ballycohey that no amount of sweet talk about landlords and tenants playing happy families could get around, was that Scully acted as he did because the law allowed it. De Jarnac's reaction to Ballycohey was not to question (at least publicly) the story told for the past decade and more at their gatherings, rather to reinforce it, namely that there was a mutuality of interest between landlord and tenant. He spoke about Tipperary tenantry seeing 'their landlord in his appointed capacity of their truest friend and benefactor, as his father was the friend of their fathers and as his son will be the friend of their sons (loud cheers).'⁷ It was indicative of the enormity of what happened at Ballycohey that this gathering essentially in the landlord interest, reacted with sympathy to the tenants who defied a landlord, during which action, men died.

Replying for tenants, Michael Ryan of Rathnaveen⁹ declared tenants 'felt happy and content with such landlords who mixed with them at Poor Law Boards and other local meetings, where they could converse with them and make known their wants and wishes and they were listened to by them with the deepest attention.' Present at the banquet was the 3rd earl of Portarlington and while Ryan expressed regret that the earl had to sell vast amounts of land in mid-west Tipperary, having inherited mountains of debt in 1845 when he became earl, he was not explicit about something those at the banquet would have known, Ballycohey townland had been part of the Portarlington estate and it was

that sale in 1855 that initiated a sequence of events leading to the events of 14 August. In giving something of the history of Ballycohey, Ryan mentioned how an earlier purchaser, Lord Derby's agent Charles Grey Gray, had raised the rent by twenty per cent and so on. The whole sorry tale was narrated, to an audience who presumably knew the story. From Ballycohey Ryan drew a different conclusion than de Jarnac. For Ryan, the next session of Parliament should remove such landlord power of abuse. 'No tenant should be thus left at the mercy of fortune. Every tenant should have a lease of 61 years, subject to periodic revision of valuation.' Just as well that neither the earl of Derby nor his son were present to hear such revolutionary talk.

Lord Derby

The death of the earl of Derby, former prime minister, Tipperary landlord and founder and promoter of the Tipperary Union Farming Society, in October 1869, ended not only his connection with Tipperary but that of his family. That September, in his diary, his son and heir, Lord Stanley, reflected personal and family concern about impending land legislation for Ireland. The previous year William Gladstone and his Liberal Party had won power and threatened a variety of distressing changes. Personally Lord Stanley realised, however distasteful, that some change was necessary. On 8 September, he recorded that 'L(or)d D(erby) dwelling much on the idea of selling his Irish estates' and on 28 September, the son noted that 'L(or)d D(erby) talks much of selling his Irish estate, being disgusted at the turn which affairs have taken, and at the ill-feeling which exists among the tenantry, though full half the rental of the estate has for many years been spent in improving it. As he asked my opinion, I urged him not to act in haste, as it is hardly possible that the feeling of distrust in the security of Irish property can increase and a forced sale at the present time would be to sacrifice the property.'¹⁰ In the event, it was the diarist, now the 15th earl of Derby, who sold the Irish estate for £160,000 to a Dublin Roman Catholic businessman Valentine O'Brien O'Connor, the transaction being completed by 1871.¹¹ This transfer of ownership from non-resident protestant peer to native Roman Catholic middle class businessman was indicative of changes to come.

James Caird, one of the great agricultural experts of the period, wrote that 'Ireland in 1869 presents a strange spectacle. The landlord's rents are well paid, the tenant farmers are prosperous, the labourers never had higher wages; yet there is a general feeling of uneasiness and discontent. With the increasing value of their property, there has arisen in the minds of the farmers a keener desire to secure it.'¹² In Caird's view and indeed Charles Kickham's, leases were the answer. The agricultural economy might have been doing well and evictions rare but as Ballycohey demonstrated - for tenant farmers feeling secure and being secure were two different conditions. The exact situation with reference to tenure in county Tipperary in 1870 was that 68 per cent of holdings were held at will or without leases. The fact that the higher the valuation of a farm, the less likely it was to be held at will, is no surprise.¹³ In 1868, William Gladstone's Liberal Party came to power committed to various reforms in Ireland, such as the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. Changing the land system was more problematic.

Not unconnected with impending land legislation, in 1870 a 'Clonmel Farmers' Club'¹⁴ was founded, with rules that excluded discussion of religion or 'general politics', which

meant the big issues relating to the Union and not matters relating to land management. Unsurprisingly, the Liberal John Bagwell MP was elected president and Edmond de la Poer MP as vice-president, hardly representative of farmers.¹⁵ Within a few days, a meeting was convened to discuss impending land legislation. This 'club' was a local politically inspired reaction to the gathering interest in Gladstone's land legislation and lasted just as long as the attention given to same.

A letter from Captain Massy Dawson of Ballinacourty in the Glen of Aherlow and one of the largest land owners in the county, declared his intention to join the new club. In stating his belief that what was for the good of tenants was also good for landlords and his hope that farmers would take an increasing role in public matters, he was advocating a progressive position, going where most of his peers were very much not ready to go. While Massy Dawson was out of the country for long periods during the 1860s, he appears not to have taken any interest in the Tipperary Union Farming Society, likely one of those frequently criticised for indifference.¹⁶ A clubbable man, his distance may have been a reaction to the influence of the Derby family. After discussion, Clonmel Farmers' Club expressed the view that legislation should 'embrace the following': fixity of tenure or the granting of long leases; an allowance for tenant's improvements and freedom for a tenant to sell his interest – in other words 'to give the occupier an interest in the soil', which was actually quite revolutionary as it undermined absolute property rights. For club members the matter was straight-forward; not only should these changes be introduced but tenants tied to rackrenting leases and tenants with no leases should benefit.¹⁷

It should be said that this first effort by Gladstone with respect to Irish land was a failure.¹⁸ The demand for 'security' was not answered by legislation that dealt with what constituted a 'fair rent'. It would be another decade before any nettles were grasped. When members of the Clonmel Farmers' Club studied the proposed legislation and met to discuss it, one of the members got it about right, saying that 'it was prepared by a committee of adroit cunning lawyers who purposely rendered its wording and provisions complicated, in order to give themselves employment at a future period.'¹⁹ In fact, the legislation was very much Gladstone's own work and was all about maintaining landlordism by reform of its worst excesses (again Ballycohey can be cited). Gladstone was not in favour of land purchase schemes for Irish tenant farmers.²⁰

Presiding over the Tipperary Union Farming Society banquet in 1872 was a new figure, Denis Caulfield Heron, elected MP for Tipperary county in controversial circumstances, having stood against Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in a by-election. This latter won but as a felon was disqualified. In a re-run Heron very narrowly defeated a second Fenian candidate, Charles Kickham. A Roman Catholic lawyer from the north of Ireland, Heron said what was expected, noting evidence of prosperous farmers as he made the brief journey from Limerick Junction to Tipperary town. 'Prices were going up,' he told his audience, 'and the tenantry because of the good understanding between them and the landlords, were increasing in prosperity and the country was progressing.' It was left to John Massy of Kingswell to (again) note with regret the lack of support for their society, on the part of the 'gentry' and strongly defending 'people with whom any one might be proud to mix with' indicated that, in his view, the reason for this lack of support was social. The

count de Jarnac, whose personal circumstances were changed because of the Franco-Prussian War, was also a popular speaker and in retrospective mood, looked back over his time in the locality, telling his audience how compared with twenty years earlier, cattle were now three times the price.²¹

The following year, entries to the Tipperary Show were up and tenant farmers, rather than gentry, were the main exhibitors and prize winners.²² However, in agricultural shows as in life, there were gradations. 'First Class' was open to all members of the society; 'Second Class' was open to tenant farmers in the Union, who held no land in fee and whose rent exceeded the PLV; 'Third Class' was open to tenant farmers in the Union, living mainly by farming, whose holdings were valued under £100 p.a. by PLV and finally 'Fourth Class' was for farmers whose holdings were valued under £50 p.a. PLV. The impression comes across that for the minority of farmers who participated, the social incentive mattered as much, perhaps more, than any economic motivation.²³

That evening, at the banquet, presided over by Count de Jarnac, he was joined at the top table by Bagwell Purefoy of Cappawhite, Leopold Cust the Smith-Barry estate agent, Cooke of Kiltinan Castle, Massy of Kingswell and de Jarnac's brother-in-law and serial hanger-on, Colonel the Hon. Augustus Foley. It was made clear that de Jarnac had replaced Stanley as the figurehead of the society and in his remarks expressed satisfaction that, unlike unnamed others, their society had survived. He also denied a view, apparently current, that their Society promoted pasture at the expense of tillage, or, as he put it, 'to drive away the population and replace them with sheep and cattle'. Grass was associated with more prosperous farmers, in a way that tillage was not. As always in such speeches over the years, representatives of the landed interest, such as the count, described a world in which landlord and tenant shared a mutuality of interests; a world in which tenants looked to their benevolent landlords, rather than the law or indeed each other, to advance their interests; a world in which landlords and tenants met and socialised at events such as this banquet.

When Thomas Dowling spoke, he upset this scenario by rounding on Lord Derby, 'who had left them under such very peculiar circumstances. The wisdom of the legislature had lately stepped in and done much that Lord Derby might have done [hear]. His lordship thought proper to disconnect himself with their country, by disposing of his property and his tenantry, remarkable for their integrity and industry, for the skill with which they cultivated their farms - these tenantry asked Lord Derby to sell their farms to them and even offered to pay him a higher rate than he would get from any other person, but he refused.'²⁴ Dowling, a self-made man (his father was a cabinet maker and his brother medical officer to Tipperary PLU), was forthright and would in time be in trouble with his own tenants at Cappawhite. He went on to speak elliptically about problems with the management of the town's crucial butter trade; something that prompted a protest from the floor.

One of the points made by Leopold Cust was the lack of support within the region for the parent body in their endeavours, the Royal Agricultural Society, regarding which no more than twenty gentlemen within their Union were members and of that number, no more

than seven or eight were resident. This ongoing lack of commitment, especially from large resident landlords remained contentious. At the 1873 Tipperary show and banquet, Count de Jarnac directed heartfelt criticism at Arthur Moore of Mooresfort, who had been asked to take the chair but declined.²⁵ Moore was only twenty five years of age and had inherited substantial property on his father's death in 1869. He was also Roman Catholic. By 1876 however, Moore, then MP for Clonmel for two years, presided at the banquet. Clearly, he was there as local MP. As a local substantial landowner, he had no interest.

Clonmel District Agricultural Society

A few weeks after the Tipperary Union show, a public meeting was convened in Clonmel, chaired by Lord Lismore, to consider establishing 'an Agricultural Society on an extensive scale for improvement in the breeding of stock'.²⁶ In other words, a proper farming society and not a pressure group like the Clonmel Farmers Club of 1870. As always, Lismore emphasised the importance of having farmers involved and was hopeful in that regard. The requisition for the meeting had been signed by over 500 individuals, perhaps 400 of whom were tenant farmers. Asking what the object/s of such a society was, he itemised the following: the improvement of stock (including poultry – a nod towards the economic interest of farmers' wives); improved tillage and the improvement of labourers' cottages. This last was greeted by 'loud cries of hear hear'.²⁷ The level of enthusiasm for this latter cause seemed to be in inverse proportion to the intention to actually do anything.

A local land agent, Adam Coates cut through this fine talk by narrowing the focus to very practical and contentious matters such as something he clearly felt strongly about, the inconvenience of holding fairs in the streets. With some commotion, this was ruled out of order. It was usually the case that these meetings were happiest dealing with generalities. For John Bagwell MP, the attention of any such Society should be on small farmers and encouraging them to improve their enterprises. No more than on previous occasions did the nature of landlord-tenant relations come up for discussion. Suggesting measures of apathy and opposition, some months later, after the first show by the Clonmel District Agricultural Society, a local newspaper opened its report by noting from some quarters 'a cold adherence sufficient to chill it to death'.²⁸ That the Society was formed and an agricultural show held, was according to this source, entirely due to Lord Lismore. Whatever about the talk regarding the importance of farmers, the long list of those present was a comprehensive display of the local loyalist establishment and aspirational middle class Catholics: a mixture of Bagwell, Lalor, McCraith, O'Donnell, Clibborn, O'Connell Hackett, Power, Shee, Walsh, Bianconi, Hemphill, Falkiner, Grubb, Mulcahy, Pedder, Watson, Cooper, Russell and so on.

A theme of the period was the shortage of agricultural labourers and those displaying agricultural equipment and machinery made this a selling point.²⁹ At the banquet, held in the court house, an unusual feature was the presence of both rector and parish priest (St Mary's) who took it in turn to say grace before and after the meal. Lismore gave an upbeat address, not difficult when the rural economy was flourishing. For example, their new society had funds of £700. As was customary, reference was made to the condition of agricultural labourers and the need to improve their housing; a problem described

by the speaker as 'that blot on our country'. This was an issue very much at the stage of being investigated and talked about. Doing something about it, came later. The following year, the matter was still being talked about. That year's show (the 2nd), held in Mr Bell's field adjacent to the gasworks, had increased entries, especially welcome was the increased competition between second and third classes (see above). In his banquet address Lord Lismore, emollient as usual, directed attention at the single matter an agricultural society should be most concerned with, improving breeding stock and the fact that landlords might be expected to provide bulls and boars and not



just limit themselves to the extraction of rent (not that Lismore was so blunt).³⁰ For the society in 1875, their big project was their application for the 1876 show of the Royal Agricultural Society, a national rather than a regional or local event. At a public meeting, there was no difficulty raising the £500 needed as a completion guarantee and their main rival Cork was dismissed.³¹

At the show and banquet in Tipperary, Count de Jarnac, again doing his duty, noted a 'falling off' with respect to landlord interest and that the Society was 'mainly supported by the tenant farmer class'. One of that class, James Cleary of Rathduff, a tenant of de Jarnac holding around fifty acres, reinforced this view, castigating the 'indifference' on the part of landlords and suggested even greater classification in competitions, so that a tenant with a lease and reasonable rent did not have unfair advantage over his neighbour with neither of these benefits. Clearly, Gladstone's 1870 Land Act was not perceived as changing anything. Cleary, rather cheekily added: 'I would like to see the landlords competing amongst themselves for a prize offered by the tenant farmers to be given to the most just, the fairest and the most deserving.[cheers]'

For many years and certainly since the departure of Lord Stanley from the scene, Count de Jarnac had been a fixed centre in the world of Tipperary Union Agricultural Society but in 1874 circumstances changed and his departure was imminent. He had been appointed French ambassador to the Court of St James. He had been second secretary at that embassy at the time of the 1848 revolution. During the uncertain years of the early 1870s, as France fixed its constitutional position as a republic, Orleanist supporters had influence and hence de Jarnac's appointment.³² President of France at the time was Patrice Mac Mahon, obviously a man with Irish antecedents. After so many years in exile, the count only briefly enjoyed his new status. He died suddenly in London in March 1875. He was nearly sixty years of age.³³ As was remarked at the time, it was singular that the same individual should be President of the Tipperary Union Agricultural Society and the French ambassador in London. Other speakers at the Tipperary banquet in 1874 remarked on the unique fact that the first president of their society, the 14th earl of Derby had been prime minister and not only was their present president now French

ambassador to Britain but the British foreign minister with whom he would be dealing was the 15th earl of Derby, who as Lord Stanley frequently spoke at their gatherings.

In its report on the Tipperary show in 1876, *Tipperary Free Press*, always supportive of such shows, noted that entries were down, even though there had not been a cattle show for two years.³⁴ However, the quality of livestock on show was very good. The report continued:

It is a matter of regret that such societies are not accorded the practical support of the landlord classes. Time was and not many years ago, when those gentlemen were to be found exhibiting in every class and by example and precept encouraging their tenants to compete. So great was their solicitude that suspicions were aroused and farmers – fearing that their energy and enterprise, if made so manifest, would be taxed accordingly in increased rents etc., for a time held aloof, save when it was intimated to them that it was expected they should exhibit.

The Hon. Sec. of the Society was scathing about the lack of support for the Society in Tipperary, a town that benefitted hugely from butter sales. Even the matter of a venue for their banquet was difficult; the court house was only used because other venues, specifically the Forester's Hall, were not available. Captain Massy Dawson, one of the speakers, castigated farmers for not supporting the Society. He was hardly in a position to castigate fellow landlords. Clearly, Tipperary Union Farming Society was in something of a trough. One of the show's judges did not hold back in describing that year's show as poor with landlords indifferent and tenant apathetic.

Attendance at the inevitable banquet was also less than previously, some sixty gentlemen sat down to dinner at Tipperary courthouse and heard their chairman for the evening Arthur Moore MP speak more stringently perhaps than some listeners wished, to the effect that landlord-tenant division in the county was more marked than elsewhere. 'The landlord has looked upon his tenant as a sort of wild beast (cries of "no, no" and other manifestations of dissent here interrupted the speaker) ...and unfortunately, the tenant has too often looked upon his landlord as a mere oppressor with no common interest existing between them both (A voice- not in Tipperary, Sir)...' Moore continued by affirming the importance of such gatherings, not only allowing but encouraging landlord and tenant come together and with the added value of improving stock and produce, especially butter. In nothing Arthur Moore said was there any sense that the landlord system was terminal.

'It is the want of a feeling of security that has caused so many dissensions amongst us', was his bold statement and Moore went on to illustrate this by citing a neighbouring farmer offering £75 an acre 'for the occupational interest of a farm', in other words goodwill. On the one hand, Moore believed that the productive capacity of that land would not repay such investment but willingness to pay such an amount demonstrated a sense of security on the part of that farmer. The speaker was perceptive enough to realise that 'the tide of legislation, once it has set in, cannot recede.' In large measure this inspired confidence by tenants. It was a common view of landlords, and Moore was not an exception, to personalise the issue; rather than looking at landlord-tenant relations in the abstract; it

was a matter of good and bad landlords. Trouble on the other side of the Galtees was the fault, less of the system, than the landlord Nathaniel Buckley and his agent Patten Bridge.³⁵ In contrast, on the Tipperary side of that mountain, Captain Massy Dawson, who was at the banquet, was an excellent landlord.

Leopold Cust, the Smith-Barry agent, spoke about the Royal Agricultural Society, of which he was the regional representative, noting how they had looked on the Tipperary Society 'as one of the most promising of the local societies'. Now, after the twenty-second annual meeting, it would be a great regret if the Tipperary body collapsed. At least with reference to venue, he told the gathering that by the following year, Tipperary's new town hall would be opened. Cust was also able to talk about the economic benefit to the area from the military barracks being built. However, he did voice his frustration with the fact that butter merchants and other wealthy traders could not get elected to the Town Commission. While commenting on the absence of that body's chairman from their gathering, Cust's statement that 'whatever may be said of the present commissioners, they certainly did not represent the wealth nor the intelligence of the town' was not calculated to endear the speaker to his subjects of his topic.

By the following year's banquet, the town hall was the venue, having just been opened.³⁶ For this reason, Arthur Hugh Smith-Barry was there and as president of the Society, presided. Arthur Moore was not in attendance. It is unclear when exactly Smith-Barry became president, but did acknowledge what the Society owed to the late Count de Jarnac. In the special circumstances of the opening of the new town hall, there was a substantial turnout, including Lord Lismore Lord Lieutenant of the county. The attendance included a scattering of Ryans, Daltons, Frewens, Sadleirs, Bourkes and O'Dwyers, very much the kind of substantial farmers who sent their sons to boarding schools. Smith-Barry was bullish about the economy, making much of new bank branches being opened. (By then, there were four.) He also noted a decline in emigration.³⁷ Improvement on the previous year's show was noted, with forty more entries, which was hardly dramatic.

Among other speakers, the Hon. Sec. of the Society spoke about preaching to the converted and sang the by now familiar refrain of urban indifference, landlord detachment and tenant apathy. According to Lord Lismore, at some stage earlier in the year, there had been talk about the Tipperary and Clonmel societies amalgamating, something of which he disapproved and was glad the notion fell through. This was 1877 and though speakers did not know it, a long period of prosperity was drawing to a close. One of the reasons was mentioned by Lismore, but not as anything to be feared, the revolution in refrigeration and transport, so that 'not only dead meat but live cattle were now imported from America'.³⁸

The Tipperary town newspaper, its proprietor and editor with a Fenian past and supportive of tenant's demands, was never too enthused about the Tipperary Union Farming Society and delivered itself of a measured editorial in 1877.³⁹ It admitted the success of that year's show but segued from an account of a display of agricultural machinery to a lamentation about all those never able to use such equipment because they had been forced to emigrate. And then the dismissal: a reference to the 'suspicion' aroused by 'such yearly

tournaments as cattle shows, which are now being used in this country as fit occasions for rackrenters, absentee landlords and exterminators, to paint over the villainy of their crimes and misrepresent the "prosperity of the country". The assault continued: 'From what we can glean from the associations connected with these shows, they are simply man-traps under a different name. They are foreign institutions ingeniously contrived for the purpose of drawing a few well-to-do farmers and aping aristocrats together, to permit the landshark launch forth his fulminating falsehoods as to the prosperity of the country.' McCormack should have told his readers what he really thought!⁴⁰

The writer (J. R. McCormack) did allow that some of the exhibitors were well intentioned but dupes, providing cover for 'land-robbers (who) proclaim their innocence'. Some of this animus was prompted by the appearance on the scene of A.H. Smith-Barry 'a smart Englishman who is making a tool of the mere Irish for his own purpose'. The editorial concluded by promising that much more would be said about Smith-Barry (incidentally, landlord of the premises where the newspaper was printed) in the future – a promise kept especially during the New Tipperary struggle. The fact that when habeas corpus was suspended in 1881 during the Land War, McCormack was one of the first to be arrested in the area, should not surprise.⁴¹

Sustaining an agricultural society in 1877 was not only difficult in mid-west Tipperary.⁴² Clonmel also had problems and such were stories and rumours about decline, even demise that Lord Lismore penned a robust counter-attack to that primary supporter of such societies in South Tipperary, the *Tipperary Free Press*. Reacting to the resignation of a prominent member and the fallout from this, Lismore's letter was impassioned. 'As to our Society, it must not fall through, no matter what has happened.' He continued; 'There never was a time in our county when it was more necessary to have a society in conjunction with the development of agriculture.' To demonstrate his seriousness, Lismore contributed £100 over and above his usual donations and concluding his letter, which gave the impression of being entirely from the heart, he declared: 'Farming societies exist in all well-regulated countries and are increasing; they invite competition and co-operation; they shake up landlord and tenant together; they are social, unpolitical, friendly meetings, where the farmer can, if he is clever, beat his landlord.'⁴³

Apart from the fact that Lismore's timing was off, in optimum economic conditions, farming societies were hardly expressions of popular broad-based appeal, suspicion on one side met indifference on the other, the social and cultural landscape pictured by Lismore with landlord and tenant pulling in the same direction, was more the stuff of the Home Counties than of Tipperary. Reacting to Lismore's letter, the *Freeman's Journal* correctly commented that agricultural societies, especially their banquets, provided venues where well disposed landlords met secure tenants, very much circumstances cut off from the real world. 'No tenant whose heart may have been turned to gall by bad treatment according to law, would care to sit at the same board with the man who injured him.'⁴⁴

Something of the changed economic circumstances were evident in the annual report delivered at the 5th AGM of the Clonmel District Agricultural Society in March 1878. 'The past has been far from a prosperous year; the vicissitudes of our climate, the fluctuations

of trade and the uncertainty which prevailed at home and abroad' all contributed. Lord Lismore was president of the society and in his remarks kept his focus narrowly on agricultural matters - bulls to be exact and their importance; together with his willingness to support his opinions by providing money for prizes in a range of categories. This 5th AGM ended with a decision about the date of that year's show and anyone reading this account of their meeting would conclude that agricultural matters, at least as experienced by the society and its members (which was up somewhat) allowed for optimism.⁴⁵ In fact, when the show was held, there was disappointment about public attendance. Common to speeches by society insiders, was the conviction that they as bringers of enlightenment should be met by a more receptive public. It was the puzzled zeal of the convinced that the message of salvation was not being embraced by the people; especially at a time when, in the words of one speaker at the banquet, there was increased competition from the thrusting Yankee.⁴⁶

The Tipperary Union Farming Society and its annual show was by the late 1870s, the longest established in the county. The 1878 show in spite of the negative wishes of the local newspaper, was attempting to hold its own. In contrast to the opinion of the *Tipperary People* the *Tipperary Free Press* (also nationalist but perhaps of a less advanced kind) deprecated what it characterised as an old-fashioned view, namely the 'delusion' on the part of many tenant farmers that 'agricultural societies and their shows were merely traps set by designing landlords for an unsuspecting tenantry and that they were utilised by the former as a kind of ready-reckoner, which would enable them more effectually to put "the screw" on the latter.' That was then. Now however 'nobody disputes the fact that these friendly competitions between tenant farmer and landlord are fraught with the most beneficial results to both and to everyone in the community.'⁴⁷

At that year's banquet, the chairman Colonel J. S. Mansergh of Grenane, in toasting the success of the society, referred to its founding in 1854 and, unusually in that setting, declared that the society was on the decline.⁴⁸ While entries were very little down on the previous year, the decline he firmly ascribed to the local 'gentry'. 'There are not so very many of them; it is not so thickly populated with gentry but I think the few that there are should patronise this society (hear, hear and applause).' He continued: 'I think it is the general opinion that this society cannot get along prosperously without the aid of the landlords living within its radius; but I am sorry to say there are not many of them at this table this afternoon (applause).' The speaker ended with a downbeat assessment to the effect that this 'will probably be our last meeting' unless there was better support by the gentry.

The long-standing secretary of the society, a former military officer and present magistrate (not the best points of contact with ordinary tenant farmers), like the previous speaker, did not attempt to sugar-coat the state of the society. Also blaming the absence of landlord participation, Captain Warburton noted that in 1868, their show had 457 entries as against 230 in the present year (1878). With this decline went a huge decrease in gate money. With regard to cause: 'It is not for me to stand up here and dictate to people what they ought to do, but it is perfectly clear to me that there is not that interest, that mutual interest existing between landlord and tenant, which there ought to be.' The speaker like others

committed to such societies, had difficulty connecting the wider political issue of landlord-tenant relations and the demands of tenants for change and the work of the societies promoting better agricultural practices, which appeared to be in everyone's interest.

That the next speaker was Arthur Hugh Smith-Barry reinforced the reality (not just the perception) that agricultural societies with their annual shows were elitist and removed from day to day concerns of ordinary farmers. Reference was made to one individual who had departed the scene since the previous show, the local Smith-Barry agent, Sir Leopold Cust. 'You are aware that he made some enemies while living here and no person was more aware of it than himself.'⁴⁹ Making a point that Cust had worked for and promoted the society, was not in the circumstances a point to endear the society to the wider public. The chairman Colonel Mansergh, who was a friend of Cust, also emphasised how much he had done for their society and attributed the decline in the society, in part at least, to Cust's death. It would not have escaped any contemporary readers of this report in the *Tipperary Free Press* that no one at this agricultural society banquet was speaking about what mattered most, not the greater use of fertiliser but such matters as rent levels and tenant improvements.

The tenant representative who responded to one of the toasts was John (O) Dwyer (Barronstown), not your usual tenant farmer.⁵⁰ His son was the future Sir Michael O'Dwyer governor of the Punjab and a man associated with the Amritsar Massacre in 1919. Dwyer Senior had been a member of the society since its foundation and in common with other speakers, accepted the line that the problem with the society was the lack of support from landlords; whereas in fact, most ordinary tenant farmers felt that the society had little to do with them. Very much the view of the *Tipperary People*. Reflecting the changing economic circumstances (see table of butter prices in part one), Dwyer told his audience, that with falling agricultural prices, rents should be adjusted. He had sold butter at Tipperary market the previous Saturday at eighteen shillings less than on the same day a year previously. His message was very much not confrontational. Landlords and tenants together would weather the storm.

There was an agricultural show in 1879, something of a victory of optimism over reality. Twenty-five years on from the foundation of the society, there was £60 in the bank and in bad weather, a show struggled on that September day. It was held in the market yard, after a great deal of rain the previous twenty four hours, the show yard was consequently covered with mud and the judges had frequently to take refuge in the Town Hall, while many exhibitors were deterred from sending their animals in to the show. It was indicative of terminal decline that there was no banquet.⁵¹ In contrast, the Clonmel District Agricultural Society (512 entries), while reflecting the agricultural downturn, appeared to have a wider base of support and in 1879, not only had a moderately successful show but a successful banquet. One advantage enjoyed by the Clonmel society was their connection with the Royal Agricultural Society. For example, there was an expectation that their show, a national affair, might be held in Clonmel in 1880. The banquet chairman, emphasised the importance of keeping step with changes in butter technology. Optimistically, competition could only bring improvement and, a not uncommon complaint, while there was no excuse for County Tipperary not producing the best butter in the world, sometimes it didn't.

A bit late in the day and a problem common to all such societies was highlighted by the chairman when he said that the 'wants and requirements' of small farmers had been ignored. Surprisingly perhaps, for this speaker, the first 'want' mentioned was access to bulls to improve breeding and actually he was not sure but that was more the business of landlords than of this society. The purpose for which such societies had been founded was exactly this, to promote improvement in stock and crop. All of which was true but at a time when agricultural prices were falling and evictions and agrarian crime rising, it possibly seemed a bit precious to be obsessing about 'German butter-kneaders'.⁵²

The following year, 1880 was dominated by the Land League. The Tipperary town show was held and the press report, while looking for positives, used the phrase 'aspect of failure'. Entries were under two hundred (230 the previous year). Most entries were from tenant farmers, which was good but many of the animals were unexceptional, especially the horses.⁵³ In contrast, as expected the previous year, Clonmel had the privilege of hosting the Royal Agricultural Show, 'one of the most successful provincial meetings ever held by the Royal Agricultural Society' and the banquet, at the top table of which sat the marquis of Waterford, Viscount Lismore, Count Arthur Moore MP (Clonmel), Colonel de la Poer, Colonel Mansergh, A.H. Smith-Barry, Colonel Vesey, P.J. Smyth MP (Tipperary) and the society secretary the Rev. J. R. Millington. In his keynote speech, Lord Waterford dealt with the economic crisis, blamed on what he called the 'Visitation of God' (bad weather), together with 'severe' competition from overseas and a universal decrease in trade. Admitting that farmers were very badly affected, His Lordship had no truck with such nonsense as remedial legislation but in an analysis with a powerful modern resonance, talked about farmers enjoying unlimited credit for a long time and taking its availability for granted.⁵⁴ The ending of the good years had come as a shock and the speaker held out little hope of change, clearly of opinion that there was no going back. The best that might be managed was government investment in promoting manufacturing jobs.⁵⁵

The following year, 1881, saw the end of the Tipperary Union Farming Society. On a day in September, in Tipperary market yard, the Society held its twenty-seventh annual show. Each of the previous few years marked a decline and this year continued the pattern. Apart from entries, there were few spectators, no more than



2nd Viscount Lismore

one hundred and fifty to two hundred at any given time during the day (which was fine). Also, continuing a pattern of the years, there was 'the almost entire absence of the local gentry'. A special press report tried some excuses such as a busy harvest or the town's fair on the same day. With hindsight, there is amusement to be derived from Mr Smith-Barry's sheep sharing honours with John Cullinan's, though of course, the men competed in different classes. Even then Cullinan worked for the Land League and a decade on would be a thorn in Smith-Barry's side during the New Tipperary struggle.⁵⁶

Four years previously, the Tipperary town newspaper, *Tipperary People* attacked the society (see above). Now, that newspaper danced (or rather its editor did) on the grave of the Tipperary Union Farming Society. Under the inelegant headline 'The Tipperary Cattle Farce' the paper castigated what it called 'the dying embers of that most ridiculous institution', meaning the society and that the exhibition of livestock was a direct insult to the starving hundreds and the writer piously hoped that it was the last such show until people owned their own land. (That year, 1881 saw the passage of Gladstone's second land act, granting the 3 Fs and setting up the Land Commission, all of which helped reduce rents, without affecting the reality that those who worked the land did not own it.) J. R. McCormack, a true newspaper man, having said all this, nevertheless published the prizewinners in the various categories, though under the heading: 'Tipperary Cattle Humbug'.⁵⁷

In contrast, the Clonmel show survived. Grudgingly described in 1883 at a meeting of the County Cork Agricultural Society as 'perhaps the most successful provincial society in Ireland', Clonmel struggled through the contentious 1880s.⁵⁸ Two years later, there was a show but just about.⁵⁹ The following year, 1886, was the time of the Plan of Campaign and in a more difficult economic climate, there was no show. An indication of how sustained land agitation polarised, indeed politicised opinion, was the sustained onslaught from Clonmel's mayor in 1891. He reacted badly to his office being omitted from the show's vice-presidents and in a statement at a corporation meeting declared (among other points) his knowledge that when 'the names of several merchants of the town known to be Nationalists were proposed as members, they would not be appointed'. Some named members of the organising committee were attacked and the mayor concluded as follows: 'If the farmers of the country wished to be humbugged and made cats-paws of by Mr S(tephen) Moore and other landlords, their hereditary persecutors, let them; but the Nationalists of Clonmel would not allow themselves to be humbugged by such men.'⁶⁰ The Clonmel District Agricultural Society, dating from the early 1870s when the agricultural boom was about to wind down, survived the agitations of the 1880s and saw in a new century as the Clonmel Horse Show Society – a safer bet as interest in horses crossed the political divide.⁶¹

Conclusion

The farming societies in Clonmel and Nenagh planted seeds in the nineteenth century that survived into the twentieth and beyond. In both cases, their saving graces were not just their locations with enough of the right kind of people to sustain them but the absence of a mission to educate or a dream to provide a space which landlords and tenants could occupy in harmony. On the other hand, the Tipperary Union Farming Society had just

such a mission. In the words of one of its leading supporters, Count de Jarnac: 'the cause of the society was that of peaceful industry, of slow and constant improvements. It was a cause that created good will and confidence between landlords and tenants.'⁶²

On a wider front, the Royal Agricultural Society endeavoured, with difficulty, to bring landlord and tenant together in the context of improved agricultural. Whatever measurement was used, this message of brotherhood and progress, fell on unreceptive ears. Again and again, the committed speaking at annual banquets lamented all those not committed, indeed indifferent or even hostile to the great work of landlord-tenant relations and agricultural improvements. For example, out of 105 Irish MPs, only 35 were members of the RAS. More tellingly, out of some 600 deputy lieutenants in the country, no more than 140 were members. Deputy lieutenants were important figures in local administration, sound loyalists chosen to help the lord lieutenant of the county, in this case Lord Lismore.

Speaking in 1877, it was Lord Lismore who said 'Farming societies exist in all well-regulated countries and are increasing; they invite competition and co-operation; they shake up landlord and tenant together; they are social, unpolitical, friendly meetings, where the farmer can, if he is clever, beat his landlord.'⁶³ To which might be retorted, but Ireland is not a 'well-regulated country.' While Lord Derby put back into his Irish land more than was common in Tipperary, generally landlords invested little in their estates and no amount of post prandial sweet talk mitigated this. As W.E. Vaughan wrote: 'by not investing, Irish landlords missed an opportunity to justify their existence.'⁶⁴

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- 3 See D.G. Marnane, *Land & Violence a history of Clanwilliam from 1660* (Tipperary, 1985) pp. 78-85.
- 4 *T.F.P.*, 10 Sept 1867
- 5 *T.F.P.*, 10 Sept 1867
- 6 Jenkins, *Fenian Problem*, p. 71.
- 7 Marnane, *Land & Violence*, pp. 96-100; G. Moran, William Scully and Ballycohey a fresh look in *THJ* (1992), pp. 63; P. O'Grady, *The Battle for Ballycohey* (Author, 2018).
- 8 D.G. Marnane, 'Such a treacherous country: a land agent in Cappawhite 1847-52 in *THJ* (2004), pp. 233-
- 9 See Part 1
- 10 J. Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party journals and memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley 1849-1869* (London, 1978), pp. 342-3.
- 11 J. Vincent (ed.), *A selection from the diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th earl of Derby (1826-93) between Sept 1869 and March 1878* (London, 1994), p. 9. Such a prominent Tory family divesting itself of their Irish estate did not indicate confidence in the future of the landed supremacy so central a part of that same family's philosophy.
- 12 J. Caird, *The Irish Land Question* (London, 1869, 2nd ed), p. 5.
- 13 Returns showing the number of agricultural holdings in Ireland and the tenure by which they are held by the occupiers [C 32] H.C. 1870, lvi, 737.

- 14 Membership extended into Waterford.
- 15 *T.F.P.*, 11 Jan 1870.
- 16 See D.G. Marnane, A Tipperary Landlord's Diary of the 1860s in *THJ* (1991), pp. 120-28.
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- 18 For example, P. Bull, *Land. Politics and Nationalism a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 54-7.
- 19 *T.F.P.*, 22 Feb 1870.
- 20 R. Shannon, *Gladstone Heroic Minister 1865-1898* (London, 1999), p. 77. Land purchase, the 'answer' to the Irish land question was a Tory measure.
- 21 *T.F.P.*, 15 Sept 1871.
- 22 *T.F.P.*, 13 Sept 1872.
- 23 Personal information.
- 24 This was correct. On 25 January 1871 Derby received a deputation of tenants with such a request. Vincent (ed), *Diaries 15th Earl of Derby*, p. 73.
- 25 *T.F.P.*, 12 Sept 1873.
- 26 *T.F.P.*, 5 Nov 1872. See T. Bunbury, *Clonmel Show 150 Years – A History 1865-2015* (Clonmel, 2015), pp. 13-18.
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- 28 *T.F.P.*, 1 July 1873.
- 29 See *Report from poor law inspectors on the wages of agricultural labourers in Ireland*, (C 35), H.C. 1870, xiv, l.
- 30 *T.F.P.*, 11 Sept 1874.
- 31 *T.F.P.*, 8 June 1875.
- 32 Unlike the rest of the monarchy, the Orleanist faction actually supported the revolution.
- 33 *F.J.*, 27 March 1875.
- 34 *T.F.P.*, 15 Sept 1876.
- 35 For this see J.S. Casey, *A Mingling of Swans* (UCD Press, 2010).especially Introduction.
- 36 D.G. Marnane, *The First Hundred Talks on Tipperary's History* (Tipperary 2013), pp. 154-5.
- 37 During 1861-71, over 47,000 emigrated from Tipperary. During the following decade, this fell to around 26,500. See Vaughan & Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics Population 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 307..
- 38 *T.F.P.*, 14 Sept 1877.
- 39 *T.P.*, 14 Sept 1877. See the article about McCormack and his newspaper elsewhere in this volume.
- 40 See article on McCormack in this journal.
- 41 *Cork Examiner*, 18 Jan 1882.
- 42 *T.F.P.*, 1 June 1877.
- 43 *T.F.P.*, 29 May 1877.
- 44 *F.J.*, 31 May 1877.
- 45 *T.F.P.*, 22 March 1878.
- 46 *T.F.P.*, 2 Aug 1878. Lord Lismore was not present because of his wife's illness.
- 47 *T.F.P.*, 10 Sept 1878.
- 48 *T.F.P.*, 13 Sept 1878.
- 49 Such was the opposition to Cust, that on his death, no undertaker could be found to deal with the funeral and his remains had to be crated and shipped back to England.
- 50 See introductory matter by T. O'Dwyer in the 2000 reprint of Sir M. O'Dwyer, *The History of the O'Dwyers*.
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- 52 *T.F.P.*, 15 Aug 1879.
- 53 *T.F.P.*, 17 Sept 1880.

- 54 This connects with the argument of J. S. Donnelly, Jr. about a 'revolution of rising expectations' during this period. See his *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975), pp. 219-50.
- 55 *T.F.P.*, 13, 31 Aug 1880.
- 56 *T.F.P.*, 14 Sept 1881. Cullinan was nationalist MP for the constituency 1900-1918.
- 57 *T.P.*, 16 Sept 1881.
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- 59 *C.E.*, 19 Aug 1885.
- 60 *C.C.*, 9 Sept 1891.
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