

The Land Struggle 1800 - 1920

CHAPTER

12

Those who worked the land of Ireland did not own it. In Tudor Ireland, the land was owned by Irish chieftains who held their land, in the old Gaelic tradition, as a kind of trust for the extensive and extended family or clan. In post Tudor Ireland, Plantations followed rebellions until finally, most of the island of Ireland was owned by English or Scottish landlords who were loyal to the English crown. Those who worked the land were either labourers or tenants on small and large estates.

Anyone studying the court cases or reading the Galway newspapers in the early 1800s could not fail to be struck by the amount of agrarian unrest in East Galway in the period between 1820 and 1835. This phenomenon was particularly prevalent within a triangle of countryside between Ballinasloe, Portumna and Tynagh. The parish of Clontuskert experienced its own share of unrest in that period also.

The national newspaper accounts of the time are filled with references to Ribbonmen, Whiteboys and the other agrarian secret societies then operating in Ireland. The East Galway papers are filled with references to yet another secret society, the *Terry Alts*,

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sometimes referred to as the 'Terries' or 'Altism'. The Terry Alts were members of a secret society named after a man called Terry Alt from Corofin, County Clare. He was a Protestant army pensioner and an ardent loyalist who would have been appalled to have his name associated with any form of outrage. He had come upon the scene of an assault on a man in Corofin, and was by coincidence, dressed in clothing exactly similar to the clothing of the assailants. Locals picked up on the irony of the situation, and all subsequent violent outrages were attributed to the innocent Terry Alt whose name for the next quarter of a century was used as a cover-name for a North Clare agrarian secret society.

The Terry Alt movement spread over the Clare border into parts of South and East Galway in the early nineteenth century. Whether there was any real connection between the agrarian secret societies in the two counties is a matter of debate. The fact is that a violent secret society did exist in this parish and in a large number of neighbouring parishes in the first third of the nineteenth century. The name 'Terry Alt' was used by the courts and the newspapers of the time as a tag to describe the movement.

The Terry Alt movement had its birth in the social conditions then existing in this part of the country. People on the lower rungs of the social ladder were experiencing the effects of grinding poverty, excessive rents, minor famines and the worsening economic situation which followed the ending of the Napoleonic war. The landlords and wealthier tenant farmers added to the problem by changing over to grassland farming and in consequence were disinclined to rent small plots of land to cottiers and labourers for the growing of potatoes. Wages paid to agricultural labourers were so low that these unfortunate people were unable to feed their families.

The dispossessed and the underprivileged felt that the only

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answer to their problems was to obtain redress by joining an agrarian secret society. In an article entitled 'Disturbances in the County of Galway' in *The Times* of London of February 9th 1820 and quoted by the *Freeman's Journal*, the modus operandi of such societies is described:

The Ribbonmen here are becoming more active and numerous every day . . . They go about in considerable bodies. When they come to a house, the person acting as leader or captain knocks at the door, and calls out in English and with an English, or as some say, a northern accent, 'Come forth man of the house;' upon which the owner of the house and every other male inhabitant, is immediately obliged to present himself at the door. If there be any delay or the least resistance, they instantly proceed to enforce their commands, by breaking the door . . . He is next obliged to swear he will not prosecute; and, lastly, that he will go to Ballinafad upon such night as shall be appointed for the purpose; and he is severely threatened, should he fail in obeying this mandate . . . But from the moment they have been at Ballinafad, (which does not mean any particular place, but merely signifies the field or hill, or other spot, appointed as their rendezvous for that night,) they are no longer communicative. It is supposed they take other oaths there, but of what nature has not transpired. We understand each man is obliged to pay ten-pence into the public fund, and those who are sworn there upon one night, become thenceforward instruments themselves, and shortly afterwards proceed to swear the inhabitants of other districts.

One such 'Ballinafad' is mentioned as being held in Gortnamona on February 20th 1820. Upwards of two hundred and fifty people were in attendance, armed with guns, pistols, pikes, and

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a sword wielded by a man called Peter Kelly. The purpose of this meeting was to dissuade a Patrick Doogan from giving evidence at the Galway Assizes. The trial involved a number of men who were accused of threatening Mr. Seymour of Somerset House, of being members of a secret society, of appearing in arms and of administering unlawful oaths. The defendants were Peter Kelly, John Madden, William Staunton, Thomas Colohan and Thomas Preston. Fr. James O'Donnell, the parish priest of Clontuskert, was questioned in court about Peter Kelly. The priest declared he had known him for a period of three years and that Kelly had surrendered a pistol to him and had given information about some of his associates in the hope of avoiding prosecution. All the prisoners were found guilty. Madden and Colohan were transported for life and Preston was imprisoned for two years and publicly whipped on three occasions.

Many court cases involved the theft of arms from private houses. A party of armed men surrounded the house of Patrick McDermott of McDermott's Lodge in Loughturk in August 1831. They demanded guns but only succeeded in obtaining one musket. The following April, the house of Mr. Nevin of Crossconnell was raided and a blunderbuss was taken as well as a case of pistols. Other raids were made on houses to threaten the owners who had refused to rent land for conacre. Among those mentioned in the *Western Argus* was Patrick Morgan who was attacked by an armed party in March 1832.

Strangely, the activities of the Terry Alts were not confined to the poorer areas. They were more prevalent in the areas of better land and occurred wherever there was evidence of a change from arable to grazing land or where the rent demanded for conacre was regarded as being too high. Sometimes the organisation stepped in where there was a dispute between tenant

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and tenant or more commonly, between landlord and tenant.

Perhaps the case which achieved the highest degree of notoriety was that involving Hugh Larkin of Lismanny. He lived with his wife Esther and two sons in a small house beside the shop at the cross roads which is now owned by the Ryan family. When Hugh was threatened with dismissal from his position as herd by his employer Mr. Seymour in 1833, he broke down the door of Somerset House in an act of defiance. Because he was accused of being a Terry Alt and because one of the servants from Somerset swore against him in court, he was sentenced to transportation. Despite the pleas of his wife for clemency, he was lodged in Galway jail and from there sent to Spike Island where he was put on a ship bound for New South Wales. One of his sons, Patrick became a drover for Mr. Seymour and the other, young Hugh, became the owner of a public house and a sawmill. Hugh Larkin himself had a rather sad end to his life. He became a very successful hardware merchant in Australia and married a girl called Mary Shiel. However, when she died in childbirth in 1854, he became a heavy drinker and allowed his business to decline. Sadly, he died three years later in 1857. His life-story achieved international fame when it became the subject of a best-selling novel by the Australian writer, Thomas Keneally, whose wife is a direct descendant of Hugh Larkin of Lismanny. This episode involving Hugh Larkin in 1833 is the last known activity by the Terry Alts in Clontuskert.

Before the Famine, tenants were often allowed to subdivide their holdings in order to provide for their expanding families, while labourers were often paid in kind with a small plot of ground on which to grow potatoes to feed them. As we know, this kind of estate management ended in disaster for both tenant and landowner when famine struck in the 1840s and the labouring class was almost wiped out. In post-famine Ireland, the major political

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movement became the struggle between landowner and tenant as the latter sought security from eviction and from rising rents and the landowner sought to make a profit from his estate, sometimes at any price. This struggle between landowner and tenant reached its peak in the 1880s and 1890s, although strife continued on some estates into the 1920s.

It is difficult to find accurate information on the occupiers and tenants of the land in Clontuskert in the early nineteenth century. The *Tithe Applotment Books* are one of the few sources containing records of that era. These Books were compiled during the period 1823 to 1837 in order to determine the amount which occupiers of agricultural holdings should pay to the Established Church, the Church of Ireland. They contain the name and acreage of the occupier and the amount of tithes or tax to be paid. Unfortunately, the Books are not comprehensive. Apart from the fact that they omit anyone not in occupation of land, certain categories of land were exempt from tax. Such exemptions resulted in significant inequalities and are also the reason that these records are not totally factual with regard to the acreage of landowners at that time. The tithes were fiercely resisted in some areas by those who were not members of the Church of Ireland. They were finally abolished in 1838.

According to the *Tithe Applotment Books* of 1823 the following were the more extensive landowners in Clontuskert at that time: Dennis Kelly of Kellysgrove, 530 acres; Persse Grome, 500 acres in Lismanny; Martin Kirwan, 440 acres at Tristaun; Mrs. Lynch, 430 acres in Abbeypark; Bernard Browne, 360 acres in Gortnahorna; Thomas Shadwell, 270 acres in Ballymanagh and Whitehall; Art Ailward, 254 acres in Ardranny; Joe Kelly, 220 acres in Liskelly; Major Mc Dermott, 200 acres in Carrowkeel, Bogpark, Loughturk and Loughaunbreen. The acreages are approximate.

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There were other occupiers of a hundred acres and less and many of these paid tithes despite farming small acreages. The *Tithe Applotment Books* of 1823 make no reference to some of the larger landowners in the parish, such as Lord Clancarty, Thomas Eyre or the Earl of Clanrickarde. Twenty-five years later, following the famine of 1847, many tenants were unable to pay rents and there were more than 70,000 evictions in Ireland. The landlords of the time had incurred crippling debts, due to the fact that their rents were diminishing and because of the heavy taxes levied on them for the provision of famine relief. The Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 enabled new investors to purchase heavily indebted estates. This Act facilitated the sale of Irish estates which had been mortgaged and whose owners were unable to meet their obligations. It was hoped that investors from Ireland and Britain would purchase these estates, thereby breathing new life into Irish agriculture. Over a quarter of the land of Ireland passed to new landlords, some of whom were speculators, while others were related to the existing landlord. In the years following, the demand for cattle in England increased considerably, resulting in a major changeover from tillage to grassland. By 1856, there had been a considerable change in the ownership of land in the parish of Clontuskert. The major landowners at this time were: Lord Clancarty, 4880 acres; Allan Pollok, 3480 acres; Thomas Eyre, 1400 acres; Major James McDermott, 1140 acres; Right Hon. Richard Greene, 770 acres; Patrick Blake; 600 acres; Col. Edward Taylor, 439 acres; John Maher, 440 acres; The Marquis of Clanrickarde, 270 acres; Henry Thompson, 260 acres; Edward Browne, 250 acres; Thomas Loftus Jones, 250 acres. Many of these landowners did not reside in the parish. Some leased large portions of their land to graziers, some of whom came over from England and Scotland and grazed tracts of land of up to 1,000 acres. The agricultural depressions of the late

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1870s and the mid-1880s caused many of these graziers to lose a large portion of their investment, with the result that some of them gave up their tenancies and returned to their native countries. If and when land was offered for sale, the smallholders were unable to afford the purchase price of the land.

The Irish Land League was formed in 1879 by Michael Davitt. He perceived that the power of the tenant farmers could be organized to bring real and lasting improvement in their lives. The League's aim was to abolish 'landlordism' in Ireland and enable tenant farmers to own the land they worked on. Davitt prevailed on Charles Stewart Parnell to join the League. Parnell became its President and Davitt its Secretary. Branches were formed in almost every parish and by the end of 1879, the organization had become a formidable one. The tactics of the Land League included mass demonstrations in support of lowering rents, and providing strong resistance to evictions.

The Land League held many 'Monster Meetings' throughout the west. Its objective was to impress the Government with the justice of its demands and to rouse the people and make them aware of the strength and power they possessed. In *The Western News and Weekly Examiner* of February 5th 1881, it was reported that there was a 'magnificent land demonstration' at Clontuskert. This was the third large demonstration held in the area. A large crowd of men and some women, assembled in the vicinity of the Old School. They wore Land League cards in their hats and some wore green rosettes and medals. A troop of horsemen arrived from Clonfert headed by Robert William Finney. The crowd, while waiting for the speakers to arrive, was entertained by a fife and drum band. Clontuskert Land League meetings at that time were held in the boys' school. Michael Parker, principal of the school, was a prominent member of the

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Land League as well as being a founder member of the Clontuskert Land League Band in 1880. At the 'Monster Meeting' there were a larger number of speakers on the platform. Among those who attended were three priests from Ballinasloe - Fathers Kirwan, Walshe and Moloney. Those present from Clontuskert were; James Barr, Rossglos, William Sharpe, Cornfield, James Barrett (Sen.) and James Barrett (Jun.), Abbeypark, James Curley, (Poor Law Guardian), Bogpark, John Colohan, (Poor Law Guardian) Coolbeg, James Craughwell, Urraghry, Stephen Williams, Urraghry, James Cooke, Gortnahorna and Isaac Walshe, Gortnahorna. They were leasing large amounts of land from the landlord of the townland.

Fr. Mulkern P.P. was President of the local branch and James Barr was Vice-President. Fr. Mulkern was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health and it was chaired by Fr. Kirwan, Ballinasloe. He addressed the crowd and said that they were there to claim justice for the tenant farmers of Ireland, for the labouring classes, and also to claim justice for the landlords. They wanted to make the English people aware of their just demands and he hoped that the English would come on their side when they saw how reasonable and fair their demands were. During his speech he continually stressed the need to act in a peaceful manner. They should not get involved in any violent act or commit any outrage, nor give offence to anyone. They would show their calm determination to attain their objectives.

The first resolution was proposed by James Barr and he was cheered loudly as he came forward. He referred to the three successive bad seasons they had had and also, the competition they had to deal with from foreign competitors due to unlimited free trade. He said that both these factors contributed to the tenant having less money. He believed *Griffith's Valuation* to be fair and in many cases set a high standard of rent. This valuation, overseen by

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Richard Griffith and published between 1847 and 1864, was the first full-scale valuation of property in Ireland. Mr. Barr called on all landlords who had not yet done so, to follow the example of the generous landlords who had accepted *Griffith's Valuation* as a fair rent, pending the settlement of the Land Question. He concluded by declaring that if the farmers of Ireland were treated fairly by the Government and by the landlords, they would be loyal, industrious and honest in their dealings.

The next speaker, Rev. J. Walshe, in a long address said that the presence of so many at the meeting was evidence of their earnestness and determination to rouse their British rulers to a sense of their duty towards 'our downtrodden country'. He stressed the need to act in a constitutional manner, saying that it was only by peaceful agitation and with a united voice their rulers would at length be moved to give way to their demands. He stated that the rents had in many instances been cruelly raised on the lands of the industrious tenant when he had reclaimed his land and increased its fertility. He also referred to the crisis of the previous years, as Mr. Barr had outlined, and stated that this had contributed to making the tenant less solvent. He perceived that a rent which during more prosperous times was fair and equitable was simply a 'rack rent' now. He said that the principles of the Land League had united the tenant farmers of Ireland and that the English Government would have to see the expediency and necessity of buying out the landlords. In his conclusion he stated that it would be by their peaceful agitation that they would ultimately impress the English Government with the justice of their cause.

Robert Finney also made a speech, declaring that they would continue with their efforts until the objectives of the Land League were reached. He was glad to see that they could all assemble on one common platform under which sectarian

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differences lay buried. This was very true as those on the platform included people of Presbyterian, Catholic and Church of Ireland persuasions. Another resolution put forward was,, that no farmer would take the farm from which a tenant had been evicted due to 'rack-renting'. Columns of *The Western News and Weekly Examiner* were taken up with the varying speeches at this meeting. It is not surprising that James Barr and other large tenant farmers were members of the Land League, since one of its aims - to compel landlords to reduce the rents - was in their favour as well as in the small tenant's favour.

There are no further reports of any meetings of the Clontuskert branch of the Land League at that time. Because of the continuing actions of the Land League throughout the country however, the Gladstone Parliament was pressurized into introducing the Land Act of 1881. As a result of this act there was some improvement in the position of the tenant who could not now be evicted at the landlord's whim, and who could apply to the newly established Land Courts for a fair rent. Nevertheless, the agitation continued and the leaders of the Land League, including Charles Stewart Parnell, were arrested and imprisoned under the Coercion Act 1881. Later in that year the Irish Land League was suppressed and in the following year the Irish National League was formed.

The Irish National League was established by Parnell in October 1882. While the Land League had agitated for land reform, the National League also campaigned for Home Rule. The National League became the main base support for the Irish Parliamentary Party. It grew and had many branches throughout the country. Branches were formed in parishes where Land League branches had existed previously. The officers were often the former Land League officers. The constitution of the National League

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carefully avoided alienating the support of the large tenant farmer. Thus they did not have a clear agrarian policy although some rural branches called for land distribution, in the manner of the Land League of old.

Meetings of the Clontuskert Branch were reported in *The Western News and Weekly Examiner*. Officers of the branch were: Michael Curley, Chairman; Pat Butler, (Treasurer); James Cunniffe, (Secretary). Other named members were Pat Callaghan, Michael Cormican, Edward Colohan, Thomas Curley, John Kelly, Thomas Cunningham, Michael McGuinness, Michael Farrell, Thomas Colohan, Patrick Madden, Pat Kelly, Patrick Furey, and John Shiel. The first reported meeting took place in February 1888. The principal business of the meeting was to select a person to represent the Kellysgrove Division of the Poor Law Union for the year. A Poor Law Union was a unit used for local Government in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It usually comprised a town and its catchment area within a radius of ten miles. The Unions were created to assist the poor in the area, and consequently were responsible for the administration of the workhouses. Poor Law Unions were managed by elected Boards of Guardians. Those whose property was valued at £4 or over could vote to elect a Guardian but it was possible to have six votes if a person's valuation was over £200. Prior to 1880, the Board was made up of landowners and businessmen. By 1885, the composition of the Boards was changing with tenants taking more positions than ever before. At the Clontuskert meeting of 1888, it was agreed to recommend James Curley (Jun.) for adoption by the ratepayers for that year. Although the Branch was in its infancy, it was reported that 'hundreds of parishioners had enrolled'.

The Clontuskert branch was very active in the League. In May 1888, Mr. T.S. Eyre of Kiltormer evicted the herd James

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Gilchreest. This caused much anger among the Kiltormer and Clontuskert National League members. It was agreed at a meeting in Kiltormer that a crop of potatoes be sown for the evicted man. Supplies of manure and seed potatoes were contributed by the people of Kiltormer as well as those in the surrounding parishes of Clontuskert, Killoran, Quansboro and Cappatagle. On the appointed day, two hundred and fifty men and one hundred and sixty horses, assembled at Ballagh to sow potatoes in a field donated by Thomas Concannon. To quote *The Western News and Weekly Examiner*, 'At about 12 o'clock all were in full working order and at 8 o'clock they had sown a splendid field of potatoes.' Having completed the work the men formed into processional order and proceeded to march round the field with spades and forks on their shoulders, presenting 'a most imposing sight', after which some speeches were delivered. It was common for members of the League to give a big show of support to those whom they felt were wrongly evicted. Names of those who had contributed to the sowing of James Gilchreest's potatoes were later published in the paper. It would appear from an article in July 1888, that James Gilchreest was later reinstated as herd for Mr. Eyre following the intervention of Fr. Melvin P.P., Lawrencetown and Mr. J.J. Elder, Ballinasloe. Mr. Eyre is quoted as saying that he hoped the whole affair would be forgotten and forgiven and the matter would be allowed to drop.

In Oct. 1888 the committee of the branch held their meeting and after routine business the chairman Michael Curley drew the attention of the meeting to the National Indemnity Fund. This fund had been opened to assist Parnell in his action against *The Times* of London. In an article in that paper, Parnell had been accused of involvement in crimes pertaining to the Land War. It was also implied that he had some involvement in the Phoenix Park murders. The Chairman hoped the men of Clontuskert would

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show by their 'generous contribution their loyalty and devotedness to the noble leader of the Irish people, C. S. Parnell'. The meeting congratulated John Dillon M.P. on his release from 'Balfour's British Bastille' and sympathized with John Redmond on his imprisonment, and hoped his health and strength would not be impaired by his confinement. Arthur Balfour, Chief Secretary of Ireland introduced the Coercion Act 1888 and as a consequence many politicians, journalists and National League members were imprisoned. John Redmond, a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party, had given a speech in County Wexford in support of an evicted tenant and was charged with landlord intimidation. He was consequently imprisoned.

At the last reported meeting of the Irish National League in Clontuskert in April 1889, the members tendered their most sincere thanks to the electors of Kellysgrove and Lismanny, congratulating them on returning two Nationalist Guardians to the Board of the Ballinasloe Union. James Barr of Rossgloss was the defeated Unionist candidate for the Kellysgrove area. In the course of the meeting, the electors of Lawrencetown and Craughwell were severely censured for returning to the Board 'one of the most cruel and hateful evictors that ever stained our land, a shame to human nature and a mockery to William O'Brien'. This referred to the election of T. S. Eyre to the Board. In 1891 the Irish National League and the Irish Parliamentary Party both split on the issue of Parnell's relationship with Katherine O'Shea, the estranged wife of a former M.P.

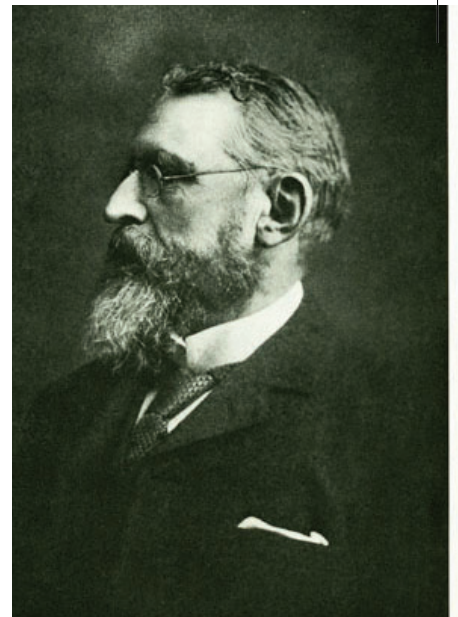
In the years following the 1881 Gladstone Land Act, both landlord and tenant were dissatisfied. Landlords were losing a large amount of the income from their properties due to the Land Courts ruling on fair rents. Although many tenants benefited from rent reduction, the Land Courts were regarded with distrust by the

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tenants. Furthermore, appealing to these Courts was a costly exercise. The landlords had the choice of holding on to their land and suffering a reduction in income, or they could sell their estates to the Land Commission through the Land Purchase Acts. They would be paid in Government land stock, the value of which was slowly depreciating. Neither choice was very attractive. Some landlords now saw a way out of their predicament. Untenanted land could be kept outside the terms of the Land Act. Consequently, they attempted to let their land on the eleven-month system for rents determined by market demand, rather than by the Land Courts. This opened the way for a new type of tenant to emerge. These tenants were made up of large farmers and shopkeepers. They were termed 'graziers' as they rented large farms for grazing. Some farms consisted of approximately fifty acres, but the more typical amount leased was between 400 and 600 acres. Graziers were seen as allies of the landlords, because of the close economic relations which existed between them. They were seen as propping up landlordism and were sometimes referred to as 'land grabbers'. Much of the land agitation in Clontuskert was directed against the graziers. The Land Act was not helpful to the congested tenants. They could not purchase their tenancies because they were not believed to be a secure investment for the British taxpayer and furthermore the Land Commission assumed that they would be unable to pay their purchase annuities. A new organisation would soon address these problems.

The United Irish League was founded by a Corkman, William O'Brien, who was living in Westport in 1898. The League was explicitly designed to reconcile the various parliamentary fragments

William
O'Brien M.P.



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existing since the Parnell split. O'Brien hoped to bring them together in a new grassroots organization around a programme of land agitation, political reform and Home Rule. The U.I.L. took up the issue of land distribution and its first electoral target was the County Council elections under the new Local Government Act 1898. This Act abolished the multiple voting system, based on a person's rateable land, and removed the landlords from the new local authorities. It also broke the power of the landlord-dominated Grand Juries for the first time, passing absolute democratic control of local affairs into the hands of the people through elected local County Councils. The U.I.L. performed extremely well in the elections and threatened the position of the Irish Parliamentary Party. It was about to become one of the most influential political organizations in the country and quickly gained the support of the tenant farmer. By the year 1900 it was the largest organization in the country with 1150 branches and 84,355 members.

William O'Brien now intensified the U.I.L.'s agitation for land purchase by tenant farmers, continually pressing for compulsory purchase. He aimed to complement the work of the Congested Districts Board, which had been set up by the Irish Chief Secretary, Arthur Balfour in 1891 to address the problem of poverty in the west of Ireland. The Board's objective was to increase the acreage of congested farmers, and also to move congested tenants to newly purchased land elsewhere in the region. However the C.D.B. was largely ineffective because it did not have the power to compel landowners to sell their land and furthermore it was not adequately funded.

Among the policies used by the League as weapons against graziers were the following:

- Graziers who prevented the C.D.B from redistributing the

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land were intimidated in order to dissuade them from leasing grazing lands.

- Public auctions for the letting of grass on the eleven-month system were boycotted. Labourers who worked for graziers were also boycotted.
- Smallholders who had formerly stocked grazing lands let by graziers were boycotted if they continued to do so.
- Shopkeepers who traded with graziers were boycotted and the League also agitated against herds who continued to work for graziers

Such was the agitation that police patrols frequently protected the homes of graziers. At the outset, most of the Catholic priests were opposed to this new land movement. However, as the new League established itself, the clergy realized that only by cooperating with its members could they hope to moderate its more radical policies. Because of the popularity of the League, some members of the Irish Parliamentary Party, particularly John Redmond, tried to unite the varying factions within his party. This he succeeded in doing and in 1901 a united Parliamentary Party proceeded to take the U.I.L. under its wing. O'Brien and Redmond then began to agitate in earnest for compulsory land purchase. As well as applying pressure to the 'graziers' and the 'grabbers,' the U.I.L. now turned its attention to the landlords who refused to sell their land to tenants who wished to purchase it. Boycotting was to be applied to the grabber, the grazier, and to the landlords as well.

The nationalist press increased the power of boycotting by publishing the names of boycotted persons. Reports of meetings, true or false, were published, inciting members to boycott and intimidate. The press also threatened to compel people to join the League by announcing that the names of those who did not do so,

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would be published. The agitation was orchestrated by U.I.L. 'courts' which claimed authority over all matters pertaining to land in their parishes. Persons were tried who were accused of breaking the 'law of the League' and penalties were imposed on those who were convicted. Some League courts ruled that compensation should be paid to an evicted tenant. The defendant was invited to attend to make his case. League branches appear to have followed two basic laws: that it was illegal to lease grazing land on the eleven-month system and that it was illegal to take an evicted person's land. The decisions of the League's courts were published in the local nationalist press. This sometimes led to a boycott of the defendant, the first step taken by the 'courts' against persons who defied the League.

The first reported meeting of the Clontuskert branch of the United Irish League is to be found in *The Connaught Champion* of December 1904, even though the branch existed before this date. The Vice-President was Michael Curley and Thomas Stephenson was Secretary. Members named as present were J.P. Molloy and John Madden, (District Council representatives), John Shiel, and Peter McKeigue. All but three committee members attended and the latter were strongly criticized for their absence. Delegates from the neighbouring parishes of Lawrencetown, Kiltormer, and Aughrim also attended. The committee members expressed their strong opposition to both the grazier and the grabber whom they termed as the two most noted enemies of the country. A case of what they saw as 'grabbing' had recently occurred in the parish. A man had been ousted from his leased land and another had put his stock onto the land. Both were members of the League. The man they termed 'the grabber' was denounced and it was decided to return his League subscription. Fr. Pelly P.P., who was their President called into the meeting and advised them never to do

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anything unjust, and to decide their business in a fair and respectable fashion.

The Secretary, Thomas Stephenson stated that they expected some benefit from the latest Land Act, the Wyndham Act of 1903. A sum of £100 million had been set aside for the purchase of land. Loans were provided to tenants at reduced interest, while landlords who sold their lands were given a 12% bonus on the total purchase price. As a result, some 200,000 tenants had decided to buy their farms because the repayments would be substantially less than their old rent. However, a weakness of the Act was that it was not compulsory for landlords to sell their lands. At the Clontuskert meeting it was stated that some of the landlords were attempting to gain inflated prices for their land. No landlord in the area had offered to sell land at a fair price, or to reduce rents by even a small amount. The meeting strongly urged the 'eleven-month men' - another term for graziers - to leave, and allow the tenants to increase their meagre holdings. Every man was urged to join the League and help secure the land for the people. Labourers were also referred to at this meeting and their plight was noted. Members were asked to stand up for them, as they had stood by the farmer all along the way. They were advised to apply for cottages, since the Ballinasloe District Council had invited all those requiring cottages to apply. It was hoped that they would apply for these cottages through the League. The first cottages in the parish were built around 1910. Around fifteen cottages were built by the District Council in the parish at this time. These were for Malachy Byrnes in Gortencahill, John Barry in Ballagh, Michael Scott in Gortnahorna, Patrick Hurney in Tristaun, John Wills in Tirrooaun, Michael Finn in Loughturk, Bryan Quinn and John Kelly in Lakefield, Michael Forde in Carrowmore and Patrick Mahon in Chapel Park. Later in 1911 a cottage was built for Anthony Carey

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in Glenaun, and in 1912 three cottages were built in Kill for John Bermingham, Pat Colohan and James Kelly and one in Abbeypark for Patrick Burke.

Mr. John
Redmond M.P.

There are no further reports in the press of any meetings of the Clontuskert Branch for the next few years but named delegates who attended East Galway Executive meetings in 1905 were

Thomas Stephenson, Peter McKeigue, Michael Curley and John Shiel. A sum of £8 13s.6d. was contributed on behalf of the Branch to aid members who had been imprisoned. This contribution was the average amount collected from the branches at that time.

John Redmond was leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party from 1900 until his death in 1918. He was passionately opposed to physical force nationalism and had campaigned for Home Rule for most of his life. The Clontuskert branch of the U.I.L. showed their loyalty to him to the end. In the edition of the *Loughrea Nationalist* of January 19th 1905, it was reported that John Redmond, while on his way to Portumna, was met by members of the United Irish League at the Cross in Clontuskert. A triumphal arch was erected with the inscription:

*A hearty Welcome to the Leader of
the Irish Race the World over.
To John E. Redmond and his Lady,
From the Clontuskert Branch of the
United Irish League.*

An address was prepared by the President Fr. Pelly, and was presented by the secretary, Thomas Stephenson. The welcome was

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an enthusiastic one and Mr. Redmond was greeted with loud applause. Mr. Redmond, addressing the crowd, expressed his thanks for the welcome given to both himself and his wife. He assured them that they were on the eve of a glorious victory and that the Irish Party would never rest until they had the Irish people placed on the rich lands which were now in the possession of the grazier. He begged the assembly to continue to press for a fair distribution of the grasslands of the country and he advised his listeners to unite to that end. Afterwards, thirty members of the League followed Mr. Redmond to Portumna. The Clontuskert group included Michael Curley, Thomas Stephenson, Patrick Hurney, Michael Callaghan, Michael Broderick, Pat Hobbs, John Mc Keigue, John Jennings and Pat Callaghan.

The land struggle still continued throughout the west with the U.I.L. agitating to achieve better terms of purchase for tenants and to force the landlords to cease leasing their grasslands on the 'eleven-month' system. The Birrel Land Act followed in 1909, making the selling of land compulsory for landlords. A further 61,000 tenants bought lands but certain factors still militated against an equitable system of land distribution. Those who had previously rented large farms now bought these farms. Small farmers retained their few acres, while labourers with no land continued to remain landless. As late as 1913, the amount of tenanted land purchased was only 54% and by 1918, over one third of land had still to be purchased.

In early 1910, the parishioners met with the intention of re-organizing the League. The *Connaught Tribune* reported that there was a large attendance at this meeting, which took place after Mass. Most of those present are reported to have given their names and paid their subscriptions. At a later meeting, a new committee was elected. John Colohan was appointed Secretary, Patrick Callaghan

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(Carrowkeel) became President, William Colohan (Cloonascragh), a member of the District Council, was elected Vice-President, Michael Kirwan (Ballymanagh) was Treasurer, and Patrick Hurney (Tristaun), became Assisant Secretary. Committee members were, Michael Curley, John Tobin, Michael Coleman, James Curley, Patrick Colohan and John Murray. The importance of making the Party Fund a success in the parish was stressed, especially 'at this time of crisis, when the party was confronted by factionism.' The western portion of the parish was severely criticized for its apathy and indifference, as it was pointed out that most of the tenants in this area had benefited from the recent Land Acts. The reference to 'factionism' was most likely alluding to the rift which had occurred between William O'Brien and the members of the Irish Parliamentary Party. O'Brien did not agree with the Irish Parliamentary Party's aim of putting Home Rule before Land Purchase and Distribution. He had resigned in 1904 when he found himself alienated from the party, even though the United Irish League and himself were largely responsible for the passing of the 1903 Land Act.

According to the reports in *The Western News*, United Irish League meetings in Clontuskert took place in a field near the church after second Mass on Sundays. Some women also attended these meetings. The committee always urged that the meetings be conducted in a fair and just manner. The Chairman Pat Callaghan urged them not to bring disgrace on the parish by using violent language. They were urged not to offend those who might not be in sympathy with them. Their aim, as always, was to achieve ownership of the grasslands in the parish, thereby getting rid of the landlords and the graziers. Loyalty to John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party and to the principles of the United Irish League, was always pledged at these meetings.

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In the latter half of 1910, their meeting was attended by the U.I.L. organizer for the area, Mr. Coogan. Even though he praised the men of Clontuskert for their support down through the years, he was critical of them for allowing 3,000 acres of the best land in the parish to remain in the hands of the graziers and the grabbers, while the young people of the parish were obliged to emigrate. He referred to the 'cattle drives', or the driving of stock off the grazier's lands, which were happening in other parishes. According to him the success of these drives justified their taking place, even though 'cattle driving' should be a necessity no longer. He hoped that the Birrel Act of the previous year would now empower the Congested Districts Board to give the land to the people and make the landlords accept a fair price for that land. He urged the people to form Estate Committees and approach the landlords and the graziers, offering the former the full rent that the graziers were giving, until a sale would take place. They should then send the result of the interviews to the Commissioners, giving details of the number of tenants, their acreage and valuation and the numbers of acres of grassland involved. In this way it was hoped that within two years they would have all the grasslands in the parish redistributed. Referring to evicted tenants, he was certain that they would be restored to their old farms, or if that were impossible, that they be given equally good farms on the acquired lands. In conclusion, he pledged his loyalty to John Redmond and the Irish Party, confident that Home Rule for Ireland was imminent, and that when they would take the management of their affairs into their own hands, national prosperity would be secured. The main objective of the organization should therefore be directed to securing the settlement of the Home Rule question.

For the year 1911, all the officers were re-elected, but William Colohan was replaced as Vice-Chairman by John Tobin,

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the former saying it was inconvenient for him to attend all meetings since he lived on the outskirts of the parish. Committee members other than officers elected were, John Murray, Thomas Murray, John Tobin, Patrick Colohan, Michael Coleman, Pat Kelly, Martin Forde and Thomas Kelly. The Parliamentary Fund was always open for subscriptions. The chairman pleaded for support for the Irish Parliamentary Party which was bringing about such great changes. "The Party needs your support now more than ever to carry on the fight to a glorious finish . . . 1912 will be of great importance as far as Nationalists are concerned and I am certain that it will be the year of Home Rule." At the end of that year a list of the subscribers to the Parliamentary Fund was read at their meeting and this list was forwarded to their M.P. Mr. Roche as well as to the local press.

However, 1912 arrived and ended and still Home Rule had not been granted. "The deplorable state of the parish with its many uneconomic holdings," was referred to by the Chairman Pat Callaghan at a meeting that year. "Nothing practical has been done to relieve the congested tenants and still thousands of acres of fertile land remain in the hands of the graziers and the landlords". He urged the young men of the parish in need of land to send in their names to the Congested Districts Board and the Estate Commissioners.

The Secretary John Colohan was scathing in his references to those parishioners who had not contributed to the Party funds and wondered if some were afraid they might "incur the wrath of the landlord or big grazier. Such people bring discredit on a parish - crouching creatures who have not the courage of their convictions, but who run bare-headed to the landlord to tell him what his neighbour has been talking about." He continued in a rousing speech, to compliment the men of the parish for remaining

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loyal to the cause of the League and urged the younger men to follow in the footsteps of their elders. "Wake yourselves as there is much work to be done. Shall we stand aside while the land of our inheritance is given over to the greedy grazier? We should make the graziers aware of our determination not to end the fight until we have achieved our demands." Nevertheless, he stressed the importance of acting peacefully and in a constitutional manner at all times.

At the same time, in this examination of the land struggle, it is instructive to look at the situation from the perspective of the grazier and landlord. Graziers regarded themselves as enterprising people who were once described as the 'backbone of the West'. They purchased the calves from the small farmers at local fairs, fattened them and sold them on to the cattle exporters two years later. The profits of the grazier from the lucrative cattle trade could be increased by leasing large amounts of grazing land. Were it not for the grazier, the small farmer would be at the cattle exporters' mercy, who would be uninterested in small lots of young cattle. Besides, it was more attractive for the landlord to collect rent from one large tenant than from a number of smaller tenants. Moreover he could charge a higher rent for 'eleven-month land' than for land let on longer leases.

At the beginning of 1913, at a meeting of the Ballinasloe branch of the United Irish League, a resolution was passed requesting the Estate Commissioners to approach the owners of the Pollok Estate with a view to purchasing the lands. One member is reported as declaring: "This Scotch Adventurer was worse than Clanricarde and in spite of people paying their rent, they were evicted, and their houses run through with the plough before evening, and in one case the corpse was even put out of the house".

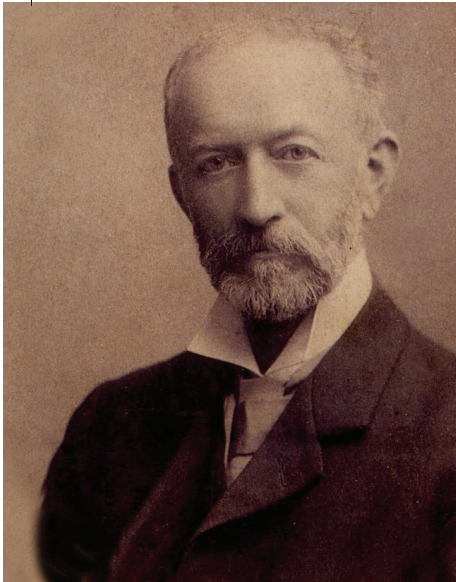
By 1913 the Home Rule Bill had been passed in the House

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of Commons and at the United Irish League meeting in Clontuskert, resolutions were passed congratulating the Irish Party and their leader on their success. The Bill was intended to provide self government for Ireland within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Because many of the Conservatives as well as the Ulster M.P.s were totally against any form of Home Rule, the Bill was still being discussed in the House of Lords in 1914. Due to the outbreak of World War 1, the implementation of the Bill was postponed. Many people in Ireland agreed that the threat from Germany was a far greater issue than Home Rule. But there were those angered by what they saw as John Redmond's acquiescence to the British Parliament in Westminster. Some of these people like James Connolly and Pádraig Pearse went on to lead the Rising of 1916. The Home Rule Act never came into effect and was eventually repealed in 1920.

James Roche,
M.P. for
East Galway

Mr. Roche was one of the M.P.s who represented the East Galway Constituency in the House of Parliament. A disastrous fire had destroyed the mills which he owned in Woodford, and at a meeting in 1913, the Clontuskert U.I.L. Secretary John Colohan, made an appeal to members to be generous to a Fund which had been set up to assist Mr. Roche. The M.P. was lauded for his continued efforts to have the large estates in Clontuskert purchased and divided among the tenants. John Colohan had a number of letters which he had received from Mr. Roche relative to the purchase of certain estates in the parish as well as copies of numerous replies to questions which he had asked in the House of Commons regarding these estates. The Clancarty and Greene estates had been divided in the previous twelve months. A collection was proposed for



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the following weeks and everyone was encouraged to be generous to the Fund. John Murray of Crossconnell had passed away at an early age that year and sympathy was extended to his family. He was praised for being an ardent supporter of the League. At their meetings long discussion would take place on the grasslands in the parish and the dilatory action of the Congested Districts Board in acquiring them.

At their meeting towards the end of 1913, a resolution was passed in connection with a vacancy in the representation of Clontuskert Electoral Division of Ballinasloe District Council. It was the unanimous wish of the meeting that Mr. P.J. Parker, N.T. be co-opted. It was said that he had consistently supported the Nationalist movement, and they were fully convinced that the interests of the Division would be well and faithfully attended to by him. A resolution was passed expressing satisfaction that polling booths at the next elections should be manned by local persons. This had been the wish of the County Council and the meeting felt that it was a grave injustice that men from a distance should be 'imported' to a district as presiding officers and polling clerks, while competent and deserving local men were available.

In 1914, members requested that communication should be opened with the surrounding League Branches with a view to forming an Estates Committee for the purpose of expediting land purchase in the district. It was now eleven years since the Wyndham Act and during that period the land was passing slowly but steadily from landlord to tenant. The U.I.L. members were disappointed with the sometimes long delays in dividing the acquired lands. The Pollok and Clanricarde estates were still not available to the congested farmers and the graziers who grazed large tracts of land came in for harsh criticism. Indeed, at this time the grazier was treated with more contempt than the landlords.

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The former was told to leave so that 'the land must come, and come quickly to those for whom it is decreed, not alone by God, but by the English Act of Parliament'. It was bitterly felt by the members that those whom they deemed to have broken the law, through their involvement in 'cattle drives' were the first to be cared for by the Estates Commissioners. Members felt that they, as law abiders, were left abandoned and expressed their determination nonetheless to continue to seek their 'long-deferred rights'.

Mr. John
Cosgrove, M.P.
for East Galway

During 1915, the Pollok and Clanricarde lands were continually referred to in the local press. Three columns in the *East Galway Democrat* were devoted to one meeting which took place that year at which Mr. James Cosgrove, M.P. was in attendance. Reference was made once again to the fact that about 2,600 acres of grassland in the parish had still not been made available to the congested tenants. The Seymour lands in Somerset and the Maher lands in Liskelly were discussed. Later that year the Maher lands were taken over by the Congested Districts Board. Again disappointment was expressed with those who, as soon as they got land appeared to abandon the League. At this time the League members were beginning to show their frustration with the Government for not forcibly removing the landlords and graziers. While they expressed their unswerving allegiance to John Redmond and the Irish Party and had heretofore declared that they always acted in a constitutional manner, they were now determined to take the law into their own hands and to possess the grasslands by force if necessary.

Mr. Cosgrove, in his address, suggested that almost 3,000

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acres of grazing land in the parish were held by people who had little interest in their country or in the welfare of congested tenants. He said that the graziers should be approached and asked to surrender these lands to the Congested Districts Board for distribution, and if they did not do so, then he would have no hesitation in stating that they should be put out of them. He also said that the constitutional policy was the better one but if this was ignored by the grazier, the people should place their own stock on the lands and keep them there. Before the meeting concluded, the question was asked as to how many people were prepared to get involved in a 'cattle drive' if the need should arise. According to the report, every young man in the crowd proclaimed himself willing to participate.

A number of Irish Volunteers attended this meeting and were given a special welcome. The Irish Volunteers were formed in 1913 by Eoin Mac Neill. The aim of this organisation was to ensure the passing of the Home Rule Bill into law. They were formed in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers in 1912 who were vigorously opposed to Home Rule. The Volunteer movement spread quickly throughout the country. John Redmond encouraged members to enlist in Irish regiments of the British Army, anticipating that when the war was over, the Home Rule Bill would automatically come to pass. The vast majority of the Volunteers supported the war effort. Those who did not, went on to take part in the Rising of 1916. The first meeting of the Clontuskert Company of the Irish Volunteers was held in the school in 1913. Michael Parker's son, Mr. P. J. Parker, who was principal of the school at this time, trained the volunteers in foot-drills, arms drills and route marching. They were issued with bandoliers and haversacks and other equipment which had been purchased from the British War Office as 'obsolete war stores.' The

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older generation in the parish remember hearing that most boys from sixth class onwards were only too delighted to get involved in the 'fight for freedom' – if they were allowed. Their enthusiasm was whetted by the history lessons they sat through in the national schools of that era and young as they were they would profess themselves ready for any action that was taking place in the area.

The Clontuskert Food Production Committee was formed in early 1917 under the presidency of Fr. Fallon P.P., to assist the Government in its efforts to increase the area under tillage in the parish. People were required to come to the assistance of the country by tilling 10% of their arable holding. The Government was obliged to pass the Corn Production Act of 1917 under which the state undertook to pay the farmer a guaranteed price for his product. At a meeting held in March 1917, the reports of the members of the committee showed that the farmers of Clontuskert were willingly carrying out the regulations regarding increased tillage. It came as a surprise to the Committee that so many of the smallholders were determined to do their utmost seeing that their involvement in extra tillage meant that most of them would be forced to dispose of a proportion of their stock. The land still occupied by five or six graziers should, according to the members, be made available to those who were trying to carry out their obligations. Men from Ballinasloe were condemned for coming out and assisting those graziers. The cases of two such men, who had done some ploughing for a grazier, were considered by the committee. One came forward and said he would cease if the committee considered his action detrimental to the interests of the parish. The other man was not present but sent an explanation which would be considered. The meeting condemned the Congested Districts Board for setting the Ballagh farm - formerly part of the Maher lands - for a fourth term of grazing, thereby

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precluding any portion of it being broken for tillage that year.

Any rumour of an estate being divided caused great excitement. This happened in 1917 with regard to what had been the Maher estate. It became known that an official of the Congested Districts Board was due to arrive in Ballagh, to mark out the farm for division. However the indignation of the people was aroused when it was rumoured that the Board was giving the land to two outsiders. It was reported by the U.I.L. Secretary John Colohan that a crowd of about two hundred men had lined up at Crossconnell and marched four deep, headed by a fife and drum band, to the farm in question. A meeting was held and resolutions were passed pledging support for the congested tenants in the locality. The crowd remained for three hours at the farm and when the official failed to appear, they again formed into fours and marched back to Crossconnell where they dispersed quietly. They had scarcely reached their homes when word came that the Inspector had at last arrived. In less than a quarter of an hour and in a violent

Fifes used in
Clontuskert
United Irish
League Band



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snowstorm, about seventy people assembled at the farm. They made their views known to the Inspector and he asked the Secretary to place their grievance before the Board. He said he would do all in his power to safeguard the interests of the poor. A very relieved crowd returned to their homes once again.

In the April of 1917, the Parish Food Committee went to the graziers in the parish and asked them to relinquish the lands which they held, in favour of the surrounding congests in order to enable them to increase their tillage production. The committee guaranteed to till the requisite 10% of all lands handed over to them, in addition to paying the outgoing grazier's rent. Their request was refused so that by the end of April, feelings in some quarters were running very high.

While sympathizing with the people in what was termed their 'legitimate claims', Fr. Fallon exhorted them neither to break the law in any way nor to carry out any act of injustice. He arranged a meeting of the people of the parish to organise a peaceful march along the public road in the hope that a demonstration of strength and determination might be effective in influencing graziers to give up their lands. About an hour prior to the meeting, a large number of people assembled at Ballagh Cross, but when they attempted to proceed to the place of meeting, a force of about fifty policemen barred the way and refused to let them pass. This caused much resentment and the younger men 'took to the fields and gave the forces of the Crown some hot cross-country work for a bit'. At Somerset the police observing some young fellows crossing a field drew their batons and went in pursuit. The report states that the actions of the police were very provocative but Fr. Fallon arrived and approached the officer in charge demanding the right for himself and his people to proceed quietly on their way. He explained that they were endeavouring by

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an orderly and lawful protest, to secure the lands for the people without which they could not produce food. After some discussion, permission to proceed was grudgingly given. Fr. Fallon then drove slowly along the road, followed by a crowd, according to the paper, of over a thousand people. When they reached Ballymanagh, Fr. Fallon addressed them briefly, thanking them for their co-operation and counselling them to disperse and return quietly to their homes.

The cattle drive was one of the forms of intimidation used by the U.I.L. throughout the west. It was used to demonstrate the level of feeling against the grazier and to shame him into giving up the land which he occupied. The tactic caused much disruption since a great deal of time was spent re-gathering the cattle. It was a popular event involving large crowds, triumphant public meetings, and a convoy of cars to bring the 'drivers' back home. It was a public spectacle intended to deter members of the community from either letting grazing farms or defying the law of the League.

In May 1917, some men were charged with driving stock off lands in Somerset. The men were released however when they gave an undertaking not to become involved in cattle driving again. Animals on the Pollok estates were also removed and sometime later, cattle were driven from a farm in Gortnahorna. This farm, which formed part of the Clanricarde estate, was in the hands of a farmer from Kilconnell for many years but had recently been acquired by the Congested Districts Board. As increased tillage had accentuated the congestion in the area, tenants felt very aggrieved that this land was not made available to them. The Board sometimes held lands for a few years before it was divided among the tenants. This was due to their difficulty in getting tenants to agree to the divisions and to the fact that tenants sometimes had to swap with others so as to make the holding viable. Such delays were resented. In June 1917, twelve men were charged with

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unlawful assembly in connection with cattle driving and they were sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment.

Towards the middle of 1917, new U.I.L. officers were elected following the resignation of a number of officers. Patrick Kelly was elected as Chairman, P.J. Kelly as Vice Chairman, Michael Kirwan and John Colohan were re-elected as Treasurer and Secretary respectively. A large number of new members were enrolled and a working committee of two from each district of the parish was elected. The same indignation was once again expressed at the continued refusal of the graziers in the parish to give up their lands. In this report the amount of acres being farmed by graziers amounted to a thousand. The unfairness of the Food Production Regulations was also causing dissatisfaction when members perceived that the graziers were not carrying out their tillage obligations. The Ballymanagh tenants were congratulated on acquiring the farm for which they had been so long agitating. The assistance of Fr. Fallon was also acknowledged. A farmer from Eyrecourt was the grazier concerned, whose lands were now about to be divided among the tenants.

Later that year at a meeting at which Fr. Fallon presided, a scheme of distribution was drawn up regarding the Clanrickarde lands. The scheme involved evicted tenants, congested tenants, congested non-tenants and landless farmers. The continued delay of the Congested Districts Board in dealing with the property was causing much dissatisfaction in the parish. The meeting hoped that in the interests of the peace of the district, the property would be dealt with in time to enable the congested tenants to carry out the increased tillage needed for the following year.

At the beginning of 1918, unrest still continued. In March of that year a large meeting took place in Clontuskert for the purpose of drawing attention to what was termed 'the abnormal amount of

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grass lands in the parish'. The meeting was attended by the M.P., Mr. Cosgrove as well as several County Councillors from the area. The secretary John Colohan announced the resolutions which included calling on the Congested Districts Board to place the grasslands in their possession at the disposal of the farmers. This would enable them to do their part in averting the food shortage which was a consequence of allowing large tracts of land to be unproductive in the parish. They also called on all holders of grazing lands in the parish to surrender them in the coming April and solemnly warned any person who might contemplate taking these lands against the wishes of the people, that no such action would be tolerated. They also called on the Department to enforce the tillage order rigidly, so that no one would be allowed to evade the law.

Mr. Cosgrave congratulated the people on their stance against 'grazierism' and said that it was the duty of all Nationalists, whether they were United Irish Leaguers, Sinn Feiners or Hibernians, to join hands in the continuing struggle of acquiring the land for the people. He spoke of the changes that had taken place since he had addressed them a few years previously. The Clanricarde property had been taken over by the Congested Districts Board and he was glad to be able to tell them that the Cooke lands, part of the Clanricarde estate, were now about to be handed over to the Board. He suggested that the Board be commissioned to get temporary possession of it, pending its distribution to the tenants. The Board was now also negotiating the acquisition of the lands of Miss Hession of Templepark. He suggested that the Board be petitioned to give temporary possession of these lands to a committee for the use of the congested tenants until distribution of the farms could take place. He then read out a list of all the grazing ranches in the parish which

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in this report amounted to 3,700 acres. The acres of grassland occupied by graziers varied in reports from between 1,000 to almost 4,000 acres.

In a later edition of the *East Galway Democrat* of 1918 a letter was published which was written to Mr. Charles Seymour, landlord of the Somerset grazing farm, on behalf of the people of the parish and signed by six solvent farmers, unnamed on the paper. The letter requested a meeting with Mr. Seymour to lay before him a proposal for taking over such grasslands as he intended to let for the forthcoming year. The signatories undertook to pay him for the lands or to pay rent in advance. Whether they succeeded or not is not known but the Seymour property was not purchased by the Land Commission until the 1930s.

There are no further reports of land agitation in the parish and it is presumed that when the graziers' lands were acquired by the Congested Districts Board, peace reigned. Some of the land in the parish was not divided among the tenants until after 1920 and indeed some at a much later time. The local papers of the era, in particular the *East Galway Democrat* were mostly in favour of the United Irish League and pages were taken over each week with accounts of the meetings of the various branches. Speeches at the varying demonstrations took up columns and often there were articles urging the tenants to continue on with the struggle for their rights. The *Connaught Tribune* also reported on the meetings of the various branches in the county. After 1918, the United Irish League ceased to be active throughout the country except in the North of Ireland. After the Anglo Irish Treaty of 1921, land conflicts became the problem of the Provisional Government. At this time two thirds of the land in Ireland had become the property of Irish tenants. A compulsory law transferred the remaining portion soon after the establishment of the Irish Free State.

Education in Clontuskert

CHAPTER

13

The Board of Commissioners for National Education was appointed in 1831. Their powers were based on a set of instructions drawn up by the Chief Secretary Stanley and were referred to as “The Stanley Letters”. Under the Board of Commissioners, if a local community provided a site, assistance would be granted usually at two thirds of the cost, towards building a non-denominational school. English was to be the sole medium of education. Teachers were not allowed to teach religion but the

Old School
as it looked
in 2008

