THE LAND LEAGUE AND THE RISE OF IRISH NATIONALISM

by

Janet Kahrer

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Agnes M. Smith — 3/11/76

Adviser — Date

Lowell J. Satre — 3/11/76

Adviser — Date

Dean Land — 3-18-76

Dean of the Graduate School — Date

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ABSTRACT

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Janet Kahrer
Master of Arts
Youngstown State University, 1976

This thesis examines the connection between Irish nationalism in the late nineteenth century and the earlier struggle for land ownership waged by the Irish National Land League. It is the main contention of this work that the ownership of the soil was the true basis for Irish nationalism, for it was the only issue that could arouse the interest of the Irish peasants and enlist their active support. The movement conducted by the Land League proved to be a movement of the people, a real nationalist movement, for it included Irishmen of all political and religious beliefs both within and outside of Ireland.

The paper begins with a general discussion of the iniquitous land system of Ireland, describing its main features and its effects on the Irish people. A summary of the early nationalist movements conducted in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries deals with the main revolutionary societies such as the United Irishmen, the Young Irelanders and the Fenians as well as the constitutional organizations like the Tenant Right League and the Home Rule Party. It examines

their aims and activities as well as the reasons for their failure to obtain national independence.

The emphasis of the study then shifts to a discussion of the men most responsible for the land movement--James Fintan Lalor and Michael Davitt. Lalor, a member of the Young Irelander organization, was the true revolutionary thinker of his day, for he maintained that the land issue rather than the political issue, was the real basis of Irish nationalism. Writing during the days of the Great Famine, Lalor was not able to put his theory into practice since the Irish people, suffering from hunger and disease, could not be stirred into action. This responsibility was left to his spiritual heir, Michael Davitt, who, thirty years after Lalor's death founded the Land League based on the principles which had been expounded by Lalor. The theories and works of these men are discussed at length in the thesis. Excerpts from Lalor's contributions to the revolutionary organs such as The Nation and The United Irishmen and Davitt's The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, comprise the basic source material of the paper. Although the study views Lalor and Davitt as the most important figures in the development and activities of the League, the part of Charles Stewart Parnell as a leader of the agrarian movement is also examined throughout the work.

An extensive portion of the study is concerned with the Land League including its formation by Michael Davitt, its main principles and aims and its importance as a political issue. Emphasis is placed upon the elements that made it a true

nationalist movement such as the unifying effect it had on the Irish people and the goals and aspirations of the men who headed the League.

The concluding section of the paper deals with the demise of the League and the effect that it had on the future of Ireland. Although the League's existence was short it had a profound impact on later events. The League was responsible for the passage of certain land acts which are discussed briefly in the thesis and which eventually gave the soil of Ireland to the people of Ireland. Once this was accomplished, the Irish people were in a position to concentrate on the achievement of their ultimate aim--national independence.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If one were to assume that the cause of Irish nationalism can be found solely in the hatred of England, then the subject need not be examined any further. Indeed, the long and troubled history of Ireland abounds with many outstanding examples of insurgent nationalist movements based on this assumption and aiming at the total separation from England. That these movements on the whole were failures, may be explained by the fact that nationalism in Ireland lacked a broad, popular base, and that the Irish people, although sympathetic to the goals of active nationalists, did not overtly support them. It was the desire to hold the land, and not the more remote desire for independence, that was the all-encompassing concern of the Irish people.

The evils of the Irish land tenure system with its exhorbitant rents and dread of eviction had, throughout the centuries, reduced the status of the Irish peasants to among the most wretched in Europe. "The Bulgarians, Anatolians, Chinese and Indians are better off than most of them are, " wrote General Gordon, a widely travelled British official, in 1881.[1]

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[1] Times (London), 3 December 1880, p. 7.

The Irish tenant farmer had little time to concern himself with the lofty aspirations of the nationalists. Agriculture was not an industry in Ireland; it was a means of paying the rent and retaining his hold on the land.[2] The peasant was forced to spend his time ekeing out a bare existence from his small plot of land. Land became life itself in Ireland and was not only the soul of the nation but also the only issue that could possibly provide the popular base so desperately needed by the nationalists. In his book, The Struggle for Land in Ireland, John Pomfret correctly states that "Irish nationality is the love of the land. . . . on that and on no other issue could the Irish people be aroused."[3]

This nationalism, based on the peasant's desire to own the land, is the topic of the present author's research. Although historians have investigated the struggle for the land of Ireland and have alluded in their writings to the fact that there was a resurgence of nationalism in the late nineteenth century rooted in this struggle, no one has fully examined the connection between nationalism and land ownership. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that there was such a connection and that the conflict for the land not only provided substance for a cohesive national movement that would appeal to all Irishmen but also provided its leaders with "a

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[2]John Pomfret, The Struggle for Land in Ireland (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), p. 102.

[3]Ibid, p. 105.

stepping stone for a larger goal--national independence."[4]

The idea that the fight for independence could be won only after the land was owned by the people instead of a small class of landlords was first expressed by James Fintan Lalor, a Young Irelander, who wrote during the days of the Great Famine. Lalor firmly believed that for Ireland to be free of British rule required a new nationalism "based on the peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land."[5] To Lalor, the only foundation on which the Irish nation could safely rest was a secure and independent peasantry.[6] His radical political theory was not to become a reality, however, until more than thirty years later when Michael Davitt, an eminent figure in Irish history and Lalor's spiritual heir, converted Lalor's policy into practice. Lalor's contributions to The Felon and The Nation, the revolutionary organs of the Young Irelanders, and Davitt's The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, provide the basis for this study. It was they who grasped the true meaning of nineteenth century nationalism and thereby suggested the contention of this thesis that the true basis for Irish nationalism was the struggle for the land of Ireland.

As Norman Palmer states in The Irish Land League Crisis, it was not until 1879 that this new nationalism based upon the

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[4]Norman Dunbar Palmer, The Irish Land League Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 123.

[5]The Writings of James Fintan Lalor, ed., John O'Leary (Dublin: T. G. Donohue, 1895), p. 66.

[6]Francis S. L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1971), p. 97.

common desire to hold the land, had arisen.[7] That year witnessed the development of the Irish National Land League founded by the energetic and compassionate Davitt. The purpose of the League was, in brief, to assure fair rents, to stop evictions and to establish peasant proprietorship by abolishing landlordism, which Davitt and other nationalist leaders described as the "English garrison" in Ireland. It seems natural that Davitt, who was the son of a poor tenant farmer, was instilled with both a peasant's love of the land and a hatred for English rule. From his personal experience and writings it is clear that he understood the people and knew how greatly the motto of the Land League, "the land for the people", would appeal to them. Furthermore, he was an ardent nationalist who believed that land ownership was of primary importance and that once the Irish people owned the land of Ireland, self-government could easily be achieved. Throughout his life Davitt held that: "The struggle for the soil of Ireland involved a combat for every other right of the Irish nation. The leadership of the land carried with it the ownership of government."[8]

While Davitt figured largely in the events of the late seventies and early eighties, another leader of equal importance appeared. He was Charles Stewart Parnell, an Anglo-Irish

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[7]Palmer, p. x.

[8]Michael Davitt, The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland (London and New York: 1904; reprint ed., Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), p. xvi.

Protestant landowner who, because of the major role he played in shaping events of the period, has been the subject of a number of scholary studies. While most of these studies deal primarily with Parnell's achievements as an astute parliamentarian, this thesis will view Parnell as the leader of the agrarian movement during the early years of his rise to power. It was at this time that the land movement gave him the backing of the farmers, nationalists and clergy alike. By uniting the people through land agitation, the Land League provided Parnell with the organized support that was to strengthen his position in Parliament.

Throughout his career Parnell's main goal was Home Rule for Ireland. Yet, between the years of 1879 and 1881 he knew that Home Rule, for the moment, had to take a secondary position to that of the land question. Sensing the importance and the potential of the land movement, he soon gave his name and leadership to it, and in return the people gave him their loyalty and support. In Parliament Parnell effectively gained concessions for the Irish farmers but his stature with the people as a parliamentarian and a national leader had been greatly increased by his participation in the land agitation. Parnell needed the support of the Irish and the Irish needed Parnell. They merged on the land question, one that the English Parliament found it impossible to ignore.

CHAPTER II

THE LAND TENURE SYSTEM OF NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND

Beginning with the first Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169, Ireland was conquered several times by the British aggressors. With each new conquest Irish land was confiscated and distributed among the English victors, thus strengthening the intense hatred felt by the Irish toward England. Other results of these conquests were the loss to Ireland of her native aristocracy through flight and economic ruin and the stripping of personal liberty and political power from every Irishman. They soon found themselves to be a defeated and dispossessed people, robbed of their land and political rights. By the nineteenth century, however, Ireland had neither been subdued nor assimilated, for there still existed a numerous, separate and hostile Irish people prepared to resume their struggle for their stolen inheritance and political freedom.

Throughout the centuries the invasions, conquests and punitive acts of legislation not only destroyed Irish freedom and self-rule but also imposed upon the Irish an economic system which inflicted great misery and deprivation on the vast majority of the Irish people. Always in the shadow of England both in the geographical and political sense and lacking in the necessary natural resources, Ireland gained little from the industrial revolution, and her economic system remained on the

whole agriculturally based.[9]

More important in consequense to both the political and economic development of Ireland was the Act of Union of 1801. The passage of this act by the English Government made the countries one by the absorption of the economy and the Parliament of Ireland into the economy and Parliament of England. This act was the work of William Pitt, who firmly believed that the Union would guarantee social and political reforms for Ireland and would assure that country's economic growth. There would now be free trade between the two countries, Ireland would gain the capital needed for economic development and would have for the first time a voice in the imperial affairs of England.[10]

In reality, however, matters were quite different, for it soon became apparent that the main object of the Union was not to aid or improve Ireland, but to subjugate her completely.[11] The Union was, in effect, a failure since nothing was done to lessen the economic hardships of the Irish people or their dependency on the land. Instead, the Union forced Irishmen to depend more and more on the land by literally destroying Irish industry (with the exception of the small linen industry of

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[9]Pomfret, pp. 1, 2.

[10]J. H. Treble, "The Irish Agitation", in Popular Movements 1830-1850, ed: J. T. Ward (London: MacMillan and Company, 1970), p. 152.

[11]Cecil Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 153, 154.

Ulster) through the disintegration of the Irish tariff system. Between the years of 1821 and 1824 all tariffs on English goods had been removed by legislation, resulting in a virtual collapse of the Irish market due to its being thrown open to English and European competition. Thus, the laissez-faire doctrine of the nineteenth century, far from aiding the economic growth of Irish industry, merely served to extinguish it.[12]

By 1840 the economy of Ireland was such that poverty and destitution were widespread. In 1841, a few years prior to the Great Famine, about two-thirds of all Irishmen were holders of small sections of land, with only a small number living comfortably and enjoying some profit from the land. The great majority of Irish peasants lived under appallingly wretched conditions barely able to eke out a living and thus making the lot of the Irish peasant the worst in all of Europe.[13]

According to the Census Commission of 1841, there existed approximately 825,000 tenant holdings, conveniently but uselessly divided into cottiers and farmers.[14] Those who contracted for the use of a small plot of land, usually five acres or less, for one single season were termed cottiers; while a tenant who planted the same plot of land yearly was called a farmer.[15] Yet, no matter how the Irish tenants were

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[12]Treble, "The Irish Agitation", pp. 153, 154.

[13]Pomfret, p. 5.

[14]Ibid, p. 6.

[15]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, 1845, vol. 19, p. 127.

classified the sad fact remained that not only all cottiers but also most of the farmers barely produced enough to keep their families at subsistance level. In Ireland at this time there were nearly 250,000 farmers occupying holdings varying from five to fifteen acres, while 80,000 occupied holdings between fifteen and thirty acres, and approximately 50,000 occupied holdings over thirty acres in size. "On the whole," wrote the nineteenth century economist, George O'Brien, "the average farmer was but one degree less miserable than the cottier."[16]

During the first half of the nineteenth century the majority of peasants were cottiers. Cottier holding fell into misuse and had practically disappeared by the time of the Great Famine of 1845, when it gave way to yearly tenure or tenancy-at-will.[17] From 1850 on a cottier was defined as one who was an agricultural laborer, forced to implement his earnings by cultivating a small plot of land under a system known as "conacre" or hiring land. Conacre meant the letting of a portion of land in order to grow one crop, while rent was usually paid in labor with the rent being deducted from the cottier's wages. The average wages were so low that the cottier could scarcely make ends meet and his standard of living was the lowest in Ireland. Furthermore, the holders of conacre had no lease but only a license to occupy, therefore being

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[16]George O'Brien, The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine (London: 1921), p. 24, quoted in Pomfret, pp. 6, 7.

[17]Pomfret, p. 7.

subject to eviction without a moment's notice.[18] In many districts the only food for both farmers and holders of conacre was the potato and the only beverage, water. The small mud huts which the peasants called their homes were inadequate and not capable of protecting the occupants from the inclement weather. Furniture and decent clothing were indeed a luxury, while the family pig or the manure heap constituted the Irishman's only property.[19]

The deplorable conditions of the Irish peasantry were further complicated by the increase in population which began approximately a century before the Famine. When the Union was formed in 1801, the population of Ireland was 5,000,000, by 1821 it had risen to 6,800,000 and by 1831 to 7,000,000. Four years before the Famine the population of Ireland stood at 8,175,000. The low standard of living and the dependency on the potato encouraged young people to marry early. Since agricultural and industrial employment barely existed, the Irish laborer was dependent on his small plot of land for his family's existence. Therefore, Irish fathers would subdivide their land and give a portion to their married sons. Subdivision had an extremely poor effect on Ireland, for as the population increased the demand for small holdings became more frantic.[20]

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[18]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, 1845, vol. 19, p. 34.

[19]Ibid.

[20]J. C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923 (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1970), pp. 292, 293.

In an attempt to determine why conditions were so poor, the British Government sent a commission under Lord Devon to Ireland in 1841. The Devon Commission found that the main cause of the poverty and misery of the Irish was the system of land ownership which resulted in poor relationships between landlords and tenants. It was a historical matter rooted in age-old bitterness and hatred. Ireland was a conquered country and the landlord an alien conqueror. There existed no paternalism, no hereditary loyalty of feudal ties such as prevailed in England. Although there were a few exceptions, most landlords considered their holdings merely as a source of revenue and chose to live in a world apart from that of their impoverished tenantry.[21]

Throughout the centuries the English had forced their system of land tenure which included the concept of private property upon the Irish, an idea never fully accepted by the latter. Likewise, the Irish held an attitude toward the land which the English found extremely difficult if not actually impossible to understand. This was the idea that all people, landlords and tenants alike, had a proprietary interest in the land. This belief was emphasized once again in 1881 when the Bessborough Commission[22] found that "there has in general survived to him (the Irish tenant) through all vicissitudes, despite of the seeming or real veto of the law, an apparent

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[21]Woodham-Smith, pp. 20-22.

[22]The Bessborough Commission was formed in 1881 to investigate the operation of the Landlord and Tenant Act of 1870. Palmer, p. 2.

defiance of political economy, a living tradition of possessory right, such as belonged in the more primitive ages of society to the states of the men who tilled the soil."[23] Thus, the Irish peasants believed that the land they tilled belonged to no one man or group of men but to the people as a whole by natural right.[24]

The roots of this belief were to be found in the Celtic system of land ownership which had existed in Ireland during the preconquest days. The land arrangement, like the Celtic societal organization, was tribal rather than feudal, whereby all territories of the tribe or sept, the social unit of Gaelic society, were held by the chief but were looked upon as belonging to every member of the sept, a belief based upon something akin to communal right. This system of land ownership was the prevalent one in Ireland for over a thousand years. While many of the unfavorable aspects of the Celtic system were forgotten, the concepts upon which this ideal of land ownership was based were never wholly, or to any great extent, supplanted by the more modern ideas of private property; and the tradition of communal ownership survived well into the nineteenth century. This tradition aids greatly in resolving the question how and why the Irish nation developed as it did, for it explains the deep attachment of the people to the soil as well as their belief that they possessed a "natural right"

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[23]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, 1881, vol. 18, p. xi.

[24]Palmer, p. 2.

to the small portion of land on which they dwelt.[25]

It was during the nineteenth century that this belief was passionately expressed in the writings of James Fintan Lalor in 1848 and in the speeches and declarations of the Land League in 1879. The Irish peasant could have found the philosophical justification for his beliefs in natural rights in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. More frequently, however, the Irish were supported by the Bible and the writings of the great English philosopher and defender of Irish rights, John Stuart Mill, for confirmation of their treasured claim.[26] Thomas Brennan, one of the Land League's most active organizers, once stated that, "the principles of the Land League were founded on the economics of John Stuart Mill and upon the authority of the Scriptures."[27] One passage of Mill's in particular, was received warmly and enthusiastically by the Irish. In 1864, Mill wrote, "The land of Ireland, the land of every country, belongs to the people of that country."[28] Over ten years later, the Land League would adopt its motto, "The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland", from Mill's writing.

Upon this ancient communal system of land holding the English attempted to superimpose their own system based on the

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[25] Ibid, pp. 2-4.

[26] Ibid, p. 4.

[27] Annual Register, 1881, p. 206.

[28] John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), p. 411.

rights of private property. The conquests, confiscations and plantations resulted in the land and political rights being taken away from the native Irish and given to the alien conquerors, thus creating estrangement between the conqueror and the conquered--between the owners of the soil and the tillers of the soil.[29] Conquests and confiscations became an integral part of Irish history and tradition, but the Irish never abandoned their struggle to revive their communal rights and to destroy the economic and political organizaions forced upon them.

Since the English conquests, Ireland had been a country of small holdings and large proprietorships. In 1871 there existed 20,000 landlords on one end of the social scale and 600,000 tenants representing 3,000,000 people on the other end with no substantial middle class to bridge the gap. Over five-sixths of the farmers were tenants-at-will while the remainder precariously held the land under leases varying in number of years.[30]

Statistics do not reveal, however, the miserable conditions of the Irish peasants. Famine was always a major threat, for when the harvest was poor and the potato failed only charity stood between them and the equally feared options of evictions, emigration and starvation.[31] The Irish tenant was

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[29]James Godkin, The Land War in Ireland (London: 1870; reprint ed., Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. vii.

[30]Palmer, p. 9.

[31]Ibid, pp. 11, 12.

at the total mercy of his landlord, and the root of the poverty and misery in Ireland could easily be traced to that source.

The landlords of Ireland were, with justification, the objects of severe criticism by both the Irish and the English. To the landlord in Ireland went the privilege of holding absolute power over his impoverished tenants. He alone possessed the right to raise rents which were already too high and he alone possessed the authority to evict at will any tenant he chose for whatever reason he chose. Mill, a severe critic of Irish landlordism, scathingly referred to the landlords as, "a mere burthen on the land. . . . who were not nearly so useful to the hive as the drones are, and entitled to less respect."[32] In December, 1852, The Times published an editorial clearly stating opposition to the landowners of Ireland. "It is no earthly use to go on abusing the Irish landlords. Their names stink already to the ends of the earth." The article further states that as a class their "selfishness and cruelty has no parallel, and never had a parallel in the civilized world."[33] Although later in the century The Times was to become a severe critic of the Land League and its treatment of the landlords, there still existed throughout the 1800's an attitude of contempt toward the landowning class on the part of the British journalists and politicians.

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[32]John Stuart Mill, "Ireland and England", quoted in Appendix XLIII A; G. Locker-Lampson, A Considerstion of the State of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century (London: Archibald Constable and Company, Ltd., 1907), p. 582.

[33]Times (London), December, 1852, quoted in Palmer, p. 21.

Perhaps the worst feature of landlordism was absenteeism. Many of the larger land holders were absent from their estates most of the year, while some never resided in Ireland at all. Absenteeism served to aggravate the relationship between landlord and tenant and was a serious drain on the Irish economy, an economy severely lacking in capital.[34]

The economic drain of absenteeism was indeed unfortunate, but the moral effects were even more disheartening. The landlord, on or off his estate, had little or no knowledge of the needs of his tenants. Often he was represented by his agent who placed a greater value on money than on human life, using any method he chose to collect rents. The peasants in return hated and distrusted their landlords and engaged in a type of violent agrarian warfare which made Ireland at times an extremely dangerous place for landowners to remain.[35]

While the Irish tenants saw the landlords as the source of all their economic evils, the Irish nationalists viewed them as the source of all political evils as well. The British Government had throughout the centuries passed legislation protecting the rights of the landowners at the expense of their tenantry. Michael Davitt wrote that they were not just Irish landlords but "were the political garrison of England in Ireland, equipped with every weapon and resource at the disposal of the great empire for their protection."[36]

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[34]Palmer, pp. 29, 30.

[35]Ibid, pp. 31, 32.

[36]Davitt, p. xviii.

Davitt wrote that the people of Ireland were robbed of both the right to own their land and to govern themselves. It was they who were treated as outlaws and intruders in their own country, while the landlords, who owned and ruled all, were protected by the laws and power of the British Government.[37] Nationalists like Davitt believed that landlordism must first be abolished before self-government could be achieved, and it was this aim that the leaders of the Land League fought to attain.

The iniquitious land system had among its other evils exhorbitant rents and instability of tenure. Competition for land in Ireland was keen and many landlords took advantage of the situation by renting land at an extremely high price. Driven by economic necessity and an Irishman's desire to own a small section of the soil, the tenant was forced to pay rent far beyond his means, hoping he could later bargain with his landlord or his landlord's agent for a reduction. Since the tenant was invariably without capital, rents were paid in the form of produce with the peasant keeping only a sufficient supply of potatoes to hold his family at subsistance level.[38] Due to this peculiar difficulty of obtaining land, the custom of "running gale" or "hanging gale" became a common practice in many districts. The running or hanging gale permitted a new tenant to leave his rent in arrears for six to fifteen

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, 1845, vol. 19, pp. 753, 754.

months. The Irish tenant fell easy prey to this temptation and was always behind in payment, thus enabling the landlord to evict at will. To the Irish, eviction was a dreaded fate and the tenant lived in constant terror of being ejected from his small holding. It was quite simple for the landlord to regulate his affairs in such a manner as to be able to evict any one of his tenants at any time.[39]

High rents and dread of eviction were the result of the dangerous manner in which land was held in Ireland. It was discovered by the Devon Commission that the uncertainty of tenure had long been a major grievance of the Irish tenant. Land was let on a year to year basis in some instances, but on the whole the majority of tenants were tenants-at-will, that is the will of their landlord and were therefore subject to evictions without notice. The landlord possessed a great deal of power in that area, for as the rule there were no written leases, thus eliminating legal obstacles from the landlord's path. The uncertainty of tenure had a paralyzing effect on Ireland causing the Irish farmer to hesitate in making any improvements on his land.[40]

Unlike the landlords of England and Scotland, the landlords of Ireland rented the naked land with no buildings, fences or stables on it. It was the task of the tenant himself to furnish these appurtenances and also to make all

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[39]Pomfret, p. 22.

[40]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, 1845, vol. 19, pp. 15, 16.

improvements that were necessary. Under the classification of improvements fell not only the building and mending of houses, barns and stable but also agricultural operations such as draining, trenching and even manuring.[41] An injustice arose from the fact that, in accordance with the law, the Irish landlord became the owner of the buildings and fixtures constructed on the land by the tenant at the termination of the tenancy. Furthermore, the landlord could and often did increase the rent when any improvements were made. Refusal to pay an increased rent meant eviction. Usually the result of this display of absolute power was that the tenants refused to make any improvements at all, even draining or manuring. The Irish farmer had little incentive to improve his lot and was consequently looked upon contempuously as being ignorant and lazy.[42]

John Pomfret in The Struggle for Land in Ireland points out that throughout the nineteenth century the Irish landlords and the English Government, the two factions most responsible for the miserable conditions of the Irish people, did nothing to alleviate their problems. The landlords as a whole were concerned only with safeguarding their pecuniary interests. Their strong political influence was directed toward obtaining legislation that would strengthen their own rights rather than toward improving the economic conditions of Ireland. The landlords of Eireann were concerned only in their rights as the

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[41] Ibid, pp. 16, 17.

[42] Pomfret, pp. 20, 21.

propertied class, while neglecting the usual responsibilities of that class.[43]

The British Government was indeed aware at all times of the problems of Irish poverty. Between 1780 and 1833, at least 114 commissions and sixty select committees were sent to Ireland to investigate economic conditions. These investigations pointed to three possible courses left open to the Government to improve the Irishman's lot: an increase in the quality of agriculture, or in the quantity of produce, or a decrease in the population.[44] The Government could not undertake the task of improving the quality of the soil or the quantity of produce except by correcting the system of land tenure in favor of the tenant. This would have meant Government interference with the rights of private property in direct contradiction with the policy of laissez-faire.[45]

It would be ridiculous and unfair to assume that the British Government consciously contemplated embarking upon a course aiming at the reduction of the Irish populace by letting them remain the victims of their own cruel economic system. Yet, by procuring for the landlords favorable acts of legislation, the Government did aid greatly in perpetuating the miserable and wretched circumstances in Ireland.[46]

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[43] Ibid, p. 26.

[44] Ibid, p. 28.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid, pp. 30, 31.

In 1838 the English Government finally took a step in what it considered the right direction. Many Irishmen who migrated annually to England in search of employment were unsuccessful and consequently became the responsibility of the English workhouses. This situation, coupled with the humanitarian movement in England during the Age of Reform, resulted in the conviction that something had to be done in Ireland. The outcome was the passage of the Irish Poor Law modeled after the English Poor Law[47] complete with the workhouse system and poor rate unions. The Irish landlords, unlike those of England, either refused to pay poor rates or were unable to do so with the result being that the landlords cleared the land of the people and converted it to pasture. By this action, the Irish landowning class proved once again that they were either reluctant or incapable of carrying their share of the burden of Irish poverty.[48] By passing this law the British Government demonstrated that it was, on the whole, ignorant of the workings of the Irish economy; but the full

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[47]The English Poor Law of 1834 was amendment to the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. Under this act, specific provisions were made for the establishment of workhouses. No able-bodied man was to receive relief unless he entered the workhouses where life was to be made as unattractive as possible so as to encourage men to take any employment, no matter how low the wages were. Relief administration was placed in the hands of Poor Relief Commissioners. The actual administration of the act, however, was carried out by elected officials called the Board of Guardians, who were in charge of a group of parishes or "unions". Like the Elizabethan Poor Law, taxes or poor rates were levied on property owners in each parish. Goldwin Smith, A History of England (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 589.

[48]Pomfret, pp. 30, 31.

effect of the failure of the Irish Poor Law was not felt until the Great Famine of 1845.

The peasants of Ireland could do nothing to improve their condition. They did, however, react in a manner all their own by striking back at their landlords through secret agrarian societies which carried on a type of warfare against the landowners. Many of these groups were locally organized, concerned mainly with their own local problems, but within them lay also the seeds of general discontent and social unrest. In them and in the peasants they represented also resided the manpower needed by the Land League to make the English Government aware that something had to be done for Ireland.[49]

Throughout these years while the local secret societies were terrorizing the landlords and while the peasants were suffering miserably on their small plots of land, there continued to emerge groups of men eager to take up the fight for political independence from Great Britain. Although the aims of these nationalists were appreciated by the Irish peasants, demands of daily life prohibited them from giving more than sympathy to the nationalist causes. The nationalists in their turn offered only the remote aspect of political freedom to a people who found it difficult to exist from day to day and whose true concern was first the possession of their land. The result was that the earlier nationalist movements, although successful

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[49] Ibid, pp. 26, 27.

in leaving a rich legacy to later Irish revolutionary organizations, failed in their immediate objective--the attainment of political freedom.

CHAPTER III

EARLY NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS

During most of the nineteenth century the struggle for political freedom in Ireland alternated between the attempts of two forces--the physical or revolutionary force and the moral or constitutional force. The former group firmly believed that the only means to self-government was the quick and violent overthrow of British rule, while the latter held that self-government could be obtained by a slow, evolutionary political process in complete cooperation with the English Government. Many constitutional nationalists did not wish for complete separation from the British crown but only for some form of self-rule. For decades, nationalist groups were more of the revolutionary make-up than the constitutional, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the constitutional element displayed any substantial influence in Irish affairs. Nonetheless, throughout most of the period the two nationalist groups were enemies, distrustful and resentful of one another. It was not until the days of the Land League, under the masterful leadership of Michael Davitt, a former revolutionary, and Charles Stewart Parnell, a rising political figure, that the two groups merged on the question of land ownership and exerted a powerful influence for change on the British Parliament.

Throughout the centuries the Irish nationalists had attempted in numerous ways to resist the central authority of

Great Britain, only to fail for many and diverse reasons. The legacy left them from their Gaelic past was an emotional rather than a political one. This legacy rendered it extremely difficult or impossible to create and coordinate any national expression until well into the late nineteenth century when the issue of national concern became that of land ownership. Since the sixteenth century, land ownership had figured largely in Irish history. A Gaelic chieftan refusing to pay allegiance to the English crown would see his lands confiscated and redistributed among the British lords while he, himself, would be stripped of political authority. Henry VIII, during the Tudor reign in Ireland, demanded that the Irish chiefs give up their land to the crown so that it might be redistributed to them according to his will. In this way the Irish kings would have to acknowledge that their only right to their own land was given to them by the King of England, a practice which greatly contradicted the Gaelic custom that the land belonged by a natural right to members of the tribes as well as the chiefs. There was much opposition to this process of centralization and those who resisted, whether chief or commoner, had their lands taken away only to be resettled where possible by Englishmen and Scots.[50]

Beginning with the Anglo-Norman invasions and lasting well into the nineteenth century, the Irish peasant's life was one of wretchedness and misery, exhorbitant rents, arbitrary

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[50]Robert Kee, The Green Flag, A History of Irish Nationalism (London: Weinfeld and Nicholson, 1972), p. 12.

evictions and lack of political freedom. Even in the period directly following the conquests and confiscations there existed no sense of responsibility for the peasant on the part of the landlord, thus creating feelings of hatred and distrust. Yet, there existed down through the years in the minds of the Irish peasants dim folk memories of the old Gaelic system when the land belonged to all rather than to an alien landlord. The realities of daily life coupled with these folk memories only served to strengthen the dark feelings of the Celtic peasant toward his Norman landlord.[51]

By the nineteenth century, because of the political and economic structure of Irish society, the peasants of Ireland were unable to do anything within the law to alleviate the poverty which plagued them. Yet, for all their suffering, the Irish people did not take their plight submissively, for they found an outlet for their desperation in a crude type of self-rendered justice in the form of the agrarian secret society. These societies, formed by the more courageous and desperate among the persecuted peasants, waged "wars" against the landowning class through violence and intimidation. They were successful simply because the societies enjoyed the total confidence of their communities which felt that the law was an instrument only of the landowning class.[52] The activity carried on by the secret societies, which for over two centuries absorbed much of the national energies of the Irish people, was

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[51] Ibid, p. 21.

[52] Pomfret, pp. 25, 26.

sometimes completely unpolitical or at other times politically crude. When attempts were made from time to time to use the societies for political purposes the organizations tended to remain what in essence they really were: the simplest form of war by the poor against the rich.[53]

The type of violence perpetrated by the agrarian society appeared in Ireland as early as 1711. At this time bands of armed men roamed the countryside, mutilating cattle or carrying out other acts of revenge against the tyranny and oppression of their landlords and of fellow Irishmen who collaborated with the landowners. That there was little political basis for their actions; and that they had no intention of overthrowing the Government was proven during the Scottish uprisings in 1715 and 1745 when some action in favor of a Catholic pretender to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland might have been expected from the Irish. The very opposite occurred, however, for the Irish people, including the secret societies, remained quiet. This lack of a broad, sophisticated political purpose and the concentration on local day to day conditions long remained a constant feature of Irish agrarian violence.[54]

Irish secret societies were largely local, lasting only a short period of time and were in no way an expression of a cohesive national movement. An exception was the Whiteboy movement which began in 1760. Members of this society, armed, and operating in groups numbering from a half dozen to 500,

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[53]Kee, p. 26.

[54]Ibid, p. 24.

donned white shirts and rode about the countryside destroying landlords' property, punishing fellow Irishmen who collected tithes for the Protestant Church, preventing payment of high rents, intimidating fellow tenants from renting land from which another tenant had been evicted and in general instituting their own type of rough justice in an attempt to redress the grievances of the poor. For the next one hundred years or more similar groups calling themselves Rightboys, Thrashers, Rockites or Ribbonmen carried on similar agrarian violence with the same objectives in mind.[55]

There did come into existence, however, in the late eighteenth century a peasant society which possessed the features of all agrarian societies but was different in character in that it expressed crude but positive national and political aims.[56] This organization, calling itself the Defenders, was a strictly Catholic society. During the Irish Rebellion of 1798 the Defenders were prominent in the poorly equipped and poorly organized "army" of Ireland.

The Defenders were organized around 1785 in response to the activities of a specifically anti-Catholic secret society which first made its appearance in the North of Ireland, and was known as the Protestant Boys or the "Peep o' Day Boys". The name "Peep o' Day" was given to them since it was at dawn that the members appeared at the homes of Catholics to terrorize them into leaving Ulster and settling in other parts of

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[55] Ibid, pp. 24, 25.

[56] Ibid, p. 44.

Ireland. The Catholics in the northern areas soon formed themselves into a protective society which possessed the traditional characteristics of all agrarian societies, but also placed a new emphasis on the protection of Catholics against Protestants--thereby acquiring its name.[57]

As the Catholics were driven from their homes in Ulster into Counties Louth and Meath where the majority of the populace was Catholic, the Defenders continued to develop their organization on the assumption that the whole Catholic peasant identity in Ireland required defense on principle alone. This assumption laid the basis for a crude political attitude expressing the everyday grievances and resentments of the Catholic population.[58]

The political aims of the Defenders were vague. They desired the abolition of tithes, expressed their resentment against exhorbitant rents and, most importantly, aimed to secure arms in order to protect their fellow Catholics. In confrontation with Government troops, many were captured only to be hung or transported, thus transforming them into martyrs. Until the Rebellion of 1798 the Defenders continued their fighting with varied intensity regardless of the punishment they faced. Their true significance lies in the fact that for the first time in their history the peasants of Ireland were expressing something of a national resentment of the general grievances of their everyday suffering.[59]

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[57] Beckett, p. 257.

[58] Kee, p. 44.

[59] Ibid.

While the Defenders were roaming the Irish countryside supporting the Catholic peasants against their Protestant assailants, there sprang up among the middle classes of Ireland the first real Irish revolutionary organization. This organization soon became known as the United Irishmen since it was the aim of its leaders to unite all Irishmen in the fight for independence. The United Irishmen were the first republicans of Ireland, desiring complete separation from the English crown. With them began the republican, revolutionary tradition as it is known in Ireland today. In 1798 this organization staged a rebellion that proved disastrous for the future of Ireland. Yet, although failing in their immediate goals, the United Irishmen left an important legacy to future Irish republican societies, for it was through them that Irish nationalism based on republicanism began.

The message of the French Revolution that no society was as stationary as it appeared and that a new social and political order based upon the participation of the people was possible, exerted great influence on the political thinkers throughout Europe and no less so in Ireland where there was great need for political reforms along more democratic lines. In an effort to secure reforms, the wealthy middle class of Ireland, mostly Protestants, provided the intellectual leadership of the new radical, republican movement.[60]

The leaders of the new organization included such radical thinkers as Thomas Emmett, Samuel Nielson, Napper Tandy

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[60] Ibid, p. 43.

and the romantic Lord Edward Fitzgerald. The most illustrious and most important figure of the period was Theobald Wolfe Tone, known in Irish history as the founder of the United Irishmen and the father of Irish Republicanism. Tone, in fact, spent most of his time in France attempting to secure French aid for Ireland and was thus out of the country during most of the fighting in 1798. His contribution to the movement lies in the impact which he made on later Irish nationalists, for as the Father of Irish Republicanism Tone personified the republican tradition. His aspirations, ideas, goals and means to achieve these goals are still alive in the thinking of Irish Republicans today.[61]

Tone, a Protestant, was born in Dublin on June 20, 1763, the descendent of a Cromwellian soldier. He studied law at Trinity College and was called to the bar in 1789. By 1791 his interest in politics became intense and he began writing pamphlets calling for the political unity of the oppressed Catholics and dissenting Protestants to obtain parliamentary reforms.[62] Being concerned about the plight of the Irish Catholics, Tone considered it absurd that Protestants would try to think and act as Irish patriots while regarding the Catholics, the overwhelming majority of the Irish population, as somehow not involved with Irish affairs. In September of 1791 Tone wrote a pamphlet entitled "An Argument on Behalf of

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[61] Ibid, pp. 46, 47.

[62] Proinsias Mac Aonghusa and Liam O Reagain, eds., The Best of Tone (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1972), p. 7.

the Catholics of Ireland" addressing it to the Presbyterians of the North and urging them to forget their former feuds in order to combine the whole strength of the nation, thus creating one people of Ireland.[63] The pamphlet not only met with the approval of the conservative organization, the Catholic Committee, but more importantly it came to the attention of a secret organization of Northern Protestants under the leadership of Samuel Nielson. This group invited Tone to join them for a special meeting to be held in Belfast in October, 1791 and at that time the society known as the United Irishmen was formed.[64]

Tone quickly discovered that it was far easier to wish for a desirable union between Irishmen than to achieve one. At this first meeting of United Irishmen, while arguing for the Catholic cause Tone noticed a strong anti-Catholicism even among the leaders of the United Irishmen which was based on the old fear that Catholics would revive their claims to their ancient lands. It was indeed an ominous beginning for an organization whose main goal was to gain strength through the combined efforts of both Catholics and Protestants.[65]

Originally the United Irishmen had hoped to change Ireland's political system by working through parliamentary channels. But by 1793, as the war between France and England worsened and as Tone became disillusioned with the inadequacy

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[63] Kee, p. 50.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid, p. 52.

of the Catholic Relief Act of 1782, an act giving Catholics the exact same rights to property and leaseholds in land as the Protestants, and with the reluctance on the part of Catholics to press for total emancipation, the United Irishmen concluded that their goal of a free Irish republic could materialize only by violent revolution. Late in 1794, when England, fearing French intervention in Ireland, began suppressing all groups even bordering on radicalism, the United Irishmen organization went underground to become a secret, intricately organized, oath-bound society.[66]

By 1796 the United Irishmen had convinced the Catholic Defenders of the advantages of combining their forces with a united organization holding political aims. The result was that the Defenders merged their own societies with the United Irishmen even taking the secret oath. Attempting to convince both Catholics and Defenders of the political advantages of their main idea, the unity of all Irishmen, the United Irishmen sent representatives throughout the countryside delivering speeches condemning the harshness with which Orangemen dealt with Catholics, thus trying to persuade the latter to join their movement. Although the United Irishmen were wise in persuading the Catholics to join forces with a non-sectarian society, they had perhaps unwittingly transformed their higher political principle of Irish unity into secondary importance and instead encouraged crude sectarian violence.[67]

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[66]Beckett, p. 252.

[67]Kee, p. 131.

The outward expression of the ideals and goals of the United Irishmen was the fateful Irish Rebellion of 1798. The uprising was the bloodiest in Irish history and was the most tragic event to occur between the period of the Jacobite wars and the Great Famine. Over 30,000 Irishmen were killed. Instead of a war for Irish independence it proved to be a conflict that set Irishman against Irishman.[68]

In spite of their failure to get the aid from France that they had so long desired and anticipated, the Directory of the United Irishmen decided to proceed with their plan for revolt. But due to the intricate web of spies and informers implanted in their ranks by the British Government, the leaders of the society were arrested before the rebellion began. The bloody insurrection occurred without the leadership it so desperately needed. The main areas of rebellion were in Wexford in the South and in Northeast Ulster where Government troops, comprised mostly of Irishmen poorly trained and lacking in discipline, faced rebel forces. From the beginning the Wexford rising took on a religious character, exclusively Catholic with an extreme anti-Protestant bias. All Protestants were considered Orangemen, to be attacked, plundered and even slaughtered. Perhaps the bloodiest moments of the rebellion were the out and out murdering of Protestants on Wexford Bridge and Vinegar Hill. The rebellion in the South had revealed the deep division remaining between the Catholics and Protestant Dissenters which the United Irishmen had tried to heal in the

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[68]Thomas Pakenham, The Year of Liberty (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 13.

hope of attaining new, unified political strength.[69]

The insurrection in Ulster also proved to be a failure partly because of the Government's severe military measures and partly because of the disillusionment over the failure of French aid leading to the disaster in the South. Most importantly, however, the Ulster fiasco can be accredited to the reversion to Protestant-Catholic rivalry among rebel troops, reviving the long standing dissension between the Defenders and Northern Presbyterians. The sectarianism both in the North and in the South was indeed disappointing to Wolfe Tone as it was in complete contradiction with the principles upon which the United Irishmen took up arms in the hope of establishing a new Irish nationalism and the country's freedom.[70]

By the summer of 1798 the Rebellion was put down by the Government's troops under the competent leadership of Lord Cornwallis. The United Irishmen leaders, including Tone, were captured and sentenced to death. Ireland once again was deeply divided along sectarian lines. The Rebellion of 1798 had convinced many English and Irish political thinkers that Ireland should be incorporated into the political and economic structure of Great Britain, thus three years later on January 1, 1801, under the Act of Union, Ireland became completely subjugated to British rule.

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[69]Beckett, p. 263.

[70]Kee, p. 131.

The Rebellion had failed, Ireland had not won its independence, and the goals of the United Irishmen had not been realized. Yet, the United Irishmen, and more importantly Wolfe Tone, still hold an extremely prominent position in Irish history. Tone's plans were not frustrated so much by the strength of the British Army or the delay of the French aid, as by the deep division among the very people he tried so desperately to unite.[71]

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[71]Beckett, p. 266.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

After 1798, Irish republicanism as a nationalist expression remained in a dormant state only to be revived in the next century by its spiritual descendents, the Young Irelanders and the Fenians. Irish nationalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century took on a new, less radical form under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell.

The new national movement, formed and led by O'Connell, was essentially a Catholic emancipation movement. Its primary aim was the improvement of the lot of the common people, overwhelmingly Catholic, as a nationalist objective in itself. While O'Connell won important parliamentary concessions for Ireland, his victory did not radically change the lives of the Irish people. The real victory of the movement was the manner in which the goals were achieved. For the first time in their history, Irishmen by non-violence, organization, courage and good leadership took on the British Government and won.[72]

O'Connell's idea of nationalism was far from that of Wolfe Tone, for although he opposed the Union and later fought for its repeal, he completely rejected the separatist republican ideal. O'Connell possessed a strong Irish consciousness and spoke frequently of national independence, yet he never

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[72]Kee, p. 179.

questioned the connection between Ireland and England or the acceptance of the British crown. To O'Connell, Irish nationalism and Irish independence meant the extension to the Catholics of that type of national status and independence enjoyed by Irish Protestants. The liberating of the Catholics meant allowing them equal rights and national pride in their own country within the British connection.[73]

The Catholic Emancipation movement led by O'Connell was more a reform movement than a nationalist one, for it involved only the Catholic portion of the population; and this movement later gave way in 1840 to O'Connell's struggle for repeal of the Union.[74] That campaign, however, lost the backing of the Irish people because they were entering the first phase of the worst famine in their history. The quest for survival, and not the quest for equality or freedom, became the goal of the Irish peasant. Politics was the concern of only the upper classes. The ageing O'Connell, suffering from illness and the effects of his recent imprisonment, faced a stronger enemy which soon destroyed him. There existed a faction in the Repeal Association called the Young Irelanders who opposed O'Connell's slow, subtle approach in favor of a more rapid and aggressive one.

The Young Irelanders emerged mainly through the efforts of three men--Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan

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[73] Ibid, pp. 179, 180.

[74] Pomfret, p. 104.

Duffy. Davis, a wealthy Protestant of mixed English and Anglo-Irish parentage, became a dedicated nationalist during his years at Trinity College. It was there that he met the second member of the triumvirate, John Blake Dillon, a Catholic of peasant origin from County Mayo. Dillon had originally planned to enter the priesthood but made the unusual transition from Maynooth to Trinity. In 1841 he and Davis began to dabble in political journalism and together joined O'Connell's Repeal Association. In 1842 Davis and Dillon started their own newspaper, The Nation, an extremely nationalistic periodical. At this time they joined their literary talents with those of Charles Gavan Duffy, a Northern middle class Catholic who possessed great journalistic skill and organizational ability.[75] The Nation gained a wide following almost at once. The doctrine of nationality expounded by Davis and the Young Irelanders was, in Davis's words, "a nationality of the spirit as well as of the letter", a nationality that would embrace all creeds, races and classes within the island, "not a nationality which would preclude civil war, but which would establish internal union and external independence."[76] The execution of this doctrine was to be the essential part of the legacy which Young Ireland left to Irish history.[77]

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[75]Lyons, pp. 93, 94.

[76]"Thomas Davis: Essays and Poems, with a Centary Memoir", (Dublin, 1945), p. 13, quoted in Lyons, p. 94.

[77]Lyons, p. 94.

Both founders and contributors to The Nation were initially supporters of O'Connell's Repeal Association, but they were divided from him by age, background and poltical attitudes. It was not surprising, therefore, that friction would soon develop between "old" and "young" Ireland. Profound disagreement erupted in 1843 when O'Connell had been forced to abandon his plans for a monster meeting at Clontarf after which he had spent some months in prison. Emerging determined to revert to his former policy of parliamentary opportunism, O'Connell decided to adopt a federal solution to Ireland's problems rather than to seek full repeal of the Union. This hastened the clash between the two factions. The most important cause of the inevitable split, however, was O'Connell's attitude toward Sir Robert Peel's College Bill of 1845, a bill which would provide university education for those who could not for whatever reason attend Trinity College. The essence of the plan was to eliminate the denominational test for college entrance and to require that any religious or moral instruction which might be given in the schools was to be financed by private rather than public sources. O'Connell greatly opposed what he termed the "godless" colleges and the whole principle of mixed education of Catholics and Protestants. The Young Irelanders, wholeheartedly supporting Peel's bill, openly clashed with O'Connell's faction at a meeting of the Repeal Association in May, 1845 causing an irreconcilable division in the movement.[78]

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[78] Ibid, pp. 94, 95.

The split over the college bill revealed an even deeper division between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders. By 1846 it was clear that there existed two different concepts of nationalism--O'Connell's constitutional concept and the more aggressive, intransigent creed of the Young Irelanders which did not rule out the possibility that violence and physical force might be needed under certain circumstances to win Irish freedom. In July of 1846 O'Connell confronted the issue by presenting to the Repeal Association a proposal rejecting any use of force. The Young Irelanders were unable to accept this and withdrew from the Association, setting up their own organization, the Irish Confederation. At the head of the new organization were Charles Gavan Duffy and a new member to the Young Irelanders, William Smith-O'Brien. O'Brien was a Protestant landowner and a descendent from the ancient family of the O'Briens of Thomond--a fact of which he was conscious and proud. He had been a member of Parliament and had vigorously supported the fight for Catholic Emancipation. He joined the Repeal Association in 1843 and was deputized by O'Connell, but his sympathies lay more and more with the religious toleration and idealism of the Young Irelanders.[79]

While famine ravished Ireland in the black year of 1847, the death of Daniel O'Connell removed the cohesive force behind the Catholic movement. The Young Irelanders now found themselves in control of the political situation, but they

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[79]Ibid, pp. 95, 96.

were divided in their opinions as to how to bring about a change in Ireland's political situation. Some, many of whom were Protestant landowners, favored the more passive approach of reconciliation, attempting to win over men of property, while others firmly believed that only violent overthrow of the Government could achieve their aims.[80]

The most articulate advocate of the second position was a Northern journalist named John Mitchell, who had become convinced that a violent revolution was necessary. He was also influenced by the writings of an obscure Irishmen, James Fintan Lalor, who advocated a social and political revolution based on the aim of extending land ownership. Becoming disillusioned by the Irish Confederation's decision to back Gavan Duffy's proposal for a strong, independent Irish parliamentary party at Westminster, Mitchell left the organization. He subsequently started his own newspaper, The United Irishmen, a journal advocating armed insurrection as a means of obtaining an Irish republic--an insurrection which would destroy landlordism and return the land to its rightful owners, the people of Ireland.[81]

Early in 1848 it appeared that revolution might again be brewing in Paris. Events in France elevated the hopes of politically minded men desiring change everywhere in Europe and no less so in Ireland. Smith-O'Brien's faction of the Young Irelanders became nearly as militant as that headed by Mitchell. There was, however, a basic difference between the

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[80] Ibid, p. 96.

[81] Ibid, p. 98.

two groups, for Smith-O'Brien's followers favored only a political revolution while those who followed John Mitchell desired a social revolution as well. Before the quarrelling could begin anew, however, the British Government intervened in May of 1848 arresting Smith-O'Brien, Mitchell and a fiery Young Irelander, Thomas Francis Meagher. O'Brien and Meagher were released but Mitchell was convicted of treason and transported to Tasmania. In July Gavan Duffy was arrested and the offices of The Nation were seized. There seemed to be only one alternative left to challenge this coercion and that was armed insurrection.[82]

The "insurrection" of the Young Irelanders occurred in the cabbage patch of a Widow McCormick of Ballingarry, County Tipperary, where thirty-eight Young Irelanders were defeated by armed policemen, thus putting an end to the insurgents' revolutionary activities. By the end of 1848 most of the leaders were in exile or imprisoned.[83]

As with the United Irishmen, the significance of the Young Irelanders can not be found in their physical deeds like the fiasco of 1848, but in the legacy left to later generations. The ideas they supported were mainly those of John Mitchell and Thomas Davis. Mitchell's main significance in the movement was his role in connecting the Young Irelanders with Wolfe Tone by insisting upon the need to establish an Irish republic

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[82] Ibid, pp. 98, 99.

[83] Ibid, p. 99.

completely independent of British rule. By linking the dispirited and famished Ireland of his day with the most important uprising in modern Irish history, he carried on the republican tradition. Mitchell also provided a lesson for future revolutionaries in the violent hatred be conveyed, not for individual Englishmen, but for the generalized oppression felt by Ireland at the hands of the English.[84]

Thomas Davis's contribution was gentler and more futuristic than that of Mitchell, although he too did not rule out the prospect of violence. Davis, painfully aware of the changes taking place around him as the Irish imitated the English in language, fashions and attitudes, struggled to instill in his fellow countrymen a sense of pride in being Irish and an awareness of their Gaelic past. This message of Davis's was, in essence, the message of the Young Irelanders, for as they pointed to Ireland's whole past--language, history, literature, laws and monuments--they insisted that this was something in which all Irishmen, regardless of religious denomination, could have a sense of pride and upon which all Ireland could unite. Davis's ideas later became the ideas of John O'Leary, Arthur Griffith and Padraig Pearce.[85]

The defeat of the Young Irelanders' uprising in 1848 brought an end to that movement and, for a while, to violent revolutionary activity. It was not until 1852 that the Famine

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[84] Ibid, pp. 99, 100.

[85] Ibid, p. 101.

ended, leaving in its wake a new upsurge of agrarian crime. At the same time, however, there appeared a new type of activity on the part of the Irish tenantry, the formation of the protective societies under the auspices of the Roman Catholic clergy. It was the general aim of these societies to fix fair rents by an impartial evaluation. Beginning in 1847 a movement had, by 1850, spread to over twenty counties in both the South and West. At the same time the tenants in Ulster were preparing to defend their rights, thus creating the possibility for a national tenant movement.[86]

The activity in the North arose from the fear that the Ulster custom[87] was in danger. Due to the recent agricultural depression the purchase price of the tenant's right of occupancy had been reduced, while rents remained high. Landlords took advantage of the situation to curtail the operations of their estates as much as possible. Criticism of the custom by the Devon Commission in 1847 and the defeat of a bill in Parliament to legalize the custom heightened the fears of Ulster tenants thereby resulting in the founding of the Ulster Tenant Right Association by a Northern journalist, James McKnight.[88]

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[86]Beckett, p. 354.

[87]The essential character of the tenant right or Ulster custom was that the tenant held a saleable interest in his holding which he could sell to the highest bidder with his landlord's consent. Further, if evicted, the tenant could sell his interest or tenant right, or his landlord could purchase it at the market price. Beckett, p. 179.

[88]Ibid, p. 354.

Three political journalists of note watched the activity of the tenants, both North and South, with great interest. These included John Gray, editor of the most important daily paper in Ireland, The Freeman's Journal, Charles Gavan Duffy, editor of The Nation and the only Young Irelander still in Irish politics, and Frederick Lucas, editor of The Tablet, an Englishman who devoted himself and his journal to the cause of the Irish peasantry. Under their leadership a national tenant right meeting was held in Dublin in August, 1850, resulting in the formation of the Irish Tenant Right League. The basic aim of the League was to legalize the Ulster Custom and extend it to the entire country; and at the August meeting a resolution was passed to put up candidates for Parliament in the next general election.[89]

Because many Ulster Presbyterians had been present at the conference, the League was often called the "League of North and South". The part played by the Ulster Protestants soon declined, however, since many became uneasy about the great numbers of Catholics in the movement. They were also suspicious that the League would be used for political purposes since it was true that Gavan Duffy hoped to turn the tenant movement into a national one with political aims. The results of the general election of 1852 proved that Ulster would not back the League since only one of the Ulster candidates was returned to Parliament.[90]

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[89] Ibid, p. 355.

[90] Ibid.

In the South the League was far more successful, with forty of its members winning the election. At this time in British politics such an Irish party, if united and skillfully led, could have achieved much, for the British Government under Lord Derby was prepared to make concessions to Ireland. The members of Parliament who supported tenant right were unwilling, however, to make any compromises and thus introduced a land bill of their own. When the British Government refused to accept it, the tenant right members joined forces with the Whigs, Radicals and Peelites to defeat Lord Derby's government. This action was not to their advantage. Two of the tenant right members, John Sadler and William Keogh, accepted positions in the new coalition ministry under Lord Aberdeen, a ministry hostile to the aims and desires of the League; and their defection divided its members, thus reducing the party's importance in Parliament. Although the Irish party did not accomplish anything, its mere existence had demonstrated that the Irish grievances could be directed into political channels. What was needed, however, was discipline and strong leadership, which was not to be obtained for another twenty years.[91]

Despite its weaknessess the tenant right movement succeeded in keeping the land question alive both in Ireland and at Westminster. After the party's demise there were still independent members who introduced various land bills from 1852 to 1869. Most of the bills were defeated due to strong landlord pressure, and only two bills, both passed in 1860,

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[91] Ibid, pp. 355, 356.

became law. The first was to provide compensation for certain improvements that the tenants made at their own expense with the consent of the landlords, but the bill was so narrow in scope and so complicated that the tenants derived little from it. The second bill, known as the Deasy Act, was to the sole advantage of the landlord. The bill provided that in the future, the relationship between landlord and tenant was to be based on an expressed or implied contract of the parties rather than upon customary tenure or service, thus providing both parties with their own rights and duties. It would have been reasonable enough had the landlords and tenants been on equal footing; but such was not the case in Ireland. The Deasy Act destroyed the whole basis of tenant right and only increased the uneasiness and discontent of the Irish people.[92]

During the 1860's and 1870's there arose in Ireland two movements of particular importance to the events which occurred at the end of the century. The first movement called the Fenian movement, or the Irish Republican Brotherhood as it was known in America, was of the revolutionary, republican type in keeping with the tradition of the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders; the second one, the Home Rule movement, was a great and serious effort to secure self-government for the Irish people by purely parliamentary means. These movements, although extremely divergent with regard to the methods used to work for political independence, would converge to provide the Land League with excellent leadership, guidance and

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[92]Ibid, p. 357.

political power. Yet, before the days of the League each was given a chance to achieve Ireland's long sought goal, only to fail for various reasons.

The national enthusiasm which had been aroused by the Tenant Right League had diminished by 1852 with the disintegration of the Tenant Right party. This political stagnation was not due entirely to the failure of the party, but to economic and religious causes as well. Ireland now witnessed a slow but certain economic improvement for the first time since the Famine. The Church also, under the guidance of Archbishop Cullen, the most powerful member of the Irish hierarchy, contributed to the political apathy. Archbishop Cullen, who resided in Rome for over twenty years, brought to Ireland a fear of nationalists and came to regard Gavan Duffy as an Irish Mazzini. Thus, the Church, which earlier had supported the Repeal Movement, now directed its influence toward keeping Ireland within the United Kingdom.[93]

This political apathy was not due, however, to the Irishmen's acceptance of things as they were. While the tenant right movement had failed as a national rallying point, discontent over the still far from satisfactory economic and political situation existed, requiring only new leadership to mold it into a new nationalist organization. A. M. Sullivan, the editor of The Nation after Gavan Duffy's departure to Australia, strove to keep alive national feeling, calling upon all Irishmen to wait for an opportunity to re-establish

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[93] Ibid, p. 358.

a constitutional movement like that earlier led by O'Connell. This constitutional action was soon challenged by a more aggressive, vigorous organization that followed in the tradition of Wolfe Tone. Demanding secrecy and a binding oath, this new organization became known as the Fenian society and was founded in Dublin in 1858 by James Stephens with the aid of John O'Mahoney. The name Fenian, suggested by O'Mahoney, a Gaelic scholar, originated from "Fianna", the military society of the hero-warrior Fionn MacCuchail (Finn MacCool) of Celtic legend.[94]

An important aspect of its movement was that it marked the beginning of the influence, aid and encouragement given to the Irish nationalists by Irish-Americans living in the United States. The extent and value of this contribution to Irish political affairs should not be underrated. These Irish-Americans, who carried with them a hatred of English rule which they understood to be the cause of all sufferings, proved to be an inexhaustible spring of anti-British feelings. It was to this source that Stephens and O'Mahoney turned for their uprising against England.[95]

The basic principles of Fenianism, both in Ireland and in America, were that nothing could be obtained by peaceful parliamentary methods, and that independence could be achieved only by violent overthrow of British rule. Fenianism, however, offered no program of reform for Ireland, since its leaders maintained that social and economic reforms should be postponed

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[94]Ibid.

[95]Lyons, p. 112.

until political independence was gained. Furthermore, the Fenian society was not democratic, for Stephens, conceiving his organization as a military one, insisted from its inception that he have complete control. Unlike the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders, the Fenians did not attempt to gain mass support--partly because they believed the masses to be already in agreement with them, but most importantly because they felt it was their duty to win Irish freedom regardless of public opinion. Stephens, nevertheless, soon became aware of the usefulness of propaganda and in 1863 established a weekly newspaper, The Irish People.[96]

Despite the opposition from the constitutional nationalists, who felt that an armed insurrection at this point could only mean irreparable harm for Ireland, and the intense hostility of the Roman Catholic Church, which was striving to maintain good relations with Great Britain, Stephens was able to build up a large following. Besides obtaining the support of the Irish-Americans, he had among his followers Irishmen in Britain and thousands of Irish soldiers in regiments serving in Ireland. When the time appeared to be right for a rising, Stephens had come to depend on help from the Irish in America; thus the outbreak of the American Civil War forced him to postpone the revolt. After the end of the Civil War in 1865 the time seemed more opportune than ever, for now Ireland had at her disposal experienced officiers and soldiers coming from America to aid in the struggle for freedom.[97]

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[96]Beckett, p. 359

[97]Ibid, pp. 360, 361.

By 1865, however, British authorities at Dublin Castle were aware of Stephens' activity and the Fenian conspiracy. In September of that year the Government closed in first by suppressing The Irish People and then by arresting such well-known Fenians as John O'Leary, Thomas Clarke Luby and Charles Kickham. Stephens had escaped apprehension but the three remaining prisoners were tried and sentenced to transportation for acts of treason. The trials proved a vital source of propaganda for the Fenian cause.[98]

With most of the Fenian leaders still at large, Stephens' after his escape, was urged to stage an insurrection. His insistence on delay lost the chance for a successful rising. The Government soon took action by arresting all suspects, seizing arms, removing Irish troops believed to be infested with Fenian sympathizers and suspending the habeas corpus act. An uprising did occur in March of 1867 but was put down in a single night. The movement managed to survive the fiasco and remained a powerful political force. The brutal treatment of Fenian prisoners created a great deal of sympathy, while the demand for amnesty served as a means of keeping uncompromising republicanism alive in the minds of the Irish people.[99]

In 1867 an event occurred which strengthened the Fenian cause and brought the movement closer to the mainstream of British political life. This event was the execution of

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[98] Ibid, p. 361.

[99] Lyons, p. 127.

the "Manchester Martyrs". The British authorities had apprehended one Colonel Kelly known to be a chief organizer of the Fenians. Kelly's comrades had succeeded in rescuing him on his way to prison by attacking a van in which he was riding, but had accidently killed a guard while trying to blow off the lock. The five men were promptly arrested, and after a hasty trial, three men were executed. The three became known as the "Manchester Martyrs" and thereby symbols of Irish nationalism.[100]

The events at Manchester served to strengthen the attitude of most Englishmen that the Fenians were a frightening and powerful force bent on the destruction of British society. Those who held this opinion favored more repressive action on the part of the British Government. Yet, there were a few Englishmen who attempted to look beyond the violence in order to discern its cause and who felt that conditions in Ireland were in desperate need of reform. One of these, William Ewart Gladstone, was a man whose ideas and actions were to become of vital importance for the future of Ireland.[101]

The Fenians, like the United Irishmen and the Young Irelanders, had failed miserably in their attempts at insurrection. Yet, like the other physical force movements their importance lies in the legacy which they left to Ireland. Fenianism provided a link in the chain which connected the United Irishmen with the men of 1916. By resisting cenorship

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

of the Church and by attempting to separate Church and State, it reinstated the separatist ideal that the fight for independence was an intellectual as well as a political struggle. By appealing to the lower classes, Fenianism indicated where the real foundation for a radical nationalistic movement lay in the future. Most important perhaps, Fenianism had demonstrated to its own generation the harsh belief that freedom could only be won by physical struggle and self-sacrifice.[102]

With the collapse of the Fenian uprising, a new attempt was made to secure a form of self-rule for Ireland and to arouse the nationalistic feelings of the people. This was the Home Rule movement started by Isaac Butt in the early 1870's and, unlike the Fenian movement, was purely constitutional in its methods and goals.

The Home Rule movement which Butt founded was to have a profound effect on Irish politics well into the twentieth century. Butt, a Tory barrister, had distinguished himself as the counsel who defended both William Smith-O'Brien and Thomas Meagher in 1848 and the Fenian prisoners in 1865. Although a Protestant and a Conservative, Butt had always shown national pride in being an Irishman. The events of 1848 and 1865 as well as his disenchantment with the Union during the days of the Famine had succeeded in converting him to the national cause. He soon gained prominence as an active member of the Tenant Right Association, for his participation in the Amnesty Movement of which he was president and for his

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[102] Ibid, p. 128.

connection with the Home Government Association. In the years that followed Butt was to eventually incorporate all three trends into one Home Rule movement.[103] At one point Butt had foreshadowed what was to become known in Land League parlance as the "new departure", or the cooperation of both the Fenians and Home Rulers in the attempt to gain self-government.[104] Furthermore, Butt was aware of the absurdity of attempting to sever the cause of the Irish tenantry from that of Irish nationalism. "I believe", he said of tenant right and nationalism, "that the two objects, so far from being antagonistic, help each other."[105] Although Butt was to be pushed aside by events during his own lifetime, to him must be given the credit for first coordinating a movement from which Irish nationalism was forthwith to draw its strength. He consciously worked to discredit Gladstone's Irish policy as less than adequate and in doing so substituted for it the more aspiring policy of Home Rule.[106]

At first Home Rule had attracted both Protestants and Catholics alike, but as Catholic support grew, Protestants gradually withdrew from the movement. The fear that "Home Rule meant Rome Rule" increased opposition to the movement and in turn made the idea of home rule extremely desirable to

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[103]Kee, pp. 358, 359.

[104]Ibid, p. 359.

[105]David Thornley, Isaac Butt and Home Rule (London: MacGibbon and Kee, Ltd., 1964), p. 71.

[106]Kee, p. 359.

Catholics. On the other side of the political spectrum Butt was able to secure the neutrality of the Fenians for a three year trial period. Thus, Fenians, members of Parliament and priests alike took part in the first Home Rule conference held in Dublin, November, 1853.[107]

The main goal of the Home Rulers was simply separate parliaments for the domestic affairs of England, Scotland and Ireland. For the time being, however, the achievement of such a goal seemed so unlikely that they concentrated more on parliamentary tactics to be adopted and party discipline than on the precise platform Home Rule was to take. To Butt, the main tactic of Home Rulers sitting in Parliament should be to vote according to the dictate of their consciences. However, an idea expressed by Joseph Biggar, a Belfast pork butcher, then a member of the Fenian Supreme Council and soon to be a member of Parliament for County Cavan, presaged the shape of things to come. Biggar's disturbing amendment was that Irish members of a political party in a British Parliament should act solidly together for making decisions on all parliamentary issues. This proposal was not acceptable to other Home Rulers and Butt's original decision was therefore carried unanimously.[108]

Under Butt's leadership the Home Rule party which won fifty-nine seats in the general election of 1874 proved to be ineffective in Parliament due to its lack of cohesiveness, set

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[107] Ibid, p. 360.

[108] Ibid.

goals or determination. A few Fenians in the party, disillusioned by their cooperation with Butt, expressed their restlessness through the practice of obstruction, a practice extremely distasteful to Butt. This practice, which employed the technique of reading aloud long excerpts from such documents as Government blue books or newspapers in order to delay the passage of a bill, was condemned by Butt in the House of Commons. His action only served to alienate him further from the more active elements of the Irish party. On April 22, 1875 the appearance in the House of Commons of Charles Stewart Parnell, a new, young member of Parliament for County Meath proved to be the beginning of the end for Butt. Parnell, who supported Biggar and other obstructionists, would soon drive Butt from the leadership of the party altogether and form for the first time in Irish history a strong, cohesive Irish Parliamentary party.[109]

The failures of the early nationalist movements proved that the soul of Irish nationalism had not yet been discerned. Although various groups enjoyed the enthusiasm and sympathy of the Irish peasants, no one movement received their wholehearted support. Throughout the nineteenth century, Irish political thinkers who believed strongly in self-government wrote about Irish independence and Irish nationalism. Yet, although they were dedicated men, willing to sacrifice their lives for Ireland, none were revolutionary in their thinking. The only true revolutionary thinker of the time was an obscure

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[109]Ibid, p. 362.

Young Ireland named James Fintan Lalor. To Lalor, the fight for repeal, for independence, meant nothing without the support and involvement of the Irish peasants. Lalor believed that the only issue on which the Irish people could be aroused, the only true basis on which to build nationalism was the land. This was to become the revolutionary doctrine Lalor gave to Ireland and to Michael Davitt.

CHAPTER V

JAMES FINTAN LALOR AND MICHAEL DAVITT: FOUNDERS OF THE LAND LEAGUE

Born in Queen's County in 1807, James Fintan Lalor, deaf, nearsighted and deformed, spent much of his time brooding over the economic and political state of Ireland. The son of a gentleman farmer, Fintan Lalor was educated by private tutors until he entered Carlow College where he became skilled in Greek and Latin. More important, however, at Carlow College Lalor became an ardent nationalist and soon joined the Young Ireland organization.[110]

Lalor remained an obscure figure in Irish politics until 1847 when a letter he sent to Charles Gavan Duffy, the editor of The Nation, aroused the interest of Duffy and the militant Young Irelander, John Mitchell. Both men were struck by the obscure writer's novel ideas as well as his passionate, revolutionary fervor. Lalor's central theme was that the repeal of the union was of secondary importance. What was important, wrote the fiery nationalist, was the fate of the Irish tenant farmer. Lalor wrote to Duffy on January 11, 1847:

> I will never contribute one shilling, or give name, heart, or hand for such an object as simple Repeal by the British Parliament of the Act of Union. . . . I will never act, nor aid any organization limiting itself strictly to the sole object of dissolving the present connection with Britain

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[110] O'Leary, p. xix.

> and rigidly excluding every other. A mightier question is the land--one beside which Repeal dwarfs down into a petty parish question.[111]

Lalor firmly believed that repeal of the Act of Union was as an object in itself "an impractical absurdity."[112] Past events had shown, continued Lalor, that it could not be achieved by constitutional means, and military means were out of the question simply because the peasants of Ireland would not raise a weapon in favor of repeal, which was to them a remote and meaningless abstraction. Again Lalor emphasized that the only issue on which the peasants could be aroused was the land.[113]

Lalor placed the blame for all of Ireland's miseries not so much on the British Government as on the Irish landlords. He maintained that the land did not belong exclusively to any one class but to the nation as a whole. In an article published in The Nation, he urged the landlords to aid in the transformation of Irish society lest they be thrust aside forever:

> Lay deep and strong the only foundation that is firm under the feet of the nation--a secure and independent peasantry. A secure and independent peasantry is the only base on which a people ever rises or can be raised, or on which a nation can safely rest.[114]

Fintan Lalor's words went unheeded and he soon proposed

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[111] Ibid, pp. 2, 3.

[112] Ibid, p. 87.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid, p. 29.

action against the landlords that would stir Ireland in the near future, for he advocated as a remedy to Irish problems not a violent revolution or a constitutional party but a nationwide strike against rents.

Lalor's ideas of nationality more than justified his proposed action, for he held until his death the firm belief that the land of Ireland belonged by natural right to the people of Ireland. "The principle I mean to state," declared Lalor, "and mean to stand upon is this, that the entire ownership of Ireland, moral and material, up to the sun and down to the center, is vested of right in the people of Ireland; that they and none but they are the landowners."[115]

Furthermore, Lalor contended that the rights to the soil carried with it political rights as well: "I hold further, and firmly believe, that the enjoyment by the people of this right of first ownership in the soil, is essential to the vigor and vitality of all other rights."[116] The people of Ireland were by natural right not only the landowners but also the lawmakers. Any laws not made by them were null and void and land titles not confirmed by them were invalid. To Lalor, this full right of ownership had to be obtained and enforced by any means at Ireland's disposal.[117]

Although Lalor concluded that right of ownership of the soil was indeed related to the political ownership of the

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[115] Ibid, p. 67.

[116] Ibid, p. 68.

[117] Ibid, p. 67.

land, he steadfastly maintained that the land question was the more important:

> That the land question contains, and the legislative question does not contain, the materials from which victory is manufactured; and that, therefore, if we be truly in earnest, and determined on success, it is on the former question, and not the latter, we must take our stand, fling out our banner, and hurl down to England our gage of battle. Victory follows that banner alone--that and no other.[118]

To say that James Fintan Lalor was an opponent of private property would be incorrect. He had the highest regard for the real rights of property. What he did object to was the ownership of property by one small exclusive class. The small landowning class of Ireland held the land by what Lalor termed "robbers' right", and in return stripped the true owners of Ireland of all economic, political and social rights. In a nationalist journal, The Irish Felon, Lalor asserted that the true and indefeasible right of property was "the right of our people to live in it in comfort, security and independence, and to live in it by their own labour, on their own land, as God and nature meant them to do."[119]

Thus, to regain these rights to their soil Lalor devised a plan of action for the Irish people. He saw the English conquests consisting of two parts, the conquest of liberty and the conquest of the soil. To Lalor, the reconquest of Irish liberties would be incomplete without the reconquest of Irish land. His proposal to refuse to pay rents and to

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[118] Ibid, pp. 70, 71.

[119] Ibid, p. 72.

resist evictions sounded simple, but the effects were to be profound. He also called upon the Young Irelanders to put aside the repeal question for a mightier struggle, the achieving of Irish independence by the only way it could possibly be achieved--a struggle by the Irish people for their soil.[120]

When, in 1849, Lalor attempted to form a land league that would carry on the strike against rents, the peasants were still in the grip of famine and were deaf to his entreaties. Later that year Lalor was arrested for attempting to incite an armed rebellion and was taken to Newgate Prison in Dublin. Because of ill health he was released only to die shortly after on December 27, 1849.[121]

An ardent Republican and uncompromising nationalist, Lalor did not live to see his ideas realized. His writings, however, were soon to have a profound effect on the young Fenian, Michael Davitt, and nearly thirty years after Lalor's death, Davitt organized the Irish National Land League along the "no-rent" principle, proving conclusively the truth of Lalor's contention that the only true basis of Irish nationalism was the land.

Michael Davitt, a son of a tenant farmer, was born in Straide, County Mayo on March 25, 1846, while famine and disease ravished Ireland. The horrors of the famine including his own family's eviction had a profound and lasting effect on

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[120] Ibid, pp. 94, 95.

[121] Ibid, p. xxvii.

him, aiding greatly in developing an undying hatred for landlordism and for British rule.[122] "Straide was my birthplace," wrote Davitt, "and almost my first-remembered experience of my own life and the existence of landlordism was our eviction in 1852 when I was about five years of age."[123]

Soon after their eviction, Davitt's family moved to Haslingden, England, where Davitt, at ten years of age, lost his right arm in an industrial accident. By 1870 he had become deeply involved in the Fenian movement, for although he was raised in England, he had instilled in him a love for his native country and a strong conviction of Ireland's right to self-government.[124] On July 29, 1870 Davitt was arrested for gunrunning and sentenced to fifteen years of penal servitude. By 1878, however, Davitt was released and thus began the most active phase of his public career.[125]

While in prison Davitt had spent many hours brooding over Ireland's condition and searching for an effective campaign that would unite all Irishmen behind one cause. After extensive study he came to the conclusion that the land question, almost to the exclusion of the political movement for home rule, was the major concern of the Irish people. Inspired and strengthened by the doctrines of Lalor and choosing the

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[122]Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader (T. Fisher, 1908; reprint ed., London: MacGibbon and Kee, Ltd., 1867), pp. 17, 18.

[123]Davitt, p. 222.

[124]Sheehy-Skeffington, p. 20.

[125]Ibid, p. 22.

latter's formula "the land for the people" as a signal for revolution, Davitt launched a campaign soon to become known as the New Departure. With the land question as a common base, the New Departure called for the combined efforts of both the physical and constitutional forces to fight for the economic and political freedom of Ireland.[126]

Davitt firmly believed that there existed both a need and an opportunity for a new departure in 1878. The need stemmed from the fact that neither the Fenians nor the Home Rulers proved capable of accomplishing anything on their own. The Fenian conspirators, although patriotic and sincere, had nothing tangible to offer the Irish people except abortive uprisings and penal servitude, while the Home Rulers in 1878 due to the weakness and incohesiveness of Isaac Butt's party, simply lacked the popularity and combativeness necessary for an effective movement. What was needed, Davitt believed, was a combination of the energies of the two elements for a strong national organization.[127]

The opportunity of which Davitt spoke for the success of a New Departure was to be found in the social discontent that had prevailed among the Irish peasants for centuries. This discontent, the result of the evils of Irish landlordism ignored by both political factions, was a vast area of popular force waiting to be drawn upon for the purpose of a strong national movement. Davitt hoped to link the land or social

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[126]Palmer, pp. 107, 108.

[127]Davitt, pp. 117, 118.

question to that of home rule by making the ownership of the soil the basis for the struggle for independence. This struggle, nationalistic in character and semi-revolutionary in action, called for an attack upon landlordism and demanded the combined efforts of both forces in Irish political life.[128]

In addition to the resources in Ireland there lay across the Atlantic another and even stronger force ready to be tapped. The Irish-Americans, many of whom were victims of English oppression or descendents of those victims, still harbored an intense hatred and distrust of the British Government. These Irishmen had by 1870 acquired some wealth and higher social position in America and had become schooled in democratic thought and principles. Davitt believed that these qualities coupled with their concern for Ireland would prove to be a valuable aid for the New Departure campaign. With this in mind, Davitt journeyed to America in the hope of spreading the idea of his new doctrine to Irish-Americans and thereby enlisting their support.[129]

Davitt traveled throughout the major cities of the United States including New York and Boston setting forth policies advocating his new scheme. Both he and his ideas were received with great enthusiasm. A tentative program suggested by Davitt was readily accepted, and among the proposals adopted were the declarations that the first aim of the

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[128] Ibid, pp. 120, 121.

[129] Ibid, p. 125.

Irish nationalists was the achievement of self-government and with it the settlement of the land question.[130]

Associated with Davitt in advocating and inaugurating the New Departure in America was another Fenian ex-convict, John Devoy. Born in Ireland in 1842, Devoy spent practically his entire life participating in various revolutionary activities. In 1871 he was banished from Ireland and moved to New York where he was employed as a journalist.[131] As an able and respected leader of the advanced nationalist parties in America, the Clan-na-Gael and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Devoy was most instrumental in winning the Irish-American nationalists to Davitt's new movement. In a letter printed in The Freeman's Journal published in New York on December 11, 1878 he publicly advocated the principles of the New Departure. Devoy pointed out that no one portion of the Irish people alone could achieve national independence, therefore there had to be some type of action on a common ground. Like Davitt and Lalor, he readily agreed that the only question on which Home Rulers, Fenians and the mass of Irish people could unite was that of the land.[132]

The New Departure campaign in the United States ended in a meeting in Mechanics Hall in Boston, December 8, 1878 with

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Dictionary of American Biography, (1930), Vol. V pp. 264, 265.

[132] Freeman's Journal (New York), 11 December 1878, quoted in C. B. Cashman, The Life of Michael Davitt (Boston: Murphy and Murphy Publishers, 1881), p. 107.

certain policies adopted. It was agreed upon by all that the land was to be the basis of their nationalistic struggle and that all national energies were to be directed toward combating the landlords--that political garrison of England in Ireland--for the ownership of the soil and control of the political institutions.[133]

The Boston meeting ended with a speech by Michael Davitt which became famous. It was entitled "Why the Irish tenant farmer is not an active nationalist". By posing disturbing questions to the nationalists, Davitt hoped to stir them into action and to emphasize the need for a strong, cohesive movement. In the speech Davitt put himself in the place of a tenant farmer laboring in Galtee Mountain region of Ireland's desolate west coast. Davitt's peasant asked:

> How is it that I who have done no wrong to God, my country, or society should be doomed to a penal existence like this? Who are they that stand by and see the beasts of the field preferred before me or my family? I am powerless to do anything but to provide for the cravings of those whom God has sent to my care, and to relax my labour for a day might be a day's hunger for my little ones. If I go down to the castle and avenge my wrongs upon the head of the landlord, I am but injuring him, and not the system that enables him to plunder me. I must, therefore, refrain from an act which might cause me to die on the scaffold and my children to enter the workhouse. If no one else will assist me I am condemned to this miserable existence for the remainder of my life. Who are they that, having time and energy to take part in the political strife of the day, say they are working for Ireland and for people like me? The nationalist (revolutionary) party tells me that when independence is won I will no longer be at the mercy of an English landlord. . . . If the nationalists want me to believe in and labour a little for independence, they must first show themselves willing and strong enough to stand between me

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[133]Davitt, pp. 129, 130.

> and the power which a single Englishman, a landlord wields over men. Let them show that the social well-being of our people is a motive in their actions and the aim of their endeavors, while striving for the grand object ahead, and the farming class of Ireland will rally round them to assist in reaching that object.[134]

Before ending the meeting Davitt pointed out that the two parties in Ireland, although differing on principles, had to unite in the struggle for the land of Ireland. Emphasizing again that the land was the only issue on which all Ireland could unite, Davitt appealed to all nationalists to adopt a center platform "resting on a broad, generous, and comprehensive nationalism, which will invite every earnest Irishman upon it."[135]

Davitt left the United States in high spirits, confident in the belief that the Irish-Americans would aid Ireland in its momentous struggle. Upon arriving in Ireland, however, he soon learned that the Fenian organization in Ireland had repudiated the New Departure policy, fearing it to be a means of encouraging extreme nationalists into the constitutional movement. John Devoy made a trip from America to defend his position and that of the American branch of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but to no avail; for neither he nor Davitt could alter the opinions of the Irish Fenians. Although this action proved to be discouraging since it crushed his hopes for a truly united national movement, Davitt refused to give up. Knowing that his plan would appeal to the peasants of

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[134] Ibid, pp. 130-132.

[135] Ibid, p. 132.

Ireland, he waited for an appropiate time to launch his campaign.[136]

The opportunity Davitt awaited was not long in coming, for late in 1878 the potato crop failed again causing hunger, disease and eviction. The people, remembering the dark years of the late forties, were desperate and ready for action.[137] The successful inauguration of the New Departure took place in Irishtown, County Mayo, on the estate of Canon Burke, the Anglican priest. Rents on Burke's estate were exhorbitant, and since the crop failed, no tenant was able to pay his rent and therefore faced eviction. This display of conscienceless landlordism was the excuse needed to begin the new land movement. A meeting was arranged for Sunday, April 20, 1879 to protest against Canon Burke's actions, to demand lower rents and denounce the landlord system in its entirety. The meeting proved more successful than Davitt had hoped. The people of Ireland were called upon to participate in mass demonstrations for land agitation, and a resolution was passed stating that the land of Ireland belonged to the people of Ireland.[138] The Connaught Telegraph called the meeting at Irishtown "one of the greatest public demonstrations ever witnessed in the West of Ireland."[139] Nothing like it was seen since the time

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Pomfret, p. 1.

[138] Palmer, pp. 132, 133.

[139] Connaught Telegraph (Castlebar), 21 April, 1879, quoted in Palmer, p. 133.

of Daniel O'Connell.[140]

The press in Dublin did not mention the Irishtown meeting, but news of it was carried throughout Connaught raising the hopes of the Irish peasantry. The meeting was in fact one of profound historical importance, for as Davitt had hoped, it proved to be the beginning of a great land movement.[141]

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[140] Ibid.

[141] Palmer, p. 134.

CHAPTER VI

PARNELL AND THE LAND LEAGUE

While Michael Davitt successfully launched his New Departure campaign in the west of Ireland, another very important Irishman was embroiled in a struggle in Parliament for the leadership of the Irish Home Rule Party. This was Charles Stewart Parnell, an aristocratic Anglo-Irish Protestant landlord from County Wicklow. Although far removed from the Irish peasants in training, beliefs and inclinations, Parnell was destined to become an able leader of a great popular movement and one of the most astute parliamentarians ever to be elected to the House of Commons. Michael Davitt, who was instrumental in convincing Parnell of the political importance of the land movement, wrote of Parnell as: "an Englishman of the strongest type, moulded for an Irish purpose."[142]

Parnell took his seat in Parliament for County Meath on April 22, 1875. Within Isaac Butt's weak, ineffective movement there existed a small faction of Irishmen employing the practice of obstruction, and it was with this group that the young Parnell joined ranks. While mastering the technique, he quickly rose to the leadership of this small band which in a few short years would make up the core of a strong, cohesive Irish Parliamentary Party soon to become a powerful force in

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[142]Davitt, p. 110.

British politics.[143]

Butt neither encouraged nor condoned the action of the obstructionists. In a passionate speech delivered in the House of Commons, Butt attacked the member from County Meath:

> I regret that the time of the House has been wasted in this miserable and wretched discussion. It is a cause of obstruction and one against which I must enter my protest. I am not responsible for the member from Meath, and cannot control him. I have, however, a duty to the great nation of Ireland, and I think I should discharge it best when I say I disapprove entirely of the conduct of the honourable member from Meath.[144]

The speech was received by the House with cheers and applause. Yet, as Parnell knew, it sounded the political death knell for Isaac Butt. No Irishman could attack a fellow Irishman before the English, "the common enemy", and expect to remain in favor with the Irish people. In a few years Butt was pushed into the background, and by the time of his death his leadership of the Home Rule party was assumed by Parnell.[145]

In 1879, the two forces, Parnell and the land movement, came together. Although successful in the West, the Irishtown meeting did not gain the recognition outside that area which it desperately needed, and although rising politically, Parnell was not yet well known to the Irish people as he soon would

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[143] Pomfret, p. 114.

[144] Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3rd series, 233 (1877): 1049.

[145] R. Barry O'Brien, The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell, 2 vols. (Smith and Elder and Company, 1898; reprint ed., New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), I, 112.

be. It appeared that the land movement needed Parnell's name and leadership to achieve its goals, and Parnell, for the moment, needed the Land League to gain the strong popular support for himself and his party. Parnell did not possess or care to possess the deep insight into the land question that Michael Davitt had. Unlike Davitt, he did not strive for complete independence, but rather for home rule. Yet, even more than the founder of the Land League, Parnell viewed the land movement as a means to a political goal.[146]

The success of the Irishtown meeting had caught the attention of Parnell, but while interested in the growing land movement, he was reluctant to join forces with any movement that might be linked with a revolutionary organization like the Fenians. Being informed that the Fenians had rejected the New Departure, and further swayed by the enthusiasm shown for the movement by the whole country and by the Irish-Americans, Parnell decided to take a closer look at the land question.[147] Early in June, 1879, Michael Davitt called upon Parnell to address a meeting at Westport. Before consenting to do so, Parnell asked an old Fenian, Charles Kickham, "Do you think that the people feel very keenly on the land question?" to which Kickham replied, "Feel keenly on the land question, I am only sorry to say that I think they would go to hell for it."[148] With this in mind, Parnell accepted Davitt's

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[146]Palmer, p. 130.

[147]Davitt, p. 141.

[148]O'Brien, I, 183.

invitation to speak at Westport, thus embarking on a crucial phase in his political career.

Parnell's appearance at Westport was an enormous gain for the new movement and a courageous act on the part of the political leader, for certain sections of the Catholic clergy, including the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. MacHale, denounced the aims and actions of the movement.[149] In a letter written to the editor of The Freeman's Journal on June 5, 1879, MacHale, an important figure in the Catholic hierarchy, not only condemned the proposed land agitation but also called upon all members of the clergy to join together in an effort to stop the Irish people from participating in the movement.[150] In addition the Archbishop hinted that, "An Irish member of Parliament has unwittingly expressed his readiness to attend a meeting convened in a mysterious and disorderly manner."[151] This created a problem for Parnell, who, as a Protestant leader of a Catholic people could not afford to defy the Church.[152]

Davitt, greatly troubled by MacHale's letter, expected Parnell to decline the invitation. When he approached Parnell in Dublin to ask him if he would still attend the Westport meeting, Davitt was both surprised and delighted with his reply. "Will I attend?" stated Parnell, "Certainly. Why not? I have

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[149]Palmer, p. 135.

[150]Davitt, p. 152.

[151]Ibid.

[152]Pomfret, p. 119.

promised to be there, and you can count upon my keeping that promise."[153] Davitt believed that at last Ireland had found the leader it had desperately needed.[154]

The Westport meeting was similar to that at Irishtown except that it was more successful. More than 8,000 persons were present, while about 500 young Irishmen on horseback formed a body guard for Parnell. Parnell was impressed with the well-mannered behavior of the Irish people and with the new spirit and sense of power which seemed to take hold of them.[155] The tenor of the meeting and of the speech which Parnell delivered was one of anti-rent and anti-eviction. In the address at Westport which became famous, Parnell told the peasants of Ireland:

> A fair rent is a rent the tenant can reasonably pay according to the times, but in bad times a tenant cannot be expected to pay as much as he did in good times three or four years ago. If such rents are insisted upon, a repetition of the scenes of 1847 and 1848 will be witnessed. Now, what must we do in order to induce the landlords to see the position? You must show them that you intend to hold a firm grip on your homesteads and lands. You must not allow your small holdings to be consolidated. I am supposing that the landlords will remain deaf to the voice of reason, but I hope that they may not, and that on those properties where the rents are out of all proportion to the times a reduction may be made, and that immediately. If not, you must help yourselves, and the public opinion of the world will stand by you and support you in your struggle to defend your homesteads.[156]

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[153] Davitt, p. 153.

[154] Ibid, p. 154.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Freeman's Journal (New York), 9 June 1879, quoted in Davitt, p. 155.

The Westport meeting, due to Parnell's appearance, received much attention from the Irish and English newspapers. Many publications including The Freeman's Journal severely criticized both the theory of land reform and the "wild language" used at the western meetings. All the condemnation only served to strengthen the appeal of the movement to the Irish and to prove that the doctrine had attracted public attention. It appeared that the New Departure campaign was destined to become a power with great political potential.[157]

In August Michael Davitt began to organize his forces by holding a land league convention at Castlebar, County Mayo. Representatives from all over the country came to Castlebar for the purpose of creating the National Land League of County Mayo. The principle objectives and rules were read by Davitt who declared that the "land of Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland." He further explained to those present that, "land being created to supply mankind with the necessities of existence, those who cultivate it to that end have a higher claim to its absolute possession than those who make it an article of barter to be used or disposed of for the purpose of profits or pleasure."[158]

During the course of his address to the representatives he revealed to them that more than 6,000,000 acres of Irish land were owned by less than 300 persons and that twelve of

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[157] Davitt, p. 156.

[158] Ibid, pp. 160, 161.

this number owned 1,250,000 acres; on the other hand, Davitt pointed out, 5,000,000 of the people owned less than an acre. Rents amounting to over £12,000,000 were taken from the people by the non-productive landowning class.[159] Thus, the great principle of the League was to be that the land was essential to the welfare of the community, and for this reason the landlords must sell their holdings. If this was not done voluntarily by the landlords then it was the duty of the State to use compulsion. The Land League, in the meantime, would strive to protect the interests of the people by guarding them against the ruthless exercise of power, by attempting legally to abolish the present land laws, by exposing publicly the evils of the present land system such as rack renting and arbitrary eviction and by assisting the evicted and the helpless. In addition the League would pose as a vigilance committee in Mayo, observing the conduct of all public officials from poor guardians to members of Parliament and if necessary, pronouncing judgement publicly upon their actions. Finally, the League planned to publish lists of all estates, noting how they were obtained, the condition of the land tenure and the rent. Evictions or contemplated evictions were to be widely announced and protest meetings were to be organized. The League also planned to publish lists of those tenants who dared rent the land of an evicted tenant or who offered the landlord a higher rent than that paid by the previous occupier. The promoters of the League were on the whole ex-Fenians like Davitt, Thomas Brennan,

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[159] Ibid, p. 161.

Patrick Egan and Matthew Harris.[160]

Although much had been achieved, Davitt still hoped to accomplish more. He was anxious to spread the movement to other counties, to convince his fellow Irishmen that the land movement would serve the tenants well and finally to win over the still doubting Parnell. Even after the Westport meeting Parnell was still reluctant to give his wholehearted support to a movement which had so many subdivisions. Parnell did not wish to risk his leadership on the type of movement where the central body would be responsible for the actions of diverse groups and individuals. When informed of the creation of the Land League of Mayo, Parnell expressed neither approval nor disapproval.[161]

Meanwhile, the economic situation in Ireland was becoming more distressing daily. Crops were destroyed by continuous rains, and it appeared that a partial famine and acute distress would be the result. The official attitude of Dublin Castle was that there was no real reason for alarm, but the people were aware that the Land League's warnings of economic danger were well justified. While famine threatened, more and more Land League meetings were being held both within and outside of Connaught.[162]

As the situation became more critical, it was apparent that the spirit and attitude of the people were also those of

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[160] Ibid, pp. 162, 163.

[161] Pomfret, p. 122.

[162] Davitt, p. 168.

the League; Parnell was becoming more convinced of the League's importance and potential, and his speeches were filled with the principles of the new doctrine.[163] At Limerick on August 31, 1879, Parnell told the tenants of Ireland: "It is no use relying on the government, it is no use relying on the House of Commons. You must rely upon your own determination. . . . and if you are determined I tell you, you have the game in your own hands. . . . There is no power on earth which can prevail against the hundreds of thousands of tenant farmers of this country."[164]

By late summer of 1879 Parnell had become aware of the awkwardness of his position. He was the acknowledged leader of the Home Rule party but had not yet taken up in Parliament the only cause that was vitally important to the Irish people. Parnell knew that no political leader could afford to ignore the only movement that had reached the true source of Irish nationalism, drawing into it tenant farmers, Fenians, bishops and priests, the Irish press and Irishmen from all over the world.[165] With Davitt at the head of one movement and himself at the head of another, Parnell knew that a united Ireland could never become a reality. At a Home Rule meeting on September 11, 1879, Parnell clearly expressed his views: "Unless we unite all shades of political opinion in

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[163]Pomfret, p. 122.

[164]O'Brien, I, 193.

[165]Pomfret, p. 123.

that country. I fail to see how we can expect to attain national independence."[166]

Parnell now decided to unite with the New Departure movement and agreed to assist Davitt in organizing the National Land League, to become its president and to undertake a mission to America. The Irish National Land League was thus organized in Dublin on October 12, 1879. Its objectives were to bring about a reduction of rack rent and to win for the tenants the ownership of their land. In exchange for Parnell's cooperation and support, and to promote the unity of an Irish cause, Davitt and other Land League organizers agreed to adopt a platform which would not endanger Irish activities in Parliament.[167]

Even though Parnell was an immensely important figure during the days of the Land League, the credit for the remarkable achievement of unity in 1879 belongs to Michael Davitt. By sheer energy and enthusiasm Davitt had, in less than two years, started a movement which forced all Irish factions to recognize its importance. Davitt's movement was so important that it compelled Parnell, the unquestioned political leader of Ireland, not only to acknowledge it but also to become its leader.[168]

As the leader of the new movement, Parnell's task was a difficult one. Davitt had reconciled and organized the divergent elements but to Parnell fell the responsibility of

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[166] O'Brien, I, 194.

[167] Pomfret, pp. 123, 124.

[168] Ibid, p. 124.

holding them together for a single purpose. The extremists, although mostly ex-Fenians, were hostile to Parnell, who would not and could not compromise with them. While Parnell spent what time he could in expanding the League, his duties in Parliament prevented him from giving it his full attention. It appeared as if the movement was losing ground when unexpected intervention from the authorities gave it the stimulus it needed.[169]

Such an organization as the Land League could hardly hope to escape the attention of the Government. The speeches of Land League leaders, thought to be seditious, led to many arrests. Davitt, James Daly and Thomas Brennan were among the first arrested in Sligo. Parnell, due to the cautious wording of his addresses, avoided arrest. The Sligo arrests and prosecutions attracted world attention, thus gaining for the League, encouragement and promises of support. The Government, finding it almost impossible to obtain an impartial jury in Ireland, was forced to abandon the trials on the eve of the election of 1880. The League now gained more adherents in Ireland and throughout the world, thus paving the way for Parnell's journey to America.[170]

To obtain support for the movement, Parnell set out for America in November, 1879 with the Land League organizer, John Dillon. Parnell spoke in many important American cities including Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland and

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[169] Ibid, p. 126.

[170] Ibid.

Washington D. C., and he was received enthusiastically by crowds of Americans supporting the Irish cause. His most important visit was in Washington where he was given the privilege of addressing the House of Representatives. This honor had in the past been bestowed upon only a few distinguished foreigners including Louis Kossuth and General Lafayette. Parnell's address to Congress, in which he denounced the English land tenure system in Ireland and defended the activities of the Land League, met with the approval of many American political figures.[171]

It was in Cincinnati, however, that Parnell delivered what has become known as the "last link" speech, a speech which aroused much controversy years later when Parnell denied using seditious language. Much of this address was regarding the land situation:

> We are engaged in a great work in Ireland. . . . With your help in keeping our people alive this winter, I feel confident we shall kill the Irish land system. And when we have given Ireland to the people of Ireland, we shall have laid the foundation upon which to build our Irish nation. The feudal tenure and the rule of the minority have been the cornerstone of English misrule. Pull out that cornerstone, break it up, destroy it, and you undermine the English misgovernment. When we have undermined the English misgovernment, we have paved the way for Ireland to take her place among the nations of the earth. And let us not forget that that is the ultimate goal at which all we Irishmen aim. None of us whether we are in America or in Ireland or wherever we may be will be satisfied until we have destroyed the last link which keeps Ireland bound to England.[172]

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[171] Davitt, p. 127.

[172] Times (London), 26 October 1888, p. 5.

The American mission was enormously successful, drawing in contributions totaling over £50,000. Most of the money, however, was used by the League to relieve the economic distress in Ireland instead of being used to expand the activities of the Land League.[173]

Toward the end of his visit, Parnell once again stopped off in New York. While there he called together all those interested in the Irish cause and submitted an outline for an auxiliary organization soon to become known as the American Land League. Leaving John Dillon in New York to carry out the details of the work, Parnell suddenly departed for Ireland to take part in the general election of 1880, an election that was to be a triumphant one for Parnell.[174]

The election of 1880 was of great importance, not only for Parnell but for the future of the land agitation as well. Parnell's political future was at stake in this election, for it would mean acknowledgement of his leadership of the Home Rule party and the approval of the electorate of his Land League activities.[175] Among the indications that Parnell would win the election was the fact that The Freeman's Journal now recognized the New Departure doctrine. Dwyer Gray, editor of the paper, informed Davitt that since the country fully sympathized with the program and the policy of the land movement, the Journal would henceforth support the League.[176] Meanwhile,

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[173]Davitt, p. 210.

[174]Ibid.

[175]Pomfret, p. 129.

[176]Davitt, p. 227.

the doctrine of the League was spreading throughout Great Britain. Early in 1880 the Home Rule Federation of Great Britain joined together with the Land League resulting in the Land League of Great Britain. There were so many branches of the League developing in England that both major parties had to reckon with the Irish vote in the industrial cities for many years to come. Even Scotland did not escape the Land League influence as there was agitation among the Scottish crofters to rise up against their landlords.[177]

The destruction of the Tory majority in Parliament became the aim of the Land League. Disreali condemned the League as being "a danger in its ultimate result scarcely less disastrous than pestilence and famine."[178] Although voting solidly against the Conservatives, the Irish still had not secured the wholehearted support of the Liberals. Yet, at this time sympathy for Ireland, as evidenced in their speeches, appeared to be growing. Lord Hartington condemned the repressive actions of the Government and its failure to inquire into the cause of Irish discontent, while Gladstone, in his Midlothian address stated: "In my opinion these two great objectives of local government and the land laws ought now to occupy a foremost place in the thoughts of every man who aspires to be a legislator."[179]

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[177]Pomfret, p. 129.

[178]Quoted in Davitt, p. 130.

[179]Quoted in O'Brien, I, 120.

Parnell waged a vigorous campaign against the Tories and the conservative Irish of Butt's party. Lacking in funds, he was forced to borrow £2,000 from the Land League's treasury to provide needy candidates with fees and campaign expenses. Although this step violated the League's constitution, it did surround Parnell with loyal men like John Dillon, Thomas Sexton and John Redmond.[180]

Parnell and the Irish cause triumphed in the general election of 1880. The Liberals took control of the English Government and the Irish Home Rule party won sixty seats, eight more than had been won in 1874. On April 26, shortly after the election, the Home Rule party met in Dublin to choose Parnell as its leader. Parnell, the Land League and Home Rule were now one, and due to the efforts of Michael Davitt, Irish nationalism had ceased to be a mere expression and became a reality.[181]

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[180] Pomfret, p. 131.

[181] Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAND LEAGUE 1879-1881

The Land League movement of Ireland was in all respects a movement of the people--an uprising against the landlords. Although their chief aim was the complete abolition of landlordism, the Irish peasants had no definite plan of accomplishing it. The important thing between the years of 1879 and 1881 was the belief that soon they would once again be the masters of their own soil.[182]

The doctrines of the Land League proved to be irresistible for the Irish people. Land League slogans like "Down with landlordism" and "The land for the people" at once aroused their interests, passions and desires. The movement was one which could identify itself with the people, one which they finally understood completely. Revolutionaries could speak of English oppression, and Home Rulers could speak of self-government without arousing much enthusiasm, but when the Irish people heard speeches concerning landlordism and concerning their right to own their soil, their deepest feelings, as James Fintan Lalor had predicted, were immediately stirred.[183]

In addition to offering the people what they desired most and appealing to their profoundest convictions, the program

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[182] Palmer, pp. 113, 114.

[183] Ibid, p. 115.

of the Land League had succeeded in uniting all classes, sects and districts, thus proving it to be a truly national movement.[184]

No national organization could exist in Ireland to which the clergy was hostile, and one of the most valuable assets of the land movement was the approval and cooperation given to it by the Irish clergy, both Catholic and Protestant. Especially influential were the Catholic priests, ardent and active supporters of the League. "We had," said Michael Davitt, "some staunch friends and supporters among the Irish bishops, while many priests were on our side."[185]

The clergymen were extremely active in keeping the League organizations intact in their parishes, especially when the official leaders were attending sessions of Parliament or in prison. Since they were recruited chiefly from the lower classes, the clergymen were in constant touch with the people. Landlordism was condemned in the churches by parish priests and bishops alike, while the God-given right of the people to own their land was upheld. By their actions, the Irish clergy gave the movement the sanction of religious approval.[186]

Propaganda and a powerful press provided another source of strength for the Land League. The conservative journals such as The Daily Express and The Evening Mail were pro-English,

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[184] Ibid, p. 116.

[185] Davitt, p. 191.

[186] Palmer, p. 119.

pro-landlord and therefore anti-nationalist and anti-League; but The Nation and The Flag of Ireland were supporters and organs of the national movement.

Rarely missing an opportunity to condemn the League's activities, the conservative papers constantly demanded that the English Government enforce more coercive measures. The program of the League and particularly its slogans like "Pay no rent" were considered by those journals as revolutionary and communistic. Being the bitterest enemies of the League, they also opposed the most moderate of land reform.[187]

The journals which condoned the actions of the League were also the channels through which Land League propaganda was spread. The Nation in particular was the League's stauchest supporter. Always keeping its ultimate aim in sight, the achievement of national independence, it threw itself wholeheartedly into the land movement. By championing a cause of the people and attacking landlordism, it indirectly struck a blow against English rule. During the three years of the Land League's existence, The Nation devoted its columns to the progress of the League's activities. Disapproving of violence, it warned the Irish people that their goal could best be achieved by "peaceful, passive resistance." It was the most influential and substantial of all nationalist journals.[188]

Although the Land League movement was one of unity of action and unanimity of program, the aims of the leaders and

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[187] Ibid, p. 121.

[188] Ibid, pp. 121, 122.

the aims of the people from whom they drew their support, were quite different. In the first instance, the land agitation was a social revolution with political aims; in the second, it was a revolt against economic oppression. The chief organizers and leaders of the League looked upon the land agitation as a means to a higher goal, national independence. At no time did they conceal or disguise their real objectives.[189] Appearing before The Special Times Commission of 1889, a commission formed to investigate the alleged agrarian crimes of the Land League period, Michael Davitt was asked: "Did you not impress upon them (the Americans) the doctrine that if you could link the national question with the land question, the land movement would be a step toward independence?" To which Davitt replied, "I did, and I believe that now."[190] In Kansas on September 11, 1880, Davitt had spoken of the aims of the Leaguers organizers, while explaining to his American audience that the land war was different from previous revolts. Davitt declared that by waging a war against the landlords he and other leaders, "are preparing the way for that independence which you enjoy in the great American Republic." Davitt continued, "Landlordism is a British garrison which bars the way to national independence."[191]

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[189] Ibid, p. 128.

[190] Times (London), 4 July 1889, p. 6.

[191] Times (London), 26 October 1888, p. 5.

For the leaders of the movement, land agitation was to be used as a means of arousing the people against landlords and thus striking indirectly against British rule. To expect a pure agrarian land movement under such leadership as the Land League possessed was impossible and absurd. For who were the leaders but Michael Davitt, an ex-Fenian convict, Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Home Rule party and others such as John Dillon, Timothy Healy, Thomas Brennan, Patrick Egan, Thomas Sexton and many others who were either Fenians or Home Rulers. The aim of both was independence from Great Britain; the difference between the two factions was the means to be used and the degree of independence sought. Throughout the entire period, the leaders of the League had but this one purpose, a purpose which they openly revealed in their speeches and actions.[192]

It was Michael Davitt more than any other leader who viewed his Land League as a vehicle for independence. He considered it his life's ambition to aid in achieving freedom for his country. The Special Times Commission of 1888 reported:

> He, first of all those who engaged in Irish politics had recognized the expediency of uniting the land movement with Fenianism, and by an appeal, as he says, to self-interest, to give it force and vitality. He avowed in the witness box before us that the principle on which he had always acted was to make the land question a stepping stone to complete national independence.[193]

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[192]Palmer, pp. 128, 129.

[193]Times (London), 4 July 1889, p. 6.

With this end in mind, Davitt launched his great land crusade. National independence was vitally important to him, but knowing the Irish people's attachment to the land and being himself an enemy of landlordism, he no doubt conducted the land agitation with more ardor than any other Irishman of the period.[194]

The chief support of the Land League came from the Irish peasants who considered the land issue as the most vital issue of the day. While Land League leaders saw the movement as a necessay preliminary to national independence, the people were concerned first and foremost with the ownership of their land. To them the New Departure was a social revolt not a political one, and as long as the land question remained the main issue, than all classes and sections would remain united. In 1881, however, when the Land League was suppressed and the political issue came to the fore, the cohesiveness of the national movement began to disintegrate. To the peasants "the land for the people" was all that mattered, and although the movement gathered into it nationalists of all degrees, out of necessity until 1881, it had to keep its agrarian character.[195]

Between the years of 1879 and 1881 Irish nationalism, with its roots in the land movement, expressed itself in land agitation conducted under the auspices of the Land League. The words of Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell brought

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[194]Palmer, p. 130.

[195]Ibid, p. 131.

new hope to the once apathetic Irish peasants, who had come to believe that possibly at last here were leaders who could save them from their oppression. With the appearance of these two men on the same platform, pleading for the same cause, the people of Ireland were stirred to action--into waging a phenomenal campaign of successful agitation against the landlords of Ireland.[196]

By autumn of 1879 the anti-rent agitation had spread throughout all parts of Ireland. The pending economic crisis, a situation that threatened to be similar to that of 1846, made ready converts of the people. Weekly Sunday meetings beginning at Limerick on August 31, 1879 were attended with great enthusiasm. Peasants came for miles, and stood in large crowds eager to hear the speeches of the Land League organizers and Home Rule party members. It was apparent that the League was receiving the wholehearted support of the tenant farmers.[197]

On Sunday, October 12, 1879 a great meeting was held at Navan in County Meath. At this meeting Parnell was to announce his policy on the land question. According to the Dublin correspondent for The Times 20,000 or more were present. "Parnell," stated The Times, "was received with ringing cheers and waving of hats." During his speech Parnell declared that the multitude had not been equalled "since O'Connell addressed

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[196] Ibid, p. 136.

[197] Ibid, p. 138.

your forefathers on the Royal Hill of Tara." Reminding the people that O'Connell had obtained religious liberties, he stressed that now was the time for civil liberties to be won.[198] Parnell declared: "You never can have civil liberty as long as strangers and Englishmen make your laws for you and as long as the occupiers of the soil own not a single inch of it."[199] Parnell's reception was overwhelming, thus demonstrating at once his popularity, and moreover the determination of the Irish people to stand behind their great cause.[200]

The situation in Ireland was greatly altered with the rise of the Land League. Until its formation the tenants of Ireland had no way to combine and resist the actions of their landlords. In 1879, however, they discovered a powerful organization under able leadership, ready to take up their cause and fight for them. They joined the League in large numbers, enticed by its resolution to destroy landlordism and win the land for the people by non-violent means. As the League grew it became more radical, moving toward its avowed aims. Its tremendous strength and power was derived only from the support of the Irish peasants, for it championed their cause, aided in relieving their miseries and attacked the landlords--their bitterest enemies. Being restrained by a powerful organization, the landlords of Ireland were no longer able to enjoy their rights while neglecting their duties without

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[198] Times (London), 13 October 1879, p. 10.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Palmer, p. 139.

protest; and they could no longer raise rents or evict as they desired. Through the Land League the peasants of Ireland could meet their landlords on equal terms.[201]

By the end of 1879 the League had grown rapidly in strength and membership. With the exception of parts of Ulster, the League's influence penetrated throughout all of Ireland. Leagues were formed locally in almost every town, village and city, and branches of the League were organized in the United States, Australia, Canada and England. All the outside branches, especially the one in America, supported the League in Ireland with generous financial contributions. It seemed that at last Irishmen from all over the world had united behind the one great cause.[202]

The first year of land agitation proved to be well-ordered and peaceful, with the minimal amount of physical violence. In March of 1880 the focal point of the agitation was on the general election. League organizers and speakers traveled the country urging farmers to return candidates sympathetic to it. A manifesto was presented on March 12 to the farmers of Ireland declaring that a vote for a landlord candidate meant a vote for hunger, famine and oppression. The people were urged to vote against their oppressors. As was to be expected the manifesto set the tone for the election. Home Rule, as a political issue, was kept in the background,

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[201] Annual Register, 1881, p. 202.

[202] Palmer, p. 144.

and the land question was brought to the fore. The election of 1880 was an overwhelming success for the League, a victory which according to Michael Davitt foretold the political doom of Irish landlordism.[203]

After the election the League once again continued to direct its efforts toward land agitation. During the summer of 1880 land meetings were held almost every Sunday. At this time the agitation was becoming more violent as well as intense. By July the condition of Ireland was becoming exceedingly grave, and to a great extent the blame for worsening conditions could be placed on the English House of Lords.

When Gladstone came to power once again in 1880, he was unaware of the real meaning of the increasing agitation in Ireland. Like most Englishmen, he was ignorant of the true character and strength of the Land League as well as the extent of Irish distress. In 1884 Gladstone admitted: "I did not know, no one knew, the severity of the crisis that was already swelling upon the horizon, and that shortly after rushed upon us like a flood."[204] By the beginning of June 1880 it became apparent that action on the part of the Government was imperative since land agitation increased in strength and in violence.[205]

As the situation worsened, Ireland became the major topic of discussion in Parliament. The proposed solution to

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[203]Davitt, p. 239.

[204]John Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, 3 vols. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1904), III, 47.

[205]Palmer, p. 153.

the problem was embodied in an act entitled the Compensation for Disturbance Bill. It was introduced in the House of Commons on June 18 by W. E. Forster, the new chief secretary of Ireland. The measure was to be a temporary one designed to meet the needs of the moment and to protect the Irish farmers in times of distress. According to the act the county court judges could order a landlord to compensate a tenant upon eviction due to non-payment of rent if the tenant proved that he was unable to pay his rent because of economic conditions. The purpose of the act was to prevent the landlord from taking advantage of a tenant whose rent was in arrears due to the result of crop failures; and it applied only to those districts in the South and in the West where the distress was most acute. Futhermore, the act was to remain in effect only until the end of 1881.[206]

The bill was not looked upon favorably by either Gladstone's supporters, who felt it to be a violation of the sacred rights of property, or by Parnell and other nationalists in Parliament who felt that the act was too feeble an attempt to cope with conditions in Ireland. Still, the bill, after much debate, was passed in the House of Commons, only to be defeated in the House of Lords. The conservative press, both in Ireland and England, applauded the action of the upper house.[207]

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[206] Ibid, p. 154.

[207] Ibid, pp. 154, 155.

By rejecting the bill, the Government indicated to the Irish party that they were incapable of dealing with the situation; and the people now more than ever, unequivocally supported the Land League. As the year progressed, agrarian crimes became more numerous, although both Parnell and Davitt attempted to restrain such action. Before the year was over the peasants would declare "war to the knife" against landlordism. Until that occurred, however, there was a calm interval when the League continued to extend its influence.[208]

By mid-September the tranquil period closed. When the Parliamentary session was at an end, the Irish representatives, most of whom were Land League supporters, returned to Ireland to aid in the agrarian revolt. On September 19 the most important meeting of the Land League campaign took place at Navan, County Meath. Parnell and other members of the Home Rule party were present, arriving at four o'clock in the morning. In spite of the early hour, Parnell was greeted by thousands of people holding torches and singing nationalist songs. The ride to his hotel was like a triumphal march with his followers carrying placards upon which such suggestions were written as: "Parnell gave the praties, not the landlords"; "The people's rights"; The two P's--Parnell and the People."[209] From the balcony of his hotel Parnell addressed the crowd, delivering what has been termed his "Moral Coventry" advice. This advice,

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[208] Ibid, p. 155.

[209] Times (London), 20 September 1880, p. 6.

soon to become a major tactic of land agitation, was first put dramatically to use in the case of Captain Boycott of County Mayo. In his address Parnell told his followers:

> Now, what do you do to a tenant who bids for a farm from which another tenant has been evicted? (voices "Shoot him") I think I heard somebody say "shoot him". I wish to point out a very much better way, a more Christian and charitable way, which will give the lost sinner an opportunity of repenting. When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted, you must shun him on the roadside when you meet him, you must shun him in the streets of the town, you must shun him in the fairgreen and in the market place, and even in the place of worship. By leaving him severely alone, by putting him in a moral convent, by isolating him from the rest of his countrymen, as if he were a leper of old, you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed. If you do this you may depend upon it that there will be no man so full of avarice, so lost to shame as to dare public opinion of all right thinking men in the country and transgress your unwritten code of laws.[210]

As agrarian crime became more rampant with the killing of landlords or their agents and the destruction of property, the conservative newspapers bitterly attacked the League and warned the Government about its tremendous strength. The Irish World declared that the land agitation had reached such a stage that its power had to be acknowledged by its friends and enemies alike, and that it had instilled in the Irish people a will to act that had never been seen before in Ireland. If the Irish people persevered, The Irish World predicted, the year of 1880 would be to Ireland what 1776 was to America, the year that marked the beginning of the people's liberty.[211]

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[210] Ibid.

[211] The Irish World (New York), 23 October 1880, quoted in Palmer, pp. 164, 165.

Although land agitation was mainly responsible for the agrarian crime, it must be pointed out that neither Davitt nor Parnell condoned the violence; in fact both spoke out against the acts of revenge. Despite the agrarian crime, the League continued to grow and meetings were held throughout Ireland. By this time League spokesmen even entered Ulster and were winning support in many counties there.[212]

On November 5 two large meetings were held in Ulster to protest the penetration of the League into that county. In response the League held a series a huge demonstrations on Sunday November 9. Over 10,000 people gathered at Althone to hear Parnell and T. D. Sullivan, and at Killaloe a crowd numbering from 10,000 to 20,000 met to hear other spokesmen of the League. The success of the land meetings in the North was a unique triumph for the Land League, for never before in Irish history had Ulstermen joined forces with Catholics and nationalists as they did in the cause of land ownership.[213]

The English Government was bitterly attacked for not taking stronger measures against agrarian crime. In those areas where the League was in control, however, governmental control was replaced by that of the Land League. It was true that in these areas, mainly the West and South, there was considerable lawlessness; but there was no real anarchy, since anarchy implies the absence of power. The League did much to curb crime in County Galway and County Mayo, and within those

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[212] Palmer, p. 166.

[213] Ibid.

areas the orders of the League were usually obeyed.[214]

Undoubtedly, the year of 1880 had been one of the most troubled in Ireland's history. Economic distress and land agitation, which characterized the first months, provided a basis for the increase in violence that occurred throughout the year. During the last months of the year, the land agitation had greatly increased; and the Land League, with its power and influence extended throughout the country, became the most powerful revolutionary force that Ireland had ever known. Due to the power of the agrarian revolt and to the frantic pleas of the owners of property, the Government resorted to various types of protective measures. English troops were stationed in troubled areas and police on horseback patrolled the countryside. Landlords and their agents were under surveillence and protection. Yet, no matter how many troops and special forces were sent to Ireland, nothing could put an end to the violence. It was apparent that Parnell was correct when he stated that if 5,000 tenant farmers of Ireland launched an attack against 10,000 landlords, the Government could not provide enough troops to stop the revolt. The war against landlordism had arrived, and its outcome as yet could not be predicted.[215]

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[214] Ibid, p. 168.

[215] Ibid, pp. 173, 174.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE LAND WAR IN IRELAND

During the last year of the Land League's existence the Government not only increased its efforts to control the agrarian violence, but also passed a land bill that weakened the League both from within and without. Yet, the work it had begun in land agitation, the awakening of true nationalism which it had provoked and the sense of power and unity which it gave to the Irish people, survived it in various degrees well into the twentieth century.

As the year of 1881 opened it found the League still reigning supreme. The situation in Ireland was such that it appeared as if the country were on the verge of open revolt against English rule. Early in January Lord Beaconsfield asked the Parliament:

> What is the state of Ireland at the present moment? I think I am not using exaggerated language when I say that in Ireland the sovereignty of the Queen has been absolutely, in portions of the island, suspended, . . .the administration of justice has altogether ceased. . . .the laws, the Queen's law, is no longer respected.[216]

Although in the opinion of the Government, the Land League agitation was both violent and lawless, perhaps if it had been otherwise the League would not have achieved what it

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[216] Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 3rd series, 257 (1881): 21.

did. All Land League leaders from Parnell down denounced the landlords and the Government. While the English press described Parnell's speeches as disguised incitements to outrage, his utterances were mild compared with those of other Land League leaders. Although it was true that many of the addresses delivered by League spokesmen stimulated the criminal acts, the accusation that the Land League policy actually encouraged the use of violence is unfounded.[217]

As the year of 1880 drew to a close and agrarian crime was running rampant, Michael Davitt took a firm stand against the agrarian outrages and deliberately began an anti-crime crusade. Travelling throughout the country, he pointed out the futility of violence as compared with the approved technique of social ostracism.[218] He declared that no risk of unpopularity or adverse criticism would prevent him from speaking out against that violence which, in his opinion, only served to strengthen the hold of the landlords and alienate those people throughout the world who had given so much moral support to the League's great cause.[219] He said:

> Nothing tends to injure our cause with the American people so much as the occasional acts of violence which injustice prompts some to commit in parts of the country. . . Let the world see that we have higher gains in sight and nobler objects in view than stooping to war on any miserable individual while the system that makes him the instrument of

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[217] Pomfret, p. 148.

[218] Michael O'Hara, Chief and Tribune, Parnell and Davitt (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1919), p. 151.

[219] Ibid, p. 149.

> tyranny still stands upon our shores and frowns upon the happiness and prosperity of our nation.[220]

In spite of Davitt's efforts it was utterly impossible for the League to prevent acts of violence. It was the opinion of most Englishmen that the Land League was responsible for the crimes that occurred in Ireland during the years of land agitation. Davitt, on the other hand, held that if it had not been for the actions of the League in sheltering and feeding the evicted, crime would have flourished to unprecedented heights throughout the country. It was apparent that as the League grew in numbers, it became exceedingly difficult to control all its branches, especially in the more remote areas.[221]

On October 23, 1880, the Government announced that it planned to prosecute fourteen of the League's leaders and spokesmen including Parnell, Dillon, Biggar, Sexton, Egan and Brennan. The charges brought against them included: conspiring to prevent the payment of rent and to prevent the letting of land from which tenants have been evicted, and creating hostilities between the landowners and farmers. The Government gained nothing from these State prosecutions since the case against the League depended entirely upon speeches delivered by League spokesmen in various parts of Ireland, and upon various mottoes, phrases and legends written upon banners carried at demonstrations. The League had the right to examine

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[220] Quoted in O'Hara, pp. 148, 149.

[221] Pomfret, p. 148.

an unlimited number of witnesses on its behalf, which it gladly did. As was expected, the jury was unable to agree. The hearings resulted in a victory for the League and served to consolidate its strength rather than to aid the Government.[222]

The Government began the year of 1881 by introducing on January 24 the Coercion Act. The measure was extremely severe but the provisions were quite simple. Suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, the measure gave the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland the authority to issue a warrant for the arrest of anyone suspected of agrarian crimes or treasonable offenses. Such a person was to be detained as an unconvicted prisoner and to be held in custody for a period not to exceed any time after September 22, 1882.[223]

As was to be expected, the Irish members of Parliament resisted the measure and proposed numerous amendments in an attempt to block its passage. One sitting lasted twenty-two hours, while a second, surpassing all parliamentary annals, lasted over forty-one hours. Irish members were frequently suspended, and on one occasion thirty-six members were removed. The measure passed, however, and then the Government turned its attention to land reform and the drafting of the Land Act of 1881.[224]

The Irish Land Act of 1881 was declared by Gladstone to be "probably the most important measure introduced into

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[222] Ibid, p. 151.

[223] Ibid, p. 155.

[224] Ibid, p. 156.

the House of Commons since the passing of the Reform Bill."[225] He indicated the impact that the Land League agitation had had on the measure by saying in the session of 1893: "I must make one admission and that is that without the Land League, the Land Act of 1881, would not now be on the statute book."[226]

The drafting of the bill was mainly the work of Gladstone who based the provisions of the bill upon the inadequate Land Act of 1870 which had embodied what Isaac Butt termed the "Three F's"--free sale, fixity of tenure and fair rent. According to the provisions of the act, which was passed in August, 1881, land courts were created and given the power to fix a judical rent, standing for a period of fifteen years. Rent was to be agreed upon voluntarily by both the landlord and tenant. By these provisions the Act of 1881 had established a system of dual ownership, reducing the landlord to a mere receiver of rent. Furthermore, the act contained a provision for land purchase. A land commission was empowered to advance to the tenant up to three-fourths the purchase price which could be repaid in annuities of five per cent over a period of thirty-five years.[227] This financial assistance given by the Government, however, was not enough to attract many tenants, most of whom were unable to raise the necessary capital. Only a few hundred farms were bought under the provisions of the act during its first months of operation.[228]

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[225] Annual Register, 1881, p. 78.

[226] Quoted in O'Brien, I, 293.

[227] Great Britain, Laws, Statutes, etc., Land Act, 1881, 44 & 45 Vict., ch. 49.

[228] Beckett, p. 394.

If the Government had any hope of obtaining peace with the passage of the act they were soon disappointed, for Parnell refused to accept it. The act had placed him in an awkward position. He could not openly praise it without antagonizing his radical American supporters, but at the same time he could not completely reject it without arousing the anger of the Irish people. He decided at this point to "test" the act. On selected estates certain tenants were directed to apply for fixed rents according to the terms of the act. In doing this Parnell hoped to detect publicly any defects of the act and to emphasize the need for amendments before any tenants should be bound by the terms of the fifteen year contract.[229]

At the Land League convention of September 14 a proposal to admininster the land act was promptly accepted. The League resolved once more to achieve national self-government for Ireland, to win the complete liberation of the land for the people, to forbid tenants to use the rent fixing clauses of the act of 1881 and encourage them to rely on the old, approved methods of obtaining justice instead of violence. Authority was given to the executives of the League to select test cases so that the tenants might be made to realize by the results of the tests cases, the futility of the act.[230]

Responding to the League's program it became the Government's policy to try to win the Irish people away from

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[229] O'Brien, I, 304, 305.

[230] Davitt, pp. 331, 332.

their leaders by patient administration. After the action of the Land League convention became known Gladstone, on the advice of Forster, publicly warned Parnell. He denounced Parnell for arousing social discontent, for pursuing a policy of hatred of England and for attempting to urge people to test the act, not use it.[231] In one of his famous speeches, the Prime Minister expressed his disappointment in the Irish people, especially the landowning classes, who appeared both incapable and unwilling to help themselves. Gladstone promised the Irish people that he would not use force to calm Ireland if it could be prevented. He stated: "In the great crisis we depend on the good sense of the people, and we are determined that no force, and no fear of force, shall prevent the Irish people from having the full and free benefit of the Land Act.[232] Yet, he reminded the people that violence, if necessary, would be met with violence.[233] Parnell answered the Prime Minister with an address full of sarcasm and defiance. Comparing Gladstone's threat with the whistle of a small boy to keep up his courage while passing a churchyard at night, Parnell told his followers that Gladstone was prepared to destroy them if they did not humbly abase themselves before the English Government and landlords.[234]

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[231] Annual Register, 1881, pp. 187, 188.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid.

[234] O'Hara, pp. 184, 185.

Believing that Parnell was deliberately attempting to destroy the act, the Government decided to arrest him on October 12, 1881 under the provisions of the coercion act. On the following day Parnell, along with the other League leaders, began his internment at Kilmainham Jail. The Government soon discovered, however, that it had made a grave mistake. Parnell's arrest had increased his prestige in both Ireland and America. Furthermore, his internment did nothing to hasten the acceptance of the land act.[235] The reply of the Land League was a "no-rent manifesto" issued on October 18. A document circulated by the League stated that since it was forced to abandoned its policy to test the act, it felt that its duty was now to advise the tenant farmers, "to pay no rent under any circumstances to their landlords until the government relinquishes the existing system of terrorism and restores the constitutional rights of the people. Do not be daunted by the removal of your leaders."[236]

After the "no-rent manifesto" was issued the Government dissolved the Land League, declaring it to be an unlawful and criminal organization. All its meetings and assemblies were likewise declared unlawful, and were to be prevented or dispersed by force if necessary.[237] The League struggled desperately to maintain its authority, but the Government had the advantage. With its leaders in prison and its public meetings

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[235]Beckett, p. 392.

[236]Davitt, pp. 335, 336.

[237]Ibid, pp. 338, 339.

prohibited, the resistance of the League was broken. Tenants, fearing that they might lose their holdings, disobeyed the manifesto. A more serious blow was dealt by the Church when Dr. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, and an ardent supporter of the Land League, condemned the manifesto. Thus, the League failed to gain the universal support for the manifesto which it desired.[238]

As the last resort League leaders called in the Ladies' Land League, a body which had been founded by Davitt early in 1881 to aid the evicted tenants with food and lodging. Even though Parnell's sister, Anna, was at the head of the organization, he and others felt that this move was a dangerous one.[239] Davitt believed otherwise, insisting that the group served a useful purpose. The Ladies' Land League conducted boycotting and other activities after the suppression of the Land League. From Paris, Patrick Egan kept the ladies well supplied with money coming from America. Forster, who did not want to incarcerate hundreds of hysterical Irish women, did the only thing he felt could be done and sent more troops into Ireland.[240]

The amazing events of October, 1881 marked the end of the Land League in Ireland. Weakened by internal defection and persecuted by the Government, the League disappeared from the scene. With its demise, however, there occurred a new

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[238]Pomfret, p. 177.

[239]Davitt, p. 299.

[240]Pomfret, p. 177.

wave of agrarian crime. Whatever might have been the opinion of the Government, it became apparent that without the League the violence increased. During its reign, the League had been able to keep the violence in check; after its suppression, agrarian outrages grew in number and increased in intensity.[241]

The increase in violence proved to be as much of a threat to Parnell as it was to the Government, for Parnell feared that the delicate combination on which the New Departure policy rested might be upset if the extremists took control. By the spring of 1882 both Parnell and the Government realized that a compromise was necessary. In April of that year they came to an agreement known as the Kilmainham Treaty. The terms of the "treaty" were: first, Parnell was to be released; then coercion in Ireland was to be relaxed and the land act amended to deal with the problem of arrears. This was the one point on which Parnell was emphatic. The tenants in arrears would have to be given the protection of the Government from eviction by their landlords, and in return Parnell would use all his influence to calm the country and to secure an acceptance of the land bill.[242]

Many of Parnell's followers and allies, especially in America, regarded the Kilmainham Treaty as a surrender to the British Government, and he might have found it difficult to maintain his leadership had it not been for a startling event

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[241] Palmer, p. 306.

[242] Beckett, p. 392.

that captured public attention. This event was the Phoenix Park murders. In May, 1882, Lord Frederick Cavendish, newly appointed successor to Forster as chief secretary and T. H. Burke, the under secretary, were murdered in the Park by a group calling themselves "the Invincibles". This body of terrorists had no connection with the Land League, but Parnell was so horrified by the crime that he seriously considered retiring from public life. It was only due to the combined persuasive efforts of Davitt, Joseph Chamberlain and Gladstone himself that Parnell decided to stay in politics.[243]

The Phoenix Park murders in the end turned to Parnell's advantage. By sincerely denouncing the crime, he made a good impression on the British; and, in Ireland, the Kilmainham Treaty was completely overshadowed by the murders. By angrily criticizing the Government's new coercion bill, the direct result of the murders, Parnell was able to re-establish his position as champion of Irish rights.[244] His popularity was so high that he was also able to resist all demands to revive the Land League. At this point Parnell's main interest ceased to be that of the land issue and turned instead to Home Rule. The Land League had provided him with strong national support and loyal, active followers which gave him the candidates needed for a strong parliamentary party. Furthermore, the land agitation had arrested the attention of the British Government, putting Parnell in an influential political position. Parnell

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[243] Ibid, pp. 392, 393.

[244] Ibid, p. 393.

now felt that the League had accomplished all it could for Ireland. With economic distress on the decline and the Land Act in effect, Parnell questioned its utility.[245]

But in abandoning the fighting tactics of the League, Parnell feared he might lose the moral and financial support of the Americans. His position had been greatly damaged in that country by the Kilmainham Treaty, which had been denounced by the Americans as "the sale of the Land League".[246] Not wanting to jeopardize his position with the Americans any further, Parnell sent Michael Davitt, the ablest man for the mission, to the United States to explain his stand and regain as much support as possible.[247]

Davitt found the American Land League divided over the Kilmainham Treaty issue. He was able to reconcile the two factions with each other and with Parnell, however, by resolving to invite Parnell and other Irish leaders to a conference to consider the formation of a Pan-Celtic confederation whose main aim it would be to settle the question of land ownership and self-government. Thus, Davitt succeeded in maintaining the support of the Irish-Americans, and in October, 1882 he returned to Ireland.[248]

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[245]Pomfret, p. 187.

[246]Beckett, p. 392.

[247]Pomfret, pp. 189, 190.

[248]Beckett, p. 393.

Upon his arrival, Davitt was invited by Parnell to join him and other nationalists at Avondale, Parnell's ancestral home in County Wicklow, for the purpose of forming a new organization to be known as the National League. This organization of which Parnell was the head, was a purely political one, closely linked to the parliamentary party and firmly under his control.[249] Although the main aim of the National League was to create a strong political party and to obtain self-government for Ireland, there were some provisions made at the meeting regarding the land question since Parnell knew that he would lose a great deal of support if he abandoned it completely. He requested that the land question be treated strictly on a parliamentary basis and that Michael Davitt refrain from raising any rival land issue. Davitt and others readily agreed to Parnell's proposals.[250]

One must take notice at this point of Davitt's remarkable loyalty to Parnell. It is no exaggeration to say that Davitt, unlike countless other Irishmen involved in revolutionary activities, was willing at all times to sacrifice personal ambition and submerge personal views for the good of Ireland. At this time, Davitt had immense influence on the Irish-Americans. John Pomfret, author of The Struggle for Land in Ireland, states that Davitt could have won their support and placed himself at the head of an anti-Parnellite movement, thus

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[249] Davitt, p. 368.

[250] Pomfret, pp. 191, 192.

splitting Irish unity asunder; or he could have refused to support any land program that did not include land nationalization, an economic theory of great importance to him. But Michael Davitt did none of these things and Irish unity remained intact; his patriotism and his desire for Irish independence were of the finest and strongest type.[251]

The National League marked the beginning of a tactical change for Parnell. Although he had a strong party in 1882, it still continued to lack effective discipline. With the founding of the new League, Parnell was able to control the choice of candidates and to enforce party discipline by insisting that each candidate take a pledge which bound him, if elected, to vote and act with the Irish Parliamentary Party and to resign his seat if the party felt that he had failed to fulfil his pledge.[252]

From 1884 to 1890 Parnell and his Irish party wielded considerable force and influence in British political affairs. In the election of 1884 both the Liberals and Conservatives were anxious to obtain the powerful Irish vote. In Ireland the election was an overwhelming victory for Parnell. Home Rule candidates won eighty-five seats, including seventeen out of thirty-five in Ulster, forming a solid and well disciplined party which held the balance of power in the House of Commons.[253]

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[251] Ibid.

[252] Beckett, p. 393.

[253] Ibid, p. 400.

Even before Gladstone's government came into power in 1884, the Prime Minister had become convinced that home rule for Ireland was inevitable. For two years he attempted to persuade his party to grant self-government to Ireland, but his first Home Rule bill of 1886 was defeated. Parnell's position and prestige in Parliament and in Ireland were hardly affected by the collapse of the bill, for his achievements in Parliament were remarkable for an Irishman. In a short time he had made an alliance with the Liberals which assured ultimate success for Home Rule. His Home Rule movement was stronger than ever, and he was still looked upon in Ireland as the champion of Irish rights against English tyranny.[254]

His political skill was tested at the end of 1886. Another bad season in Ireland had threatened the farmers with economic hardship, and there was a demand throughout Ireland that rents fixed under the Land Act of 1881 should be further reduced. Many landlords, however, refused to do that and began evicting those who fell into arrears. To cope with this new outbreak of eviction, the National League formed the "Plan of Campaign". According to this scheme, tenants on certain estates were encouraged to act as a group and offer the landlord a reduced rent. If the landlords refused to accept this offer, the tenants were not to pay their rents at all, but instead were to put their money into a fund for the evicted. Members of Parnell's party, including John Dillon and William

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[254] Ibid, p. 401.

O'Brien, were the main organizers of the scheme. Parnell, although fighting for tenants' rights in Parliament, remained aloof. The Conservatives attempted to deal with the "Plan of Campaign" by a coercive measure, but they were fiercely denounced by both Irish and Liberal members of Parliament.[255]

By 1890 Parnell had attained a high level of political respectability in the eyes of the British public, while his immense prestige in Ireland and America had not been altered. With Conservative Government ousted in 1892 and the Liberals once again in power, Home Rule appeared to be inevitable and Parnell to be indestructible. Yet, before the year was out Parnell's political career was ended and his party totally shattered.

The reason for this sudden reversal stemmed from Parnell's private life. For years he had engaged in a liaison with Katherine O'Shea, the wife of one of his followers. In 1890 her husband, Captain O'Shea, filed for a divorce and named Parnell as correspondent, an accusation that Parnell did not refute. The result was political disaster. In Victorian England Gladstone was immediately pressured by his party to break the alliance with the Irish as long as Parnell remained their leader. The Irish reaction was different. On November 25, before the Irish members were aware of Gladstone's views that the Liberal party would not advocate Home Rule or support the Irish party while Parnell was at its head, the party met at Westminster to re-elect Parnell as its chairman. Hearing

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[255] Ibid, p. 402.

of Gladstone's decision, the majority of Irish members changed their position and asked Parnell to resign. On December 1 the Irish party met in Committee Room 15 in the House of Commons to determine Parnell's fate. By December 6 no decision had been reached. At this point, Justin McCarthy, vice-chairman of the party, called upon those who agreed with him that Parnell should resign to leave the meeting; forty-three members left with McCarthy, while only twenty-seven remained with Parnell.[256]

From every corner Parnell was urged to resign, but he was determined to remain in power. With only one-third of his party supporting him, he carried on an extensive campaign in Ireland. The Irish people were divided and confused; but the influential Roman Catholic clergy was against Parnell, and for Ireland it was his morality rather than his political policy that was the issue. He was poorly received in his own country, and in the by-election of North Kilkenny, the once "Uncrowned King of Ireland" was pelted with mud. Parnell's health gave way due to incessant travelling and speaking, but he would not give up his campaign. Finally, on October 2, 1891, Parnell collapsed and four days later at the age of forty-five he died.[257]

Although the achievement of Home Rule was Parnell's primary concern during the last years of his political career, he had not totally abandoned the land issue, and up until 1890

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[256] Ibid, p. 403.

[257] Ibid.

he aided in the passage of new land acts. Most of the measures passed between the years of 1881 and 1903 were not of great importance. Some were put into law, especially by the Conservatives, mainly for the purpose of pacifying Ireland. Until 1903 the primary feature of the acts was that they reinforced the concept of dual ownership, the main provision of the Land Act of 1881.

Dual ownership did not resolve the Irish land question but it did represent a stage in the emancipation of the tenant farmer from economic servitude. Neither Davitt nor Parnell was satisfied with the provisions of the Land Act of 1881. The main criticism of dual ownership and thus of the Land Act of 1881 was that it did not and could not bring prosperity to the Irish. On the other hand, the adoption of its concept had abolished forever the absolute power of the Irish landlords, which had been the main reason for the land agitation.[258]

By 1903 the English Government was ready and willing to put into effect the great Wyndham Land Bill. This act, like the Land Act of 1881, would never have been proposed had it not been for the Land League. It could be said that it marked the achievement of the long-sought goal of the land agitation, for the passage of the bill marked the beginning of the end of landlordism in Ireland and gave the people what they desired most, the ownership of the soil.

The land purchase act of 1903 was the work of the chief secretary, George Wyndham. Wyndham, examining the Irish question

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[258] Annual Register, 1881, p. 216.

closely before drafting the bill, believed that the establishment of free trade in Ireland was an impossibility due to the agrarian nature of the country. He saw that the low standard of living, coupled with the periods of economic distress, was conducive to agrarian crime and disruption.[259] To Wyndham, the Government was the only agency that could rectify the situation. Dual ownership had not solved the problem, since there was a reluctance on the part of both the landlords and the tenants to invest the money in the land. Furthermore, believed Wyndham, dual ownership imposed financial burdens upon the State because it had to provide for land commissions to administer the land act and a police force to deal with agrarian unrest in Ireland.[260] After his examination of the situation Wyndham concluded that the only solution to the problem was the extention of the land purchasing system. Without the State's aid 80,000 peasants had already become landowners. The Government had much to gain by extending the land purchase since with the increase of single proprietorships, the social disorders had decreased saving substantial sums of money.[261]

To avoid financial difficulty land purchase was to proceed by the transfer of whole estates. The landlords were not required to sell all their property--only that land occupied by tenants. Many Irish landlords faced financial ruin and

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[259] Pomfret, p. 291.

[260] Ibid, p. 292.

[261] Ibid.

were willing to sell out. To induce them to sell quickly, Wyndham proposed to give them a cash bonus of £12,000,000. Money to purchase the land would be loaned to the people to be repaid in annuity payments of three and one-fourth per cent over a period of sixty-eight years.[262]

Wyndham's bill met with immediate success and approval of the Irish people. Once the occupiers of the soil became the owners of the soil, they proved to be an industrious and productive people. Improvements were made on the land, and subdivision and subletting almost ceased to exist. Anxiety about the future had passed, agrarian crime abated and contentment pervaded the new landowning class.[263]

Ironically, the only real opposition to the Wyndham bill came from former Land League leaders. Michael Davitt's opposition can be explained by his fanatical adherence to the principle of land nationalization, a concept the people neither cared for nor understood. John Dillon and Thomas Sexton, still members of Parliament, felt that the settlement of the land question would undermine the demand for Home Rule.[264] Wyndham's bill was passed without any real difficulties, and after being in effect for less than ten years, it effected the destruction of landlordism in Ireland. At last the land of Ireland belonged to the people of Ireland.

It was James Fintan Lalor who first struck upon the revolutionary idea that the most effective basis of Irish

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[262] Ibid, pp. 293, 294.

[263] Ibid, p. 297.

[264] Ibid, p. 299.

nationalism was the land. Inspired by Lalor's writings, Michael Davitt founded his Land League in 1879, and the agitation it conducted proved that Lalor's contention was true. Between the years of 1879 and 1881 there thus existed an all-encompassing national movement that stirred the deepest interests, passions and desires of the Irish people. The land movement was a real national movement simply because it was based on the issue of land ownership, an issue which the Irish people understood completely and one for which they would sacrifice everything. Furthermore, it was a movement which won the support and sympathy of Irishmen throughout the world. The quest for land ownership and the possibility of achieving self-government, a goal which many believed could be obtained once the people of Ireland owned their land, had a unifying effect on a country cursed with disunity. Tenant farmers, clergymen, Catholics and Protestants, physical force men and Irish members of Parliament all united behind the cause of the Land League.

The land movement had as its outstanding leaders Michael Davitt, the founder of the Land League and a devout advocate of Irish independence and Charles Stewart Parnell, one of the most prominent political figures on the late nineteenth century. The activities of Davitt's Land League were of such importance and dimension that the political leader of Ireland found the issue impossible to ignore. Davitt's League provided Parnell with strong, popular support and loyal followers. The agitation conducted by the League placed the Irish problem in the center of British affairs, giving Parnell the

opportunity to fight for Ireland's right to home rule. Davitt, Parnell and other leaders, many of whom were also members of Parliament, hoped to achieve independence by linking the land question with that of self-government. It would appear that without the aid of the Land League Parnell's task in Parliament would have been far more difficult, if not impossible. Landlordism was Ireland's bitterest enemy and, as Davitt pointed out, England's garrison in Ireland. One wonders if the fight for Irish independence could have been waged successfully without its destruction and without the tenants being freed from their economic oppression.

The land agitation conducted by the League resulted in the passage of land bills which in the end freed the people of Ireland from their social miseries and established them as owners of the soil. In addition to winning the land for the Irish, the League instilled in the people a new sense of unity and power. The League organized Ireland and regained the soil; now Ireland was prepared to fight for independence.

In the twentieth century with the land war won and the Home Rule movement at a lull, there appeared to exist a political gap. This gap was soon filled by a new, more aggressive nationalism, a nationalism that resulted in the events of 1916.

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