

## **Oughterard and Kilannin: The Land League (1879-82)**

Please check the following page(s) for clarification. Issues are highlighted in [red] in the transcribed text.

### **Michael Davitt (1846-1906)**

Davitt, founder of the Land League, was the son of an evicted Mayo tenant. He was imprisoned for fifteen years in 1870 on charges of Fenian conspiracy in England. Released from Dartmoor prison in 1877 on 'ticket of leave', he returned to Ireland.

He staged a mass meeting at Irishtown, Co. Mayo, on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1879. This demonstration was called to protest against excessive rents and was attended by over 10,000. Other large meetings followed and the movement quickly spread from Mayo to Connaught and then throughout the country.

The Irish National Land League was founded in Dublin on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1879, with C. S. Parnell as its president. The objects of the Land League were 1) to reduce rack rents and 2) to obtain the ownership of the soil by its occupiers, i.e. tenant ownership.

During the Land War (1879-82), Davitt wrote that the landlords were

“a brood of cormorant vampires that has sucked the life blood out of the country.”

The Land League was a non-violent mass movement but it used the methods of publicity, moral intimidation and boycott against landlords and land grabbers who broke the Land League code.

This popular movement achieved a remarkable degree of success. Within a generation of its founding, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the tenant farmers of Ireland had become owners of their farms and the landlord system, which had dominated Ireland for centuries, had been ended.

### **An Agricultural Crisis**

An agricultural depression began in 1877, which was especially bad in Connaught. There were three successive bad harvests and blight had spread to the potato crop. Starvation loomed in the west of Ireland and recalled the conditions of the Famine and 'Black '47'. Many smallholders faced famine.

There was a steep fall in the prices of all farming produce, including livestock. Evictions more than doubled in 1878 and 1879, and the tenants were unable to pay the rents. At this time, tens of thousands of peasants in the west of Ireland lived on the margin of subsistence.

### **Fr. Patrick Coyne p.p., Kilannin**

There is much remembered locally about Fr. Coyne and the Kilannin dispute or 'schism' of 1890-95, when he objected to Kilannin parish being transferred from the archdiocese of Tuam to the diocese of Galway. In this dispute, he was supported by a large, loyal section of his parish but lost his case in the end.

Less may be known about him as a patriot, an avowed enemy of landlordism and a leader of the Land League in his parish and beyond during the Land War of the 1870s onwards.

Fr. Coyne was appointed parish priest of Kilannin parish, archdiocese of Tuam, in 1875. This was the year of the Berridge evictions in Garrynaghry, a townland in Kilannin, during the course of which an old man had died when evicted from his home. About the same time, the whole of the townland of Porridgetown was evicted by the agent of Robert Martin of Ross House, Kilannin, some for long periods. Fr. Coyne had them eventually restored to their houses and lands. In addition, he had cottages built to shelter families who had been evicted from their land in the parish.

In 1878, he established a Tenant Defence Association in the parish. It had 400 members and weekly meetings were held, presided over by Fr. Coyne. By 1879, it had a thousand members.

From 1878, Fr. Coyne was leader of the land agitation, loyally backed by his people. Persons evicted from their holdings were restored through his efforts, in his own parish and in neighbouring parishes. It is probable that the strong and loyal support he received during the later dispute over the transfer of the parish from Tuam to Galway diocese was due to his activity on their behalf during the Land League period.

#### **The Local Landlords (1876)**

Robert Martin – Ross House. 5,767 acres.

James E. Jackson - Kilaguile. 1,062 acres.

Richard Berridge – Ballinahinch and Oughterard. 171,117 acres.

Theobold O'Flahertie – Lemonfield. 2,340 acres.

George E. Burke – Danesfield, Moycullen. 2,480 acres.

Joseph Fitzpatrick – Knockbane House, Moycullen. 1,522 acres.

Richard Berridge, who had become the owner of the former Martin estate in 1872, was the largest landowner in Ireland or England. He had a large estate in the three parishes of the barony of Moycullen, of over 80,000 acres. During the Land War, he was generally an absentee and his estate was run by his land agent, George T. Robinson.

Most of the estate of the Martins of Ross was in the parish of Kilannin. In 1872, the Martin family left Ross due to debts and did not return until 1888. They thus avoided most of the agitation of the Land War. Their agent pursued a policy which led to opposition and evictions of their tenants.

James Jackson, a local landlord of Kilaguile, was an agent of Robert Martin, who was often absent from his estate, as he worked as a journalist in London and Dublin. Jackson, on his own evidence to a commission in 1880, charged 40-50 per cent over the government valuation for his rents. He would evict tenants who refused to accept his terms. He said that he had been denounced by the tenant's priest, Fr. Coyne, for his harsh conduct towards his tenants since 1875.

#### **Public Meetings of the Land League (1878-81)**

In November 1878, a public meeting was held in Kilannin in protest against the evictions that were taking place in the parish. John Moloney, Park, was the chairman.

Fr. Coyne spoke, denounced the evictions, and described some pitiable scenes.

A poor old woman, unable to leave her bed, was dragged out on a mattress and left on the road.

An aged man, sick and feeble, to whom he had administered the last rites a few days before, was thrown out, covered with only a blanket, to the horror of all present. Public sympathy was aroused, a meeting was convened; the people defrayed the entire cost and the poor man was reinstated in his humble hut. But the agent returned and served notice to quit on him, not now for rent but for possession.

Five other wretched families, in arrears of rent, were

brought into the courts and saddled with a crippling load of rents. Sixty police were drafted into the peaceful hamlet. The entire cost of the five outcasts had been defrayed but the agent had returned and served notices to quit on them. They were still under threat of eviction twelve months later.

Between 1879 and 1881, a number of public meetings of the Land League took place in Kilannin and Oughterard, in which large crowds from all over the county attended. Fr. Coyne played a prominent part at these meetings. The reports of these meetings in the press and the resolutions passed are typical of what was taking place at Land League meetings throughout the country, especially in counties Mayo and Galway, and they show what the Land League stood for.

The fact that Michael Davitt, the founder of the Land League, attended and spoke at a public meeting in November, 1879, just a month after the Land League was officially founded, shows the high regard in which Fr. Coyne was held on the land issue. His house in the townland of Fahy, about two miles from Kilannin Chapel, was called 'Land League House', where he later said Mass and performed the sacraments during the dispute over the transfer of the parish.

One of the most interesting aspects of the meetings, which added colour to the occasions as reported in the local press, were the bands, banners, slogans, men on horseback and imitations of pikemen etc. The reaction of the people was given as 'A Voice from the Crowd'.

In the west of Ireland, the local clergy generally chaired the local branches of the Land League meetings and were very active on the land question.

#### Land League Meeting: The Rent Question – The Harvest

A very large meeting of the tenant farmers of the parishes of Moycullen, Oughterard and Kilannin was held on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1879, after last Mass. It is not clear from the press report whether the meeting was in Kilannin or Moycullen chapel yard.

The chairman was Fr. P. Coyne, p.p. and secretary of the Kilannin Tenant Defence Association. It was convened to call on the local landlords to reduce the rents, in view of the disastrous harvests after 1877. The landlords named were from the parish of Moycullen.

The following resolutions were unanimously adopted.

- Proposed by Timothy Kyne, Moycullen; seconded by Patrick O'Flaherty, Kilannin:  
That due to the disastrous effects of three consecutive bad harvests, the tenants were so impoverished as to be unable to pay the rents of the more prosperous years. They earnestly appealed to their landlords to give them a liberal abatement, along with a revision of a half-year's rent.

- Proposed by John Joyce, merchant, Oughterard; seconded by Robert Lee:  
That they pledged themselves not to take any holding from which a tenant, in future, would be evicted because of his inability to pay an excessive rent, and they would use every influence in their power to defeat the evil of such landlords by the force of public opinion.

- Proposed by John Moloney, Park; seconded by Michael Whelan:  
That, as certain shopkeepers in the parishes had been taking over at once holdings from which tenants had been evicted, they called on these shopkeepers to desist in future from such a practice, and if they refused, they pledged themselves to withdraw their support from them and give their doings every publicity.

- Proposed by Hugh Davoren, Moycullen; seconded by John Kyne, Moycullen:  
That the committee of the Kilannin Tenant Defence Association be requested to procure the government valuation and rent of every holding in the three parishes in order to bring public opinion to bear on the exceedingly high rents imposed on them [in proportion to the Griffith Valuation].

There followed a number of memorials (written requests) to named landlords by their tenants, calling on them for a reduction of the very high rents they had to pay. They believed that their demands to the landlords were reasonable. To Edward Guilfoyle, Galway, the tenants of the townlands of Ower East and

West, Laragan, Wormhole, Gurthmore and Gurthbeg stated that, due to the sudden collapse of the prices of cattle and other livestock, and the succession of bad harvests – the potato crop had been blackened - and with a crushing load of rent, they were no longer able to pay the exorbitant rents lately imposed on them.

They called on the landlord to lower their present high rents to that paid to their late landlord in 1870, in more prosperous times. They said that tracts of valuable pasture and arable land, and the right of selling turf, which they had under the old landlord, had been taken from them. They now found themselves tottering towards ruin and almost on the verge of despair, and pleaded for a reduction of their present excessively high rents.

The tenants of four other townlands in the parish of Moycullen sent a memorial to their landlord,

G. F. Hessian Esq. J.P. It was worded in similar terms to the previous one, pointing out that the conditions at the present were the worst since the Famine. They called for an abatement of their rents, suitable to the present emergency.

The following is a list of some of the tenants of the townlands of Finnaglea, Knockalough etc.: Anthony Kyne, Michael Faherty, John Kealy, Michael and Kate Carr, Matthew Ryder, Thomas Barrett, Widow Matthew Faherty, Edward Faherty, Bridget Keady (widow of Pat Keady), Pat King, Mark Keady, Thomas Faherty.

The tenants of the townlands of Knockranny, Coulahee and Knockbaun laid a petition before their landlord, Joseph Fitzpatrick Esq., Knockbaun House. They called for a liberal reduction of their rents to tide over the present crisis. They said that even those who had a beast to sell might take it to several fairs and not even get a bid for it. Their resources were now completely exhausted. The petition was signed by a large number of the inhabitants of the district.

The resolutions and memorials to the landlords were supported by Fr. Coyne, chairman, and Fr. Francis Kenny p.p., Moycullen.

#### **The Land Question: Meeting at Oughterard**

“On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1879, the merchants of the town and the tenants of the neighbourhood of Oughterard held a meeting in the chapel square after 12 o’clock Mass. The meeting was convened to lay before the landlords who had estates in the parish the necessity of giving a permanent reduction in the high rents, by which the tenants were taxed, and to request a remission of the half-year’s rent now due. Although the distress and poverty of the district was brought under their notice, still no landlords, with two honourable exceptions, had shown any sympathy with the poor, or had shown the slightest intention of doing anything to help them. At all times, the tenants here were punctual in the payment of their rents to the landlords and very seldom raised any cry against the cruel treatment many of them received from the landlords’ hands.

Now the half-year’s rent is asked for and they have no rent to give. The two preceding seasons have placed the poor in deep arrears to shopkeepers and banks. Today, the tenants find themselves in a condition as glaring as that of 1846 and 1847. The potato crop has rotted and the harvest (corn) is most unfruitful. The banks will advance no money and the shopkeepers will give no food. How then can the tenants be expected to meet the full demands of the landlords, in the face of such hard facts?

Yet, the poor man would discharge some of his debts by bringing his stock to fairs and markets, willing to sell them at a price far below their value. At the two fairs recently held here, one-fifteenth of the sheep and cattle were not sold. Although the quality was not inferior to that of former years, one hundred pounds did not change hands although the fair green was never so well filled before. There were no buyers, no matter at what price the stock was offered to take them off the seller’s hands.

The landlords should show themselves to be the friends of the tenants in distress by giving a permanent abatement and full remission of their half-year's rents. A lesser reduction will be of no use. It is only fair that the landlords, who have received the fruits of the tenants' industry in prosperous years, should bear some of the burden in adverse years.

It is not fair that while hunger stares the poor man in the face, that the landlord should enjoy choice wines and dainty meals. It is not fair that the rich recline in cushioned coaches, hurrying off to spend the poor man's earnings in the remote metropolis, while the caravan of the Union should be carrying his tenants to the workhouse. If the landlords cut back themselves on many things that are not needed, and with which they surround themselves, they would find that the crumbs from their tables would be as loaves to the hungry mouths of the poor and would in great measure satisfy the just demands of the tenants gathered here today."

The above was the report of the *Galway Vindicator* of 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1879. It gives a very clear account of the condition of the tenants in the neighbourhood of Oughterard and the attitude of the landlords during the start of the Land League agitation.

Rev. Redmond McDonagh p.p., Oughterard, now moved to the chair and a number of resolutions were adopted. The resolutions were similar to those that were being passed at Land League meetings throughout the country at this time. Similar resolutions were passed at Kilannin, where most of the meetings took place under Fr. P. Coyne p.p.

They called for a permanent abatement or reduction of their high rents, due to three successive bad harvests and the fall in the price of cattle and all agricultural produce. They pledged themselves not to take any holding from which a tenant was evicted for non-payment of rack rents, as the system of land bidding largely led to the exorbitant rents. They called on the government to provide employment for the people by public works, i.e. land reclamation.

The tenants of each estate in the parish were to send memorials, with their names attached, to their landlords, calling for a remission of the present half-year's rent and a permanent abatement of their rents.

The proposers of the motions were Henry Murphy, Rev. J. Cradock c.c., Henry Flanagan and John Joyce. The proposers and seconders were from Oughterard and included some shopkeepers.

It is clear from the reports and resolutions of this meeting that the tenants and shopkeepers did not want to get rid of the landlords but to get a just and fair system under them, i.e. fair rents and a reduction of rack rents, due to the economic crisis from 1877.

There were periodic economic crises from the Great Famine (1845-50) through the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. 1859-62, 1879-82, 1897-98, 1904 and 1912. The years before 1877 were remembered as the prosperous years, although the vast majority of the small farmers lived in poverty and at subsistence level all through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Land Agitation: Public Meeting at Kilannin**

The *Galway Vindicator* reported that, on Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1879, a public meeting was held in Kilannin, a village in Connemara, Co. Galway, attended by not less than six or seven thousand people. Contingents attended from all parts of the county, including Galway, Headford, Spiddal, Roundstone, Ballycurran, Moycullen and Oughterard.

Michael Davitt, the founder of the Land League, attended and spoke. The meeting took place in the chapel yard after 12 o'clock Mass. Fr. Coyne p.p. presided in the chair. The contingents from the different places were accompanied by mounted men and pikemen. A remarkable feature was the tolling of the chapel bell at regular intervals, ringing out the death knell of landlordism.

The Oughterard brass band supplied the music, of a high quality, with national airs. In the brake containing the members of the band was planted a handsome green banner, displaying a richly embroidered red harp, with the encouraging motto underneath "It will sound again". The banners bore such mottoes as "Erin Go Bragh", "The Land for the People", "Down with the tyrants" etc.

The Killeen and Cloghanower men marched three and four hundred men strong, arrayed in green scarves and rosettes and carrying imitation tin pikes. The Ballycurran pikemen were equally numerous, their pike slanes being painted green.

It is interesting to note that while the Land League was being formed in Mayo during 1879, similar banners and slogans were evident. A meeting was held in Westport on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1879, addressed by C. S. Parnell. At that meeting, thousands came from all parts of Mayo to a field near Westport town. Many wore green ribbons and rosettes. Eighty arrived in a body on horseback and some held aloft banners proclaiming the slogans "The Land for the People", "Down with the Land Robbers" etc.

Amongst those on the platform in Kilannin were Rev. Patrick Coyne p.p., Kilannin; Rev. Redmond McDonagh p.p., Oughterard; Rev. James Craddock c.c., Oughterard; Rev. Patrick Mannion c.c., Spiddal; Messrs. Michael Davitt; M. J. Tierney, Galway; John Moloney, Park; John Joyce, Oughterard; James Fahy, Galway; John J. O'Loughlin, Cashel; Patrick Barrett, Aran Mór; Thomas J. Lyons, Spiddal.

The government was represented on the platform by a shorthand writer. The proceedings were most orderly and decorous.

The following is a summary of some of the key phrases of Fr. Coyne and the other speakers.

**Fr. Coyne** said that the occasion of their assembly in their thousands on that day was because their vital interests, indeed their very existence, was at stake. Three bad harvests in succession had reduced them [tenant farmers and labourers] to a state of absolute pauperism. The cereal crop had been damaged, the potato crop had melted away in the earth from blight and their stock was unsalable. They were sunk in debt to their creditors. Famine was already grimly staring many in the parish in the face. To complete their misery, their landlords were looking for their usual pound of flesh [rents], without mercy or sympathy for them.

The cause of all this destitution and famine was the vicious and iniquitous system of land tenure under which they lived and which must be ended before prosperity or happiness would be achieved. (**A Voice:** "It is long wanting.") The rack-renting landlords had oppressed and ground them down to the dust. No worse class of landlords ever breathed the free air of heaven than those who possessed the lands in this locality. The rent roll of one property in the parish had been raised within the last six or seven years by the enormous amount of 150 per cent and more. (**The Crowd:** Groans and cries of "Shame!")

During his short time in the parish, he had witnessed the most cruel eviction scenes. He had seen with his own eyes, in the parish, a poor man who dropped dead during an eviction process and his lifeless body thrown out on the street by the order of the agent. (**A Voice:** "Shame, shame! It is a fact; it is no lie.")

Fr. Coyne now drew attention to cases of eviction which he had described at a public meeting just a year before (November, 1878). Although the rent was paid for them by the people, they were again under threat of eviction. He called on the agent to desist from this threat and to have some spark of sympathy for the tenants over whom he was placed.

He said that there were not twenty farmers in the parish who were able to pay the rent. Since the landlords had refused to come to their aid, he asked what were they to do. (**A Voice:** "To pay no rent.") He told them to offer the landlords a fair rent, if they could, according to the government valuation and if they did not accept that, let them do without it. He called on them to remain united, as they had a thousand members and an organisation already, in the parish.

There was a proposal to reduce the high rents to the government valuation and to remit a half-year's rent in the barony of Moycullen.

**Mr. John Joyce**, Oughterard, proposed that no tenant in Connemara should take a holding from which another tenant was evicted because he was unable to pay an exorbitant rent, or for any other unjust motive.

**Rev. P. Mannion p.p.**, Spiddal, proposed that, since the present vicious and iniquitous system of land tenure was mainly the cause of recurring destitution and famine, it was resolved that it was necessary to abolish the system and establish a peasant proprietary in its place as the only final and satisfactory settlement of the land question.

**Mr. Michael Davitt** was received with loud and continuous cheers. Davitt, who had founded the Land League, spoke at length on the land problem and its final solution. He explained that the so-called three Fs [fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure], or joint ownership between landlord and tenant, was not acceptable as a solution. The only solution was to end the landlord system and replace it with tenant ownership. He explained in detail how this could be done without any extra cost or sacrifice for the tenants over their present rents.

He said that those who supported the landlord system were trying to turn the tide of a popular movement and arrest the popular cry for a free soil. Those who supported the landlord system say that it would require millions of pounds to buy out the landlords, and no government would provide such sums for the Irish farmers. They argued that a peasant



proprietary was unobtainable and that landlordism must remain and that many centuries must elapse before the men who cultivate the soil of Ireland would own it. No-one believed that the present government would give two or three millions to enable us to get rid of the landlords, nor had anyone yet fixed a day when landlordism, bag and baggage, would be banished from Ireland. (**A Voice:** "To hell with them!")

The present system of land tenure cannot and will not be tolerated. Parnell and other members of parliament had stated that peasant ownership as a final solution could be established without any extraordinary advance of money. A loan could be advanced by the government, the interest to be paid at 3¼ percent per annum, which would amount to the former rent. Under this system, in a limited number of years, the farm would be owned by the tenant and, in the meantime, the tenant would have undisturbed security of his holding. He advised the people to organise their strength to win back the soil of their fatherland and never to cease striving until they had:

"Land for the hands that till it,  
Land for the seed they sow,  
Land that is yours while you will it,  
Yours without striking a blow,  
Aye from each rooftop and steeple,  
If you but will it again,  
Land for the landless people,  
Land for the children of men."

**Mr. P. Conroy**, Oughterard, asked for three cheers more for Mr. Davitt, who had in great measure emancipated the tenant farmers.

The system which Davitt explained in great detail was what took place in the later Land Acts, especially the Wyndham Land Act (1903), by which tenants became owners of the land by a state-aided system of land purchase, and landlordism was abolished.

**Rev. James Craddock c.c.**, Oughterard, spoke at great length to a resolution. He said that, due to the serious distress that existed among them, he called on the government to come to the aid of the poor labouring classes and small farmers by opening up useful public works in the district to save the people from starvation and ruin.

It was sadly true that famine was already at their very doors. Half the people assembled there that day would not have food to eat in two months time. Unless public employment was provided speedily, the terrible scenes of 1846 and 1847 would be enacted again. At that time, the workhouse of Oughterard, which was originally built for 900, had to be enlarged to lodge 1500. On every side, there are bare gables and tumbled down walls of once populous villages to be seen.

The people had right and justice on their side and were not asking for assistance from the government as beggars, but as ones with a title to it. The annual millions drained out of the country to England, if allowed to circulate at home, would tide them over the bad harvests. From 1800 to the Famine of 1845, 230 million Sterling had been abstracted from the

country. Every Irishman had the right and duty to demand for the people of Ireland the wealth now swept off to England. If a famine existed in any other colony of England, it would be very ready to assist them, as had happened some years ago in the rice fields of Bengal. England had not yet cast off its old spleen for Ireland, the spirit of the Penal Laws.

He again called on the government to set on foot public works in the district to serve the people, as any more delay would be fatal.

**Mr. Davitt** then addressed the people in Irish and added in English: "If I spoke Irish any longer, I fear the government reporter, who is present on the platform taking notes, would not be able to take down my words, but I don't care a jot whether he takes down or not, I will speak to him in his own vile English language."

The proceedings then terminated and the people quietly dispersed.

In November 1899, Michael Davitt and other members of the Land League were arrested and committed to prison. Davitt was arrested for having used seditious language at a meeting in Gurteen in Sligo. As an ex-political prisoner on ticket of leave for Fenian activities, he had to be careful about what he said at public meetings, as government reporters attended.

Fr. Coyne and other local clergy attended Land League meetings outside Kilannin and Oughterard. On 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1879, a large demonstration took place in Galway, the largest ever held in that part of Connaught. Mr. C. S. Parnell addressed the meeting. Present on the platform were Rev. R. McDonagh p.p., Oughterard, Rev. P. Coyne p.p., Kilannin and Rev. James Craddock c.c., Oughterard.

Very large numbers attended the Land League meetings at this time. On 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1879, a Tenant Right meeting took place at Clifden in Connemara, where 10,000 were reported to have been present.

### **The Rosscahill Demonstration (9<sup>th</sup> November, 1880)**

On Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, a very largely attended meeting was held at Rosscahill. The principal object of the meeting was to commemorate the completion of the cottages built, at the expense of the Land League, by the tenants of the district, to shelter several families who had been evicted off the neighbouring property.

They are the first houses constructed with this object, are well lighted and ventilated, and far better than the usual class of cottages of the tillers of the soil in the west of Ireland. They are not individual cottages, but one long, low-roofed building, divided into several tenements. The people of the district are proud of their undertaking.

The meeting began at 3 o'clock, with Fr. Coyne as chairman. There were no police near the platform but, about 200 yards off and concealed, over fifty of them were stationed, armed with rifles. Present on the platform were two gentlemen who had arrived in Dublin the previous Saturday to write about the condition of the country, Mr. Cotter Morrison of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (London) and Mr. King of the *Boston Journal*.

**Fr. Coyne** said that the vast assembly gathered together showed their determination fearlessly to proclaim the eternal right of the people of the country to live on the land God had given them. Organisation and earnestness in their cause would ensure their ultimate victory. If they had stood up to the crowbar brigade, their homesteads would not be levelled, nor their fires quenched, like the evictions which took place in 1849, when more than 50,000 families were hurled out and cast on the wayside to die of starvation.

Landlordism was the source of all Ireland's miseries. It had levelled so many homesteads, driven so many to other lands or to find a home in a coffin-less grave. This iniquitous system must be fought and abolished.

To show them how this system had worked, he gave them instances of rent-raising in several townlands in their own barony of Moycullen. In one district, the rent in 1870 was £57-17s-6¾d. In 1880, it was £140-3s-2d.

In other cases, the relative rents were:

1870 - £57-7s; 1880 - £133

1870 - £28-10s; 1880 - £65-1s

1870 - £48-10s; 1880 - £93-10s

**Mr. Thomas Brennan**, Secretary of the National Land League, spoke. He said that it was absolutely necessary to establish a system of peasant proprietorship, as the only final solution of the land problem. They were to pledge themselves never to cease till landlordism was abolished and the tillers of the soil became its owners.

Before the Land League was established at all, the people of the district, under their patriotic priest, Fr. Coyne, had banded together against the conspiracy of landlordism. As there was such a spirit among the people, the efforts of the government to crush the movement would fail. What they needed in the movement were not chiefs or lords but men who, acting democratically, would bring the landlords to their knees.

In Fr. Coyne, there was no more determined enemy of landlordism, or a braver defender of the rights of the people. Fr. Coyne would assure them that the Land League was not contrary to religion or morality. It was not hostile to Protestantism or any other -ism, except landlordism.

They must fight the landlord system inch by inch and foot by foot, till it was destroyed. The miserable hovels would be replaced everywhere by comfortable homes and the cry of the starving children would no longer be heard.

The landlords thought they were badly off if they did not get their champagne. They never thought of the condition of the people, whether they had enough Indian meal or not to keep life in them. They had left homes desolate and hearts broken and driven innocent Irish girls to a life of sin. What most Irish landlords were entitled to was the prison or the ropes for having robbed and murdered the Irish people.

In conclusion, he said that the people should not crouch down before the landlords or their agents:

“They talk us down and walk us down  
who crouch to their command,  
But the yell of our defiance  
no tyrant can withstand.”

Mr. Coady of Rosmuck seconded the resolution.

**Rev. Fr. Craddock c.c.**, Oughterard, proposed that the exorbitant and unjust rents had a ruinous effect on the people of the locality and had led to destitution and famine. They resolved that they would pay no more rack rents and would not pay a higher rent than the government valuation, pending a settlement of the Irish land question.

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Higgins of the Cong branch of the Land League, and passed.

**Rev. Redmond McDonagh p.p.**, Oughterard, proposed that they should pledge themselves never to occupy a farm from which a tenant had been evicted for the non-payment of a rack rent, or any other unjust motive. They should regard the man who was guilty of such offences as a foul traitor to his country and an outcast to society, and they were to pledge themselves not to hold communication, or transact business of any kind, with such an obnoxious creature, but rather to shun him and treat him as a moral leper.

The proceedings then terminated.

There were several motions passed at Land League meetings in Kilannin and Oughterard against anyone who took a farm from which another tenant was unjustly evicted. Such a person was to be socially ostracised. Rev. McDonagh’s motion called on such a person to be treated as an outcast of society and to be shunned as a moral leper.

This was the policy used against Captain Charles Boycott, agent of the Earl of Erne’s estate near Lough Mask, Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, in 1880. It was based on a speech made by Parnell at Ennis on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1880, where he denounced land grabbers. He said that when a man took a farm from which another had been evicted, he should be shunned everywhere, even in the place of worship, and should be isolated as if he were a leper of old.

Capt. Boycott, who became a victim of the policy, which gave a new word to the English language, was forced to leave Ireland permanently in November, 1880. Robert Martin (1846-1906), the landlord of Ross House, Kilannin, travelled the country in 1882 in defence of the landlords and large farmers who had been boycotted, showing his support for the landlords and his opposition to the Land League methods.

Boycotting spread to include sport. In spite of the Land War, the Galway Hunt was held regularly during these years and was advertised on a monthly basis in north and east Galway from 1879 to 1881. In some counties, such as Tipperary and Kildare, the hunt was stopped, as it was associated with the landed gentry, who were in conflict with the tenants at that time. However, in 1882-83 the meets of the Galway Hunt were cancelled for the rest of the seasons.

### **Public Meeting, Galway (20<sup>th</sup> March, 1881)**

A public meeting of the local branch of the Land League was held in Eyre Square, Galway, on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1881. Its purpose was to hear an address from Mr. T. P. O'Connor, MP for Galway borough, in protest against the recent laws passed in the English parliament against the Land League and the Irish MPs who supported it.

There were several bands who played music and large numbers attended on horseback, wearing green scarves. On the platform were Rev. R. McDonagh p.p., Oughterard, Rev. Fr. Coyne p.p., Kilannin and Matthew Harris, MP, Ballinasloe.

The chairman, **Mr. M. J. Tierney**, condemned the Coercion Acts passed in parliament against the Land League and the Irish MPs. The purpose of these laws was to defend the landlord system.

**Mr. T. P. O'Connor**, MP, said that "the bad, wicked, tyrannical landlordism of the past was approaching its extinction and the coercion laws were a glass of whiskey given to it to keep up its courage. (**The Crowd:** Laughter and cheers.) Landlordism must sooner or later go to the wall and the Irish tenant must be the owner of the Irish soil."

**Rev. Fr. Coyne** was received with great cheering. He spoke in support of the following motion:

"That it was the opinion of the meeting that the very general action taken by the landlords throughout the county Galway, against their tenants, gave evidence of a determination on their part to take concerted action in cruelly exterminating all the peasantry that still remained in this depopulated county. They called upon the tenant farmers of Galway to stand together and to be true to each other. They appealed to their brothers in America to sustain them in this dreadful crisis."

Fr. Coyne said that, within the last week, his own house had been thronged from morning till night, with persons coming to get counsel and advice with regard to the civil bills and processes of ejectment that had been issued against them. Now was the time for the tenant farmers to show that they were not afraid of these parchments.

A friend of his had said that they should advise the people to pay what they could. He would be very sorry to give that counsel or advice. He would tell the tenant farmers on every estate to agree on a certain rental and to offer that, and if they refused, let them put them out at the point of a bayonet (**The Crowd:** Cheers); and if one man went and paid his rent, let the others shun him. Let him be expelled from the Land League, if he was a member.

Mr. Matthew Harris seconded the resolution.

Matthew Harris (1825-90) was one of the very earliest activists in the land agitation in Co. Galway. He founded the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association in 1876 and enlisted Michael Davitt's support for land reform in Mayo, which led to the foundation of the Land League. He was MP for East Galway from 1885 to 1890.

### **The Land League after 1881**

The second Land Act (1881, Gladstone) gave the tenants the three Fs – fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure. It set up land courts to fix a fair rent.

The Act satisfied many of the tenants' demands. But the Land League fought on for tenant ownership. It was declared illegal and suppressed in October, 1881. Its prominent leaders, Parnell and Davitt, were imprisoned in Kilmainham jail but were released in 1882. Eventually, the British government yielded and began a process of land purchase, which transferred the land from landlords to tenants and ended landlordism.

Sixty-one persons were imprisoned in Galway jail by September, 1881, for offences associated with the land issue, i.e. threatening letters, assaults, intimidation etc. They were from all counties of Connaught and included numbers from Connemara and the Aran Islands. Galway was the county with the greatest number of agrarian outrages, or crimes, during the Land War, even higher than Co. Mayo. There were occasional murders of landlords or their agents but the numbers were very low, as landlords could get police protection. As noted elsewhere, during the 1880s, George T. Robinson, land agent of Richard Berridge, was shot at a number of times but escaped because he was 'armour plated'. Robinson and his son, Henry, had an armed escort by government order.

### **The Murder of Lord Mountmorris**

The murder of Lord Mountmorris, a landlord in Clonbur, Co. Galway, took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1880, and drew great publicity. He had a small estate of 300 acres and fifteen tenants, and had recently obtained eviction decrees against some of them. He was murdered on his way home from a meeting of magistrates in Clonbur and some thought the murder was due to his harshness as a magistrate. The attack was carefully planned. Six bullets were found in his body and three on the road which did not pass through his person, so that more than one person took part in the murder. Three men were arrested afterwards and charged with his murder. There was a contemporary drawing of the murder of Lord Mountmorris at Clonbur, Co. Galway, in the Paris newspaper *Le Monde Illustré*.

### **The Maamtrasna Murders (1882)**

Five members of the Joyce family were murdered in a remote Co. Galway area in the Partry mountains on 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1882. Ten men were arrested and charged with the murder. Five of the accused had their death sentences commuted to penal servitude for life.

Three were found guilty, sentenced to death and hanged in Galway jail on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1882. One of them, Myles Joyce, protested his innocence even as he stood on the scaffold with a rope round his neck. Two years later, one of the prosecution witnesses confessed publicly that he had sworn falsely against Myles Joyce.

It is uncertain what the motive for the murders was, or whether there was any connection with the land problem. One view is that they were murdered because they were occupying boycotted land. In *Irish Memories*, based on the diaries of Violet Martin, of Ross House, and Edith Somerville, it is stated that tradesmen who came from Dublin to work on Kylemore

Castle had infected the minds of northern Connemara with the idea that assassination was justified for political purposes, and that the murders of Maamtrasna district followed.

### **Evictions and Process Serving in Kilannin**

Evictions of tenants increased to a great extent during the period of the Land League, as the landlords were challenged and refused rents by the tenants, under local leaders. In 1878, 192 families, consisting of 1,015 persons, were evicted in the West Riding of Galway, which included Connemara.

The landlords who evicted in the barony of Moycullen were Mrs. Kirwan, Carraroe; Patrick Blake, Spiddal; Richard Berridge, Ballinahinch and Oughterard; and the land agent of Robert Martin, James E. Jackson. The evictions of Mrs. Kirwan in Carraroe in January, 1882, are described by Michael Davitt as the 'Battle of Carraroe' in his history of the Land League, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*.

### **Process Serving**

The process server's job was to serve notice to quit on a tenant who failed to pay his rent. The notice to quit was a legal document which required any tenant who received one to give up his holding on a stated day. If the notice date expired before the rent was paid, it provided the legal basis for eviction. The bailiff then took possession of the house and land for the landlord.

The process server was the enforcer of the landlord's right. A bill of ejectment (eviction) would be passed in the local court (Petty Sessions) for the eviction to be carried out. The local landlords were the magistrates who presided over the local court sessions. Process serving was common in the barony of Moycullen during the Land War of the 1880s. The process server was protected by a large force of constabulary, or police.

The names of the process servers in the barony of Moycullen and the Division of Clifden, Co. Galway, who belonged to the locality, were:

Patrick Healy, Oughterard

Edmond Naughton, Oughterard

Lawrence Conneely, Moycullen

Walter Butler, Clonbur

Thomas McNulty, Spiddal

John Tully, Spiddal

Michael Joyce, Shanaheela

### **The Battle of Carraroe**

At the beginning of 1880, the 'Battle of Carraroe', as described by Michael Davitt, was fought and won. It was the first successful attempt to prevent a process serving by crowd resistance. The people rushed at the constabulary and Fenton, the process server, and drove them before them, pursuing the flying 'Peelers' to the doors of the barrack. Although the 'Peelers' used their bayonets, they were surrounded and attacked with stout blackthorns and stones, and compelled to retire.

This was not typical, as generally the process serving was a success because of the great force of the police. In the West Riding of Galway alone, 107 officers and 3,300 men were required to protect the process servers in the first months of 1880, and they were basically a success. This must have been a huge financial cost.

### **Processes served at Rosscahill (1880)**

The *Galway Vindicator* of 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1880, described a scene of process serving on the Martin estate, Rosscahill, Kilannin, Co. Galway. The report stated that the process serving took place on the Martin property, three or four miles from Oughterard. There were sufficient precautions taken to ensure the safe conduct of the process server.

The report stated:

“The Martin property is an extensive one, ranging from worthless land to fertile land. Much of it is fairly cultivated but a good quantity is barren and unproductive. In some spots, the farm houses are decent in outward appearance, well-thatched and whitewashed, while in others they are little better than wigwams.

There is little doubt that the tenants are unable to pay their rents at present. The holdings are small on average. The people strongly oppose and complain against these ejectment proceedings.

The processes served on this property today were issued from the superior courts. A constabulary force of about 100 men, from Galway, proceeded early in the morning to the Martin estate under Sub-Inspector Singleton, accompanied by Mr. Hill, the RM [Resident Magistrate] of Galway. They were met by Sub-Inspector Bull, of Oughterard, and a number of the men of his district.

The process server was a stranger brought down specially from Dublin. He was about thirty years of age and went about his work in a methodical manner. He carried a satchel and pulled out the document without much delay. He had a large stick and put it to good account. With it, he quickly pushed home the tacks which secured the processes to the cabin doors.

His satchel contained about thirty ejectments, all of which he disposed of in the course of the day. At the first houses he visited, he was allowed to pass unnoticed, but as he proceeded, the people began to assemble and, before long, he was confronted everywhere by an excited crowd of both sexes and all ages. They assailed him and his escort with all kinds of verbal abuse and maledictions [curses].

As the brigade advanced towards Kilannin, the little chapel bell was tolled, with what object does not appear. This had the effect on the police of closing their ranks and keeping a good look out. They marched forward, prepared to cope with any force that might be mustered against them.

The crowd of rustics groaned and hooted. As usual, the women essayed to seize the man with the satchel and missiles soft and solid were hurled. Orders were promptly given to charge the assailants and were as promptly obeyed. The same performance was repeated



again and again. Occasionally, a stone was flung from behind a fence or other place of vantage, whenever a squad of men moved off in that direction and cleared all before them.

The police were particularly vigilant in this locality, as they expected to meet with a determined opposition. The story that the women were to seize Mr. Hill, RM, and disable him, so that he could not carry out his work and orders, and the men were to attack the process server and the police, turned out not to be true. No organised plan of resistance appeared to have been contemplated. Only little scuffles took place, due to the intense excitement of the occasion.

A few stones were thrown and one inflicted a severe cut on the head of a policeman. This was the only wound of the day. A man named James Welby, of Porridgetown, was detected hurling a large stone. After a pursuit, he was arrested, handcuffed and placed in the ranks. The people were chased in all directions when their attitude became threatening.

The process server finished his day's labour in Porridgetown and left the field having achieved his object. Welby was brought off in custody to Oughterard, where the charge against him will be investigated by Mr. Hill, RM. The long cars of the constabulary were guarded by a body of men during the day. At about 4 o'clock, the entire force drove off to Oughterard, where they will remain tonight.

Tomorrow, the column will proceed to Maam, where a number of ejections are to be served on Lord Leitrim's property. There is little likelihood of any further disturbance of a serious character. The overpowering number of armed men that troop through the country has the effect of disarming all opposition."

This account from the newspaper was written by another process server, as is clear from a number of comments he made in the report, and references to other process servers. He said that the process server in this case used a large, stout stick to push home the tacks on the cabin doors, whereas he himself used to look about for a stone to pound them clumsily into place.

### **Conditions in the Barony of Moycullen in the 1880s**

There were many reports on the conditions of the people in the parishes of the barony of Moycullen at the time of the Land League agitation. They were based on local reports of the clergy and outside observers who visited the district. All the reports indicated that the tenants were unable to pay the high rents that were being charged and that the majority were in debt and arrears of rent.

Several witnesses to the Bessborough Commission (1881) stated that the average rent on smallholdings, many of them consisting partly of bog and unreclaimed land, was in the region of £1 per acre in Galway, Mayo and Donegal, i.e. the west of Ireland.

### **Distress in Moycullen**

Rev. Francis Kenny p.p. wrote to the *Galway Vindicator* on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1880, about conditions in his parish.

Ejections (eviction orders) had been served on all the tenants in two properties in the parish, which were to be tried at the present court sessions at Oughterard.

Seven of his parishioners were in jail and had been refused bail, for an alleged attack on a process server who never received the slightest injury. The families of the persons imprisoned were in the most wretched condition and must die of starvation unless relief is given them.

Altogether in his parish, there were at least 300 families in distress, in fact in absolute want, and the number was increasing. Nobody knows what will become of the poor people, unless public employment was given by the government. No amount of private charity will meet the present demand for relief, which is alarming.

### **Oughterard**

Rev. J. Craddock wrote to the *Galway Vindicator* on the condition of his parish on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1880.

A Relief Committee was established in the parish, of which he was Secretary. They depended on private charity. He thanked Mr. Simpson of the Liverpool Relief Committee for five tons of Indian meal, two caddies of tea and fourteen cwt of sugar, which he had sent for the poor of the parish.

He said that 351 families, out of 420 in the parish, had been returned by the Relief Committee as in need of relief, and in a few weeks would be without provisions. Almost all the tenants owed two to three years rent and neither the workhouse nor the landlords had anything to offer.

A special correspondent of the *Freeman's Journal* investigated conditions in Oughterard in January, 1880. He wrote that the tenants had a mass of obligations to the landlords and shopkeepers. The only government relief as yet adopted was that twenty additional Redcoats had marched into Oughterard to join the company of military already garrisoning the barracks, to protect the Spiddal and Carraroe evictions at the Oughterard sessions the following week.

As an absolute fact, there were not five persons in the whole parish who had paid the last half-year's rent. In two townlands in the parish, fifty-four families owed three-and-a-half year's rent. Mr. Edmond O'Flaherty was the only local landlord who was not an absentee. There was some £14,000 due for food to the traders of the small town of Oughterard, of 900 inhabitants.

The impoverished people were dependant on private charity, which was not adequate to meet their needs, i.e. the Duchess of Marlborough Fund, the Dublin Mansion House

Committee, the Liverpool Charity and the National Land League. Their total contribution so far was £95, which if divided would give 1s-1d [one shilling and one pence] per head to the distressed population, to keep them alive for four months.

A correspondent of the *Nation* newspaper wrote on 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1882, after the evictions that took place, that “the whole country around Oughterard and Carraroe appeared as though a conquering and devastating army had passed over the land, leaving ruined desolation behind.” Since private charity was not sufficient, what was required was public relief works to give employment to the poor, the report concluded.

Public relief works had not been provided, or were not adequate, by the early part of 1880. A Special Presentment Sessions for the barony of Moycullen took place at Oughterard on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1879, to provide employment by public works. The money was to be provided by taxes levied on the barony. They suggested a scheme of public works, i.e. the making of a railway from Galway to Clifden, the bridging of Knockferry between Headford and Moycullen, the draining and reclamation of the vast tracts of mountain in the barony, and the completion of the half-finished trunk road from Costello Bay to Oughterard. A memorial was sent to the Lord Lieutenant for these public works, signed by James E. Jackson, JP, on behalf of those present.

### **The Landlord Viewpoint and the Land League**

*Irish Memories*, by Edith Somerville and Violet Martin of Ross, was published in 1917. It was based on the diaries and memories of both and gave an account of the Martin family of Ross House, Kilannin, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Daisy Burke, later Countess Elizabeth of Fingal, daughter of George E. Burke, a landlord of Moycullen, Co. Galway, wrote an account of the Burkes of Moycullen in the book *Seventy Years Young*.

The Burkes were the descendants of the De Burgos, who had founded Galway city in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and remained Catholic. The Martins of Ross conformed to the State or Protestant church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although Daisy Burke and Violet Martin of Ross were childhood friends, they had very different views of the landlord system and how it ended.

### **The Martins of Ross**

The Martins of Ross were old-fashioned landlords of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who saw themselves as patriarchal and benevolent towards their tenants and employees. They did not raise rents and behaved with fairness towards their tenants. They expected gratitude and loyalty in return.

Violet Martin was proud of her descent from the fourteen Galway Tribes, and that the Martin family had lived at Ross for five generations. She saw nothing wrong with the landlord system which, like many of her class, she defended. She wrote that the mutual dependence of landlord and tenant was akin to a happy marriage. Her diaries are full of ideas of loyalty, gratitude and betrayal. She said that arrears of rent were given time, or taken in boatloads of turf, or worked off by day labour, and that evictions were unheard of.

Robert Martin, her grandfather, administered justice on behalf of his tenants, as he held court from his chair on the front lawn of the house and settled their disputes. Although his decisions had not a shred of legal authority, they were implicitly obeyed by his tenants rather than have recourse to the civil courts.

The Martin family never fully recovered from the effects of the Famine, due to debts and lower rents, but they managed to hold on to their estate. They failed to come to terms with the new political and social changes from the 1870s onwards, followed by the Land League and subsequent Land Acts, which completely changed the relations between landlord and tenant, and soon after abolished landlordism by tenant ownership.

In the election in Galway of 1872, the tenants of James Martin voted against his wishes and his candidate for the first time. This he saw as a betrayal, according to his daughter Violet, from which he never fully recovered. The election in February, 1872, was between Le Poer Trench, a conservative supporter of landlords, and Capt. J. P. Nolan, a liberal and Home Ruler. James Martin was a supporter of Trench. Up to that time, it was a matter of course that the Ross tenants voted with their landlord.

The polling centre was at Oughterard, about four miles from Ross, and James Martin drove there on polling day. Violet Martin wrote that, on the day, her father ranged through the crowd, incredulously asking for this or that tenant, unable to believe that they had deserted him. It was a futile search for, with few exceptions, the Ross tenants voted for Nolan, on the order of the Catholic priests. Capt. Nolan was elected by a large majority but was later unseated.

James Martin never fully recovered from what he saw as a personal wound and betrayal by his tenants rather than a political defeat. He died a few months later, in April, 1872. In June, 1872, the Ballot Act enabled tenants to vote in secret, rather than at the order of their landlords.

A few months after James Martin died in 1872, the Martins left Ross and did not return until 1888. The estate was in debt and Robert Jasper Martin (1846-1905), who had inherited it, went to London to work as a journalist. A land agent took charge of the estate. Violet Martin wrote that, when Robert, her brother, visited Ross from time to time, he saw that a new spirit was abroad, a rift or separation had begun between the people and the landlords, and the changed attitude wounded him. In 1877, Robert returned to Dublin, where the rest of the family lived.

The land agitation had now begun and the Land League was founded in 1879. Fr. Coyne p.p. was the leader, and an active organiser, of the Land League in Kilannin, where the Martins had their estate. Violet Martin wrote that rents began to fall and that, after 1879, Robert never again received any rents. She wrote that rents were fixed by land courts and that the feudal link between landlord and tenant was broken forever.

### **Robert Martin's Support for Boycotted Landlords**

A Property Defence Association and an Emergency Committee, staffed by Orange Lodges, was set up by the landlords in 1882, to defend those who were boycotted. The landlords

thus began to combine for their own protection and to fight the Land League methods. It arose out of the attempt to help Capt. Boycott, of Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo. He was socially ostracised by the Land League. His farm labourers and workmen left him. His crops were harvested by 50 Cavan Orangemen, protected by 1,000 RIC men, at a cost of £10,000.

This association provided labourers for boycotted landlords whose servants had left them. Robert Martin supported those who were boycotted, placing himself on the side of the landlords against the Land League methods. Violet Martin wrote how Robert, her brother, went forth under the auspices of the Property Defence Association as an 'emergency man'. His business was to visit boycotted landlords and farmers and to supply them with men, mainly from Ulster, i.e. Orangemen, to do the farm work. The owners of the boycotted land were unable to get food or the other necessities of life from the local shopkeepers or trades people, and had to import supplies from England or the north of Ireland.

There was terror everywhere and bitter antagonism towards certain landlords and Robert Martin faced real danger for the first time, in endless journeys in outside cars with his revolver in his hand. He met the stare of hatred, the jeer and sidelong curse. He faced an imminent death if he took the wrong road where a man with a gun was waiting for him. But he made the best of a bad business.

When the Martins were absent from Ross, a new agent ran the estate. Violet Martin had said that evictions were unheard of at Ross. This new agent engaged in evictions in the 1880s, during the period of the Land League. As noted previously, all the tenants of Porridgetown townland were evicted and a process server had posted thirty notices to quit, in a single day, on the Martin estate in January, 1880.

James Jackson, a landlord of nearby Kilaguile, acted as agent for Robert Martin of Ross. He forced tenants to pay the rents he charged under threat of eviction, and was denounced by Fr. Coyne from 1875 for his harshness to his tenants.

Violet Martin appears to have blamed the Land League and Parnell for the problems that took place in the 1880s, i.e. chaos, evictions, outrages, murders, boycotting etc. She wrote, "Parnell stirring the seething pot, while his subordinates stoked the fire." She described Parnell as "a grim, disdainful master", unlike Daisy Burke, of Moycullen, who admired him.

Violet Martin, with her mother and family, returned to Ross House in 1888. She brought back the house after sixteen years of neglect. Robert Martin, who had inherited the estate, died in 1905 and Violet Martin in 1915. Ross House was sold to Claude Chevasse in 1924.

### **The Burkes of Moycullen**

Daisy Burke, who grew up in Moycullen in the 1860s, was the daughter of George E. Burke, a Moycullen landlord. She had a different attitude and gave a different account of the landlords from that of Violet Martin of Ross, a childhood friend of hers. Yet she admired her family, and her father as a good landlord.

She recalled in her memoir that her father ruled the district as “a firm and just autocrat” from his magistrate’s room. Rents were often forgiven or reduced and frequently paid in kind by a load of turf from the bog. Her father, like Robert Martin of Ross, administered justice, as his tenants brought their disputes and quarrels to him instead of going to the lawyers or the courts. They trusted his justice and wisdom and hardly ever went against his judgements.

In 1872, she saw her father walk down to the poll at Moycullen in the most patriarchal manner, at the head of his retainers and tenants, to vote as he told them. This was the election at which James Martin of Ross saw his tenants vote against him for the first time. She wrote that, after the Ballot Act of 1872, if they had stayed at Danesfield, her father would have never walked to the poll in the same way again.

Her young brother and sister had died of diphtheria and the family went to France in 1875 to get away from the association of their deaths. She was educated in France. Soon after, her father returned to Danesfield, Moycullen.

When she returned, in 1882, she wrote that the days of the landlords were almost over. She felt that, in the end, the landlords got the fate they deserved as colonists and outsiders. Parnell, whom she admired, ended that chapter in Irish history of which she saw the twilight. The good landlords and the bad went down together, as was inevitable. They had no grievance, as nine out of ten of them had chosen to live as colonists. She quoted Lennox Robinson, “They were merely a colony and colonists have no rights.” She wrote that they could spend their rack rents at Cheltenham or Bath, free from danger. Her father would have died in such a place as Bath or Cheltenham, as he was never the same away from Danesfield and Galway.

The children of the landed class soon discovered themselves to belong to no country, as colonists. By the 1880s, she wrote, even the greatest recluse of the landlords, locked within their strong walls, must be aware of the battering on the gates outside. As the Norman Tribes had lived within the walls of Galway, with the ferocious O’Flahertys outside, so the Irish landlords lived within their demesnes, making a world of their own, with Ireland outside the gates.

Daisy Burke, who was fascinated with Parnell, called herself a rebel and a papist.

The Land Acts, from 1870 to 1903, involved a transfer of the greater part of the land of Ireland from the landlords to the tenants and peasant class. This was, in effect, an agrarian revolution. The crucial moment in that process was the Land League struggle from 1879 to 1886, a mass movement that challenged landlordism and ended it. Many of the local landlords sold out their estates in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the Land Commission and the Congested Districts Board.

The First World War decimated the Protestant landlord class. Many of them, out of loyalty to Britain, fought in the war. Richard Berridge Junior (1870-1941), by far the greater landlord in the three parishes of the barony of Moycullen, fought as a lieutenant in the Great War (1914-18).

Daisy Burke belonged to the twilight world of the Catholic Ascendancy class, a world that was passing away.

During the 'Troubles' of 1919-21, the 'big house' became a target for the Republicans. In the War of Independence and the Civil War, about 200 big houses were burnt down. Daisy Burke wrote, in reference to the burning of the big houses by the Republicans, that "people whose families had lived in the country for three or four hundred years realised suddenly that they were strangers."

### **Fr. Coyne and the Kilannin Schism**

Fr. Coyne p.p., Kilannin (1875-99), as a prominent member of the Land League, made a major contribution to tenant rights and the overthrow of the landlord system, of which he was an avowed enemy, in his parish and neighbouring parishes, from the time he became parish priest in 1875.

As already noted, his work as a Land League leader and organiser in the 1870s and 1880s is not as well remembered in tradition as the so-called 'Kilannin Schism', or scandal, which took place mainly between 1890 and 1895. The two aspects may not be unrelated, as his zealous work on behalf of tenants was most likely the reason why so many supported him in his dispute with his archbishop over the transfer of Kilannin parish from Tuam to the diocese of Galway.

Fr. Coyne got much support outside his own parish. John Joyce, merchant and shopkeeper, Oughterard, a prominent member of the Land League and at times Secretary of the Kilannin Tenant Defence Association, remained loyal to Fr. Coyne to the end. The *Galway Express*, a Protestant newspaper, gave detailed reports on the Kilannin events and was sympathetic to Fr. Coyne.

There was much need to adjust the boundaries between the archdiocese of Tuam and the diocese of Galway. In Connemara, along the coast west of Galway Bay, parishes alternated between Tuam and Galway dioceses in a patchwork pattern. Besides, Moycullen and Oughterard were in the diocese of Galway. To rectify the situation, it was agreed in 1890 between Dr. McEilly, Archbishop of Tuam (1881-1902), and Dr. McCormack, Bishop of Galway (1887-1909), that the parish of Kilannin should be transferred from the archdiocese of Tuam to the diocese of Galway, the parish of Carraroe being given in exchange to Tuam.

Fr. Coyne, supported by a number of his parishioners, protested against the transfer. He said that, as a Tuam priest, he could not be changed to another diocese without his consent, and that he did not desire to be affiliated to Galway diocese, though he added that he would prefer to be under Dr. McCormack of Galway than to serve under Dr. McEilly. Finally, he protested against the parish of Kilannin being transferred to Galway at all, alleging that the people there were opposed to the change, as well as himself.

At first, Dr. McEilly of Tuam objected to recognising Fr. Coyne as parish priest of Kilannin and claimed that he was appointed as administrator of the parish, rather than parish priest, which did not have the same status. In fact, during the Land League meetings Fr. Coyne was

sometimes referred to as administrator, but more often as parish priest. On this point, the decision went against Archbishop McEvilly.

Rev. E. A. D'Alton, in his *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam* (1928), wrote that, if Fr. Coyne had peacefully accepted the change of the boundaries and the transfer of Kilannin to Galway, he would have sufficiently safeguarded his position as a parish priest of the archdiocese of Tuam. For though he would cease to be parish priest of Kilannin, he could not be forcibly transferred to another diocese, without his consent, under Canon Law, nor would Rome consent that he should be. But Fr. Coyne would stick to Kilannin and, when he was defeated under this head at Rome, he refused to submit.

After the announcement of the transfer of Kilannin from Tuam to Galway, Fr. Coyne wrote several letters to Dr. McEvilly begging him to alter his decision and pointing out that his parishioners would never sanction the change, but the Archbishop refused to do so.

Several meetings were held in the chapel yard, denouncing in strong language the arbitrary conduct of the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. McEvilly. At one of those meetings, a subscription list was opened and funds subscribed to send Fr. Coyne to Rome to lay his case before the Roman authorities, if necessary.

When the matter was referred to Rome, Fr. Coyne protested vigorously and went to Rome himself to plead his case. He remained in Rome from 1891 to 1894, fighting his case from one court to another until a final, irrevocable decision was given against him. In his absence, Dr. McCormack, Bishop of Galway, took over the parish and sent out Fr. Conroy to take charge of the spiritual and temporal welfare of the parishioners.

After the long delay in Rome, Fr. Coyne returned and arrived in Galway on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1894. He was met by a large crowd of some thousands of his parishioners at the Galway station, which showed his popularity. He addressed them and read letters from the Papal authorities showing that his case was receiving the fullest consideration. When he returned to his parish, he found another man, Fr. Conroy, in his place and he resolved that he would not yield without an effort and a struggle. In early June, 1894, a Pontifical Decree was issued from Rome against Fr. Coyne, and an order to present himself to his bishop. Fr. Coyne was suspended from Kilannin parish. On 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1894, a letter from Dr. McCormack, Bishop of Galway, was to be read at Oughterard, Moycullen and Kilannin parishes, stating that Fr. Coyne had been canonically suspended and calling on his supporters in Kilannin to end the scandal.

After his return from Rome in June, 1894, the friends of both clergymen met at the chapel on the following Sunday and, were it not for the intervention of a large force of police, a serious disturbance would have been the result. For several successive Sundays, Mass had to be celebrated under police protection.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1895, Fr. Coyne and his supporters seized Kilannin church, and on the following Sunday there was a confrontation in the chapel. Fr. Coyne's friends built up the chapel doors with masonry and firmly secured the windows and, before Mass could be



celebrated again, the doors had to be broken open by a party armed with crowbars and pickaxes, while protected by police with fixed bayonets and loaded rifles.

Thus Fr. Conroy, appointed parish priest by the Bishop of Galway, had used force to eject Fr. Coyne and his supporters. Fr. Coyne then had recourse to the civil courts. In one of the supreme courts in Dublin, learned lawyers were employed for some days with the provisions of Canon Law. The civil courts, however, could do nothing to give relief to Fr. Coyne, nor would he yield to any decision unfavourable to him.

### **Oughterard Petty Sessions**

After his return from Rome in June, 1894, Fr. Coyne had been celebrating Mass, performing marriages etc., at his residence in 'Land League House' in Fahy townland. On the 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1894, he performed a marriage ceremony there. In the entry in the marriage register, it was said to have taken place in Killanin Roman Catholic chapel.

A case against Fr. Coyne in this connection came before Oughterard Petty Court Sessions on January 6<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1895. Mr. W. H. Flanagan, District Registrar of Marriages, said that an erroneous entry in the register book of marriages needed to be corrected. Neither Fr. Coyne nor the witnesses were present at the first hearing.

On 19<sup>th</sup> September, Fr. Coyne was present and he said that the marriage ceremony referred to had taken place at his residence, where he had been celebrating Mass since his return from Rome. The court held that the ceremony had not taken place in Kilannin chapel and directed that the entry in the register be corrected accordingly.

### **Confrontation between both sides**

In September, 1895, there was no peace in the parish, the congregation of which was divided pretty evenly, one portion attending the house of Fr. Coyne, where he celebrated Mass, performed marriage ceremonies and baptised children, and the other portion attending Kilannin chapel.

In order to put a stop to the division in the parish and the attendance at rival services, Fr. Conroy p.p. called together two public meetings. The first was held on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, and proved a failure. The other took place on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, which was well attended, there being excursion trains from Galway and Oughterard to Kilannin (Ross).

This report was given by the *Galway Express*, which was favourable to Fr. Coyne, and it stated that large placards were posted up for the meeting calling on the Roman Catholics of the surrounding parishes to assemble in their thousands to denounce the Kilannin 'Jumpers', heretics and schismatics.

When a large crowd had assembled, the report added, headed by Fr. Conroy and a number of other priests, it was decided to hold the meeting in front of Fr. Coyne's house ('Land League House'), but the appearance of Fr. Coyne in an adjacent field, surrounded by about 400 able-bodied peasants with determined countenances, soon made them alter their plans.

There could have been a bloody confrontation. They retraced their steps and held the meeting in front of Fr. Conroy's parochial house, with Fr. Conroy in the chair.

Resolutions were passed calling on the true believers to have no dealings with the 'Jumpers', heretics or schismatics, and recommending that neither young men nor women of the faith should marry or speak to those of the other section of the parish. The adherents of Fr. Coyne now arrived and the latter resolution was received with derisive roars of laughter and the proceedings were concluded amidst shouting and yelling.

In March, 1896, Fr. Redmond McDonagh p.p., Oughterard, denounced Fr. Coyne and his church supporters in nearby Collinamuck church. Fr. McDonagh was an active member of the Land League agitation and he regularly contributed to meetings chaired by Fr. Coyne from 1879 to 1882.

Fr. Coyne clung on for a further time after he was suspended but gradually ceased to interfere with Fr. Conroy, who had been appointed by the Bishop of Galway. He lived at 'Land League House', where he celebrated Mass to the end of his days, loyally supported by many of his followers. In March, 1899, Fr. John Connolly was sent to Kilannin and healed the split. Fr. Coyne died on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1899.

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