

The Battle between Carnival and Lent: Temperance and Repeal in Ireland, 1829–1845

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Over a period of about six years in the late 1830s and early 1840s the Cork Total Abstinence Society under Father Theobald Mathew enrolled over six million members, a figure that seems not to have been a gross exaggeration. Most of the membership came from the poorest classes in Ireland, in particular migrant agricultural workers or spalpeens, and the society was viewed with suspicion by the upper classes and the Protestant elite. The “Carnival” aspects of the old folk religion were sustained within the temperance movement by itinerant pledge-takers who sought out Father Mathew in the course of their annual trek in pursuit of work. What began on a note of fleeting carnivalesque revelry took on a millenarian character, however, as the agrarian crisis worsened and as temperance societies lost ground to the Repeal movement. With the defeat of the Repeal cause and the beginning of the Great Famine, the Irish underclasses were in for a lengthy season of Lent.

Pendant environ six ans, à la fin des années 1830 et au début des années 1840, la Cork Total Abstinence Society, à la tête de laquelle se trouvait le père Theobald Mathew, a recruté plus de six millions de membres. Ce chiffre ne semble pas avoir été une grossière exagération. La plupart des membres de cette société, qui éveillaient les soupçons des classes supérieures et de l'élite protestante, venaient des classes les plus pauvres d'Irlande, il s'agissait en particulier de travailleurs agricoles migrants ou de « spalpeens ». Les itinérants, qui avaient fait le vœu de tempérance et qui cherchaient à rencontrer le père Mathew pendant leur périple annuel à la recherche de travail, ont contribué à maintenir les aspects carnavalesques de la religion folklorique au sein du mouvement pour la tempérance. Ce mouvement dont les débuts avaient été marqués par une ambiance de festivités carnavalesques passagères a cependant pris un caractère révolutionnaire, lorsque la crise agraire a empiré et que les sociétés de tempérance ont perdu du terrain aux mains du mouvement Repeal. La défaite de la cause Repeal et le début de la grande famine se sont traduites par un long Carême pour les classes marginales irlandaises.

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OVER A PERIOD of about six years in the late 1830s and early 1840s the Cork Total Abstinence Society enrolled over six million members, something like 75 per cent of Ireland's population. Although there are reasons to question this figure — clearly some people pledged more than once, and there were inaccuracies at times in the tallies — it seems not to have been a gross exaggeration. A Capuchin friar, Father Theobald Mathew, was the head of the society. By all accounts he was, though from a wealthy noble family, a simple, unpretentious man with modest rhetorical gifts and small commanding presence.¹

Rather than ask how he was able to overcome these deficiencies, it seems more profitable to inquire about his recruits, particularly in the crucial early period of his mission. First, how did they and Father Mathew meet? Where did they come from? Since many of the country's bishops and priests would not permit Mathew into their sees and parishes, people would have had to come to him, and some travelled a considerable distance. As we shall see, the question of where they came from is related to another: who were they? What groups and classes were involved? What sorts of people in Ireland were likely to travel large distances? Those we would call migrant farm workers were indeed accustomed to travelling during the months between spring and late summer.

Irish rural society was not as homogeneous during the nineteenth century as was once thought. Roughly, it consisted of three classes: farmers, cottiers, and labourers, most of whom were migrants and better known as spalpeens.² Farmers rented substantial pieces of good land, 30 acres or more; cottiers held much smaller portions of poorer land; spalpeens, apart from some with conacre grounds, had nothing but hands for working and legs for walking the long distances between jobs.³ Such is the barest possible sum-

1 Father Mathew's role in the great Irish Temperance Campaign is the subject of Colm Kerrigan's recent study, *Father Mathew and the Irish Temperance Movement: 1838-1849* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1992); see also Elizabeth Malcolm, *Ireland Sober, Ireland Free* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), especially chap. 3. Of the several older biographies, John Francis Maguire's *Father Mathew* (New York: Sadleir, 1887) is still the best and most readable. There are two unpublished dissertations as well: George Bretherton, "The Irish Temperance Movement: 1829-1847" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1978), especially chap. 6 and 7; and John F. Quinn, "Father Mathew's Crusade: Temperance in Ireland, 1838-1856" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1992). For an approach rather different than the one adopted in this article, see H. F. Kearney, "Father Mathew, Apostle of Modernization" in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney, eds., *Studies in Irish History Presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979). What I treat here scarcely seems like "modernization", though Professor Kearney would maintain that the towns were different and that they were the real centres of the movement. For the moment I can only refer to my unpublished paper, "Temperance, Tradesmen and Repealers: A New Irish Morality, 1836-43".

2 In Irish *spalpins*, probably a diminutive of *spailp*, meaning a short term or spell: that is, one who worked for others briefly, for a time, a casual labourer. The combination of *spal*, a spade, and *peen*, penny, is also a possible derivation.

3 Conacre land consisted of small plots rented for part of the year almost always for the planting of potatoes. The rent was high, but seed potatoes and manure were often included in the bargain.

mary of rural heterogeneity. In practice there were some poor farmers and maybe some better-off cottiers, but spalpeens were total strangers to prosperity. One more generalization can be made: cottiers were much closer in terms of income and material comfort (little enough of both) to spalpeens than to farmers.⁴ At times cottiers, as well as sons of small farmers, took to the road and lived like spalpeens. The Irish Census of 1841 listed 1,100,000 agricultural labourers, probably a significant underestimate of the people who at one time or another made their way from mountainous districts to the richer plains, working for farmers along the way, reaching the Munster ports such as Cork by late summer, where they would catch the boat for the harvest in England. In a few weeks they would be on their way back to their cabins and the newly harvested potatoes and a long idle winter.⁵

This two-way passage through Cork would give migrant workers a double opportunity to see and listen to Father Mathew, who could often be found on the city quays and markets, mixing with sailors, dockers, and labourers. A spalpeen who pledged would carry word of the movement back to his neighbourhood, and other labourers, used to walking and with little else to do in the winter, would set out for Cork to find the great man.

This description of the spalpeen as travelling temperance agent is not entirely surmise and can be supported with some evidence. In March 1840, after a number of complaints had reached Dublin Castle concerning the dangers some of the upper classes feared from this ruse called temperance, the Irish Under-Secretary, Thomas Drummond, ordered the Constabulary, which he had recently reorganized into a national police force, to undertake an investigation of the movement. The chief instrument in his investigation was a "Circular" issued under the signature of the Inspector General of the Constabulary. Sent to every police district in Ireland, it consisted of 15 questions that were to be answered by the Chief Constable or other officer in charge. The answers to this Circular, or those that can still be found in the State Paper Office in Dublin Castle, though fragmentary, are very interesting. The 101 responses surviving in that archive are mostly from the southern and western counties, but those are the ones most important for our purposes.⁶ Some of the responding officers took this request more seriously than others and were more forthcoming or knowledgeable than their colleagues who responded "do not know" to a number of questions, but almost all respondents answered questions two through four:

2. The probable proportion of Protestants to Roman Catholics in your District?

4 John W. Boyle, "A Marginal Figure: The Irish Rural Laborer", in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr., eds., *Irish Peasant Violence and Political Unrest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 317.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 313-316.

6 State Paper Office, Dublin, Circular, Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle, March 12, 1840.

3. The total number of Persons who have taken the temperance pledge, and what proportion of this number are Protestants?
4. Whether any, and what number of Women, or of Men above those of the Working Class have taken the Pledge?

The answers to the first two questions contain no surprises. Except in the towns the population was overwhelmingly Catholic throughout the south and west, and Catholics predominated almost to the complete exclusion of Protestants in the new temperance societies. To quote a typical response from one district almost at random to question three: "Over 600 Catholics [have joined] and only 1 nominal Protestant." The answers to question four, however, are of the greatest interest. Thirty-two respondents, two-thirds of all answering, claimed the societies of which they had knowledge to be 90 per cent or more working-class in membership.

What did they mean by "working class"? After all, a number of historians have claimed that the appropriate term for contemporaries and hence for historians is "working classes", which reflects the variety in wealth and status within that group. We need not get mixed up in these issues, nor need we quibble about the meaning or appropriateness of the terms. In answering question four a number of respondents provided some helpful parenthetical detail that aids in identification. Most of the people above the working class who took the temperance pledge were women. It is possible that their number, like that of the entire group, may be somewhat underestimated. Two respondents answered that, because of the stigma of the pledge, it was somewhat difficult to tell how many of these superior individuals, including women, had joined. If they pledged, they did so quietly. Even more revealing are quite a few comments indicating that the real elite rarely joined. Members of the aristocracy or gentry, clergy of the Established Church, or even businessmen, apart from the environs of a few cities and large towns such as Waterford and Limerick, are almost completely absent. Those members above the working class came from a far humbler portion of society. In the few large towns in the sample they are identified as mechanics or artisans. In the much more plentiful country districts, they are described as farmers and shopkeepers. We may conclude, then, that the "working class" here was composed of cottiers and agricultural labourers in the country and labourers in the towns.⁷

Not only were the majority of new teetotalers from the poorest classes in the community, but they were the least educated (many were illiterate) and

7 Those the 1841 census defined as small holders possessing five acres or less of land, our cottiers and spalpeens, made up 70% of the rural population of Ireland. Their representation among the teetotalers is even greater than that percentage. L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1600* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 111. Joseph Lee estimates this number as over 80% of the rural population by 1845; it was a fast-growing group indeed. Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), p. 2.

most socially and geographically isolated. These were people of the bogs, wastes, and mountains: folks who lived far from towns, markets, and priests. Father Mathew had a special reason for becoming a temperance missionary. In addition to the promotion of industry and frugality through sobriety and the healing of class wounds through paternalism, he hoped that temperance would bring his people closer to religion.

We get some idea of how ambitious such a goal was when we consider a story told by the German traveller Johann Georg Kohl, who visited Ireland during this time. In Cork on Sunday, he passed a Catholic chapel and saw the middle and upper ranks entering by one door under a sign reminding them that “a Silver Collection is expected”, while the poor paid their penny or halfpenny and entered by another. The very poor knelt outside:

If they but hear the little bell of the assistant of the priest who officiates at the altar; when they have heard that little bell from within, and bowed and crossed themselves they think they have heard mass and participated in the worship of God.⁸

Father Mathew wanted to bring these people inside the Church in several ways. He had already brought many inside his friary and given them a penny rather than asked one of them. His charity sermons and generous contributions built or repaired many a village chapel. Along with his temperance mission, Father Mathew had taken on himself a significant part of the responsibility for the building’s maintenance and upkeep of the church’s capital equipment, and it may be that the great growth of the church, both in terms of resources and personnel, usually said to have begun at a somewhat later period and associated with the episcopate of Paul Cullen, should be attributed to Father Mathew.⁹

Yet more was at stake than buildings. Poor spalpeens and cottiers from upland hamlets were without the Church in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. As Kohl’s story about the bell indicates, they had hardly the rudi-

8 Johann Georg Kohl, *Travels in Ireland* (London: n.p., 1844), p. 184.

9 The conventional wisdom can be found in Emmet Larkin, “Irish Economy and the Catholic Church”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 72 (1967), pp. 856–862, and in the same author’s highly regarded article, “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 77 (June 1972), *passim*. In this second article the problem of too few priests for too many people in pre-famine Ireland is contrasted with the much healthier and stronger Church that Cardinal Cullen, according to Larkin, did so much to foster in the post-famine period. With a much reduced population, a significantly greater number of priests were able to catechize their flocks properly and bring all of them safely within the fold for the first time. This article, together with two other related pieces, has been reprinted in Larkin’s *The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism* (Washington: 1984), to which Professor Larkin has added a very useful introduction in which he discusses the work of David Miller, Eugene Hynes, and Sean J. Connolly. For a different point of view, see Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), pp. 97–111.

ments of Christianity. Little wonder, for it was a visit to Cork or some market town that brought many of them within sight of a church at all. Those living in especially remote parts might ordinarily see a priest no more than once a year at a station or a pattern, if then, since many priests had ceased to attend them by the 1830s. Stations, usually held in a farmer's house — a priest would not enter the cabin of a spalpeen — were places of confession, a sacrament, like the mass itself, that the poorest classes participated in not much more than once a year. Patterns, a corruption of Patron (Saint), where mass or prayer had once been said, were held more often at a holy well or some other sacred spot — sacred, that is, to a religion older than Christianity and to practices not in keeping with the Christian virtue of temperance. After the priest had blessed the people and their animals with water from the well, there would be dancing and singing, and, with the priest long since gone, a great deal of heavy drinking, accompanied by activities that the coming Victorian generations would find deplorable. In fact, the Catholic hierarchy began to deplore such practices from the earlier years of the century and had long been attempting their suppression. Father Mathew hoped that temperance would work towards the same end.¹⁰ His teetotalers would be instructed in the truths of religion; they would learn Christianity along with sobriety, and patterns and their excesses would become a thing of the past.

Ironically, these rites and the exuberance that accompanied them were given a second life by the very cause that sought to undermine them. The old folk religion revived with the effusion of élan that Mathewite Temperance injected into its decaying fabric. Father Mathew found himself the object of idolatry as millions pursued him around the country. He became the centre of a vast cult that endowed him with magical powers that the old religion had long attributed to much-loved priests. In Cromwellian days, it was the heroic priest on the run who gathered villagers together for mass in the open. The Roundheads passed by without seeing him, as he had the power to make himself invisible to his enemies.

10 Sean J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780–1845* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), pp. 136–137, has a good deal to say about patterns, wakes, and other popular rites, which would normally begin with prayers and proceed through other oblations such as a number of circuits around the well, ruined chapel or monastery, sacred stone or tree, barefoot or on bare knees. Water from the well would be drunk or used to bathe the part of the body affected by illness. Sometimes great bonfires were set and cattle driven through the smoke, which was thought to have healing properties, or burning embers from the fire were used to singe their hides. Then hawkers and their tents and booths would appear. “Wrestling and yelling, dancing noise and merriment ... [and] boxing bouts” were all part of the scene. Connolly quotes the diary of Humphrey O’Sullivan, a County Kilkenny schoolmaster, who describes a well-known pattern on the feast day of St. James in 1829. “The twenty-sixth day, Sunday, Feast-day of St. James, that is, patron day at St. James’ well, close to Callan. ... My youngest children and myself went to the patron. There were gooseberries and currants and cherries for children; gingerbread for grown girls; strong beer and maddening whiskey for wranglers and busybodies; open doored booths filled with lovers; bagpipers and fiddlers making music there for the young folks; and pious pilgrims making their stations round the well.”

Newspaper accounts of the roads of Ireland crowded not only with would-be pledge-takers, but blind people hoping to see, cripples wanting to be made whole, and others in suffering are quite common. The Tory *Dublin Evening Mail*, never a fan of the movement, took a particularly nasty and sneering tone to these sights. Its correspondent mentioned one poor old woman who followed Mathew to Castleromer, “dragging her bed and bedding”, but who died in the chapel yard before setting eye on her saviour.¹¹

“I never led the people to believe that I possessed any miraculous powers, God forbid,” Mathew wrote to a friend in England.¹² Yet it was difficult to deny some hope to mobs of the desperately ill, and an encouraging word might easily be misinterpreted.¹³ In fact, something more than hope was often the result of these performances. The Bishop of Kildare who saw Father Mathew pledging many sick people in the autumn of 1840 wrote of

the very many instances, by a sort of preternatural effort, cripples were seen casting away their staves and crutches, as no longer needful, whilst they walked erect or nearly so, to the great astonishment of all present. ... [F]or any restoration of this kind, Father Mathew invariably requested the people to give all praise and glory to God under whom he was an unworthy instrument, permitted to exercise the duties of a holy ministry, and to effect only what he believed to be a great social reformation.¹⁴

The Bishop’s statement raises two important points. One, which will be taken up in greater detail below in connection with Victor Turner’s work, relates to the relatively passive, medium-like role of priests, shamans, and the like in several societies where belief in miracles was actively present. The use of the word “instrument” certainly suggests a similar situation here. The second point can detain us for a moment. When the Bishop referred to Father Mathew’s work as a “great social reformation”, perhaps actually quoting Mathew, he may have only meant that Mathew wanted to improve the conditions and habits of the people. Yet, coming as it does in close

11 *Dublin Evening Mail*, January 24, 1840.

12 State Paper Office, Dublin, Mathew Papers, Theobald Mathew to C. Stuart, Esq., n.d.

13 Nothing Mathew might say or do could possibly contain the sorts of people who flocked to him in vast numbers at some of the “monster meetings”. These great triumphant occasions of the movement, like his first appearance in Limerick, were described by the press. The *Dublin Evening Post*, December 19, 1838, reported on that event: “Those afflicted with disease — the lame and the blind, despite all the causation of the police, fling themselves upon him; many embrace his knees and beg his blessing with an irresistible earnestness.” James Birmingham saw much the same thing during his first visit to Birr in 1840: “Much stress was laid on the eagerness of the people to touch his person and dress, or to have him impose his hands upon them. The lame, it was said and the blind, the deaf, and the decrepit threw themselves in his way to be relieved from their physical disabilities.” James Birmingham, *A Memoir of the Very Reverend Theobald Mathew, with an Account of the Rise and Progress of Temperance in Ireland* (Dublin: n.p., 1840), p. 27.

14 (Rev. Fr.) Augustine, *Footprints of Father Mathew* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1947), p. 172.

proximity to the attribution of miraculous healing powers, it suggests a relationship between the two that may have been dimly sensed by the Bishop, but grasped more directly, if intuitively, by the people involved. There was much illness in Ireland, but what was its cause? The Church would have answered sin, and many people would have looked on the prevalence of sin and illness as both cause and effect of the ills of society. A failing industrial economy, agrarian crisis, and the political and social domination of the Protestant elite would head a list of what was wrong with Ireland.

Thus actions which affected the social body reacted back on the physical body — physical ailments, for example, being seen as the result of sins, lapses or crimes which had inflicted harm on the social body. And just as in the natural body the physiological danger points were at the joints, where member met member, or at the openings where the body could be invaded by harmful influences from without, so in the social body tensions arose at the jointures which linked group to group, class to class; and in the social body too there were openings through which might pour invasion from without.¹⁵

One of the questions asked in the Constabulary Circular was: “Does the taking of the pledge appear to be associated with superstitious feelings in many instances; such as the expectation of the Divine judgment in the event of violating it?” It was answered by 42 of the 48 respondents and gives further support to the attribution of miraculous powers if any is needed. There is some ambiguity in the question. It raises the subject of “superstition”, which is the polite word the *Dublin Evening Mail* would use in describing what went on between Mathew and his supplicants, but it then directs the respondent’s attention to “manifestations of the Divine judgment” should the pledge be broken.

Of the 42 officers, 25 simply answered yes. Nine responded yes, but added that the expectation that Divine Wrath would follow an act of pledge-taking was quite common in their districts. There were eight other diverse answers (such as yes, the medal could cure disease), but only two or three negative ones. One Chief Constable reported that there was no superstition involved; the pledge was regarded as a solemn vow to God.¹⁶ Another said

15 Mervyn James, “Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town”, in his *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 21–22. This most interesting article looks at Corpus Christi processions in several fifteenth-century towns as healing rituals for the body, soul, society, and body politic. The healing *mana* came from Christ’s body.

16 There was a good deal of debate about whether the pledge should be treated as a vow. Some Catholics and nearly all Protestants thought it should not, and many Protestants disavowed the very concept of such an undertaking. Much more important is that by far the great majority of pledge-takers thought the pledge was a vow (for which see below). The Chief Constable who answered the question in this way was almost certainly a Catholic, perhaps himself a pledge-taker — he was certainly in sympathy with the movement and was being a bit touchy in its defence.

in regard to superstition that “a few of the lower orders” might feel that way.

We cannot be sure that the 25 who simply answered yes, as opposed to the nine who referred as well to the Divine Judgment, were thinking primarily of instances of superstition such as those under discussion here. Probably, “yes” was meant as an umbrella response that covered all possibilities. Of the six affirmative answers within the diverse group, four referred to instances of superstitious belief other than those connected with Divine Judgment. All in all, this seems to be quite solid confirmation of the prevalence and persistence of the belief that Mathew had miraculous powers and that not merely his blessing but the taking of the pledge itself was the means through which a measure of that power was passed on. One of the respondents in the diverse group added to his initial “yes” that many who had taken the pledge in ill health were disappointed that they were little or no better, “and they would not pledge again.” Of 42 responses, this is the only one to raise any doubt about Mathew’s abilities as a healer and the efficacy of the pledge as a cure.

Let us turn now to the related issue of pledge-breaking and Divine Wrath. There is no doubt that pledge-breaking was treated as a great horror, and appalling things were said to happen to those who returned to drink. The newspapers were filled with stories of men who broke the pledge, usually selling or pawning their household goods, their wives’ wedding rings, and the children’s clothes in the bargain. These acts were invariably followed by calamity, death, and other manifestations of Divine Wrath. Reprobates fell into rivers and drowned, fell off high cliffs, or were crushed to death by debris. Some simply went up in smoke — what the papers called “spontaneous combustion”.¹⁷ One of the Chief Constables answering the question about superstition said that he had heard a number of stories about those who, when attempting to drink again, found that the whiskey turned to blood as it came from the bottle. The resulting shock drove some to suicide. Nor was pledge-breaking only a personal matter or one between an individual and his God. Strong communal pressures were put on people to conform, affording another explanation for the strength of the movement. Once a community or a sizable part of it had pledged, the rest were expected to follow. A good instance of the determination of a group of new pledge-takers to enforce conformity on their town can be found in New Ross towards the end of 1839. Five hundred men returned in the middle of December from Waterford, where they had pledged Father Mathew’s society, determined “to have temperance whips made, and whip out of New Ross anyone who breaks the pledge”.¹⁸

This all seems very sobering, yet a considerable proportion of the enor-

¹⁷ *Dublin Evening Post*, January 21, March 14, April 4, June 9 and 14, 1840.

¹⁸ *The Wexford Independent*, December 16, 1839.

mous throngs who went to Mathew to pledge were drunk or at least had been drinking, and more than a few had already taken the pledge and broken it. Despite the threat of Divine Wrath, the temperance whips, and belief in “spontaneous combustion”, many of Father Mathew’s pledgers had been to him before, some many times. One story that has passed into folklore preserves something of this phenomenon and points to the way in which the holy and dreadful could be made amazing and profane. One day a young man took the pledge from Father Mathew. The next day the priest recognized him in one of the new groups and asked why he had returned a second time. The man said that the pledge had not worked; immediately after taking it he had had a glass of whiskey and found that it went down as easily as always. Though this anecdote strikes us as funny, it may have originated in earnest. Like the victims of scrofula who sought the touch of French and English kings as cure, some seekers after Father Mathew thought the pledge would prevent them from drinking, that some magical power would keep the glass away from their lips or the whiskey from running down their throats. Like scrofula victims who were not immediately cured by the King’s touch, they would return again and again, perhaps encouraged by some improvement in their condition, always hoping next time for a true cure.¹⁹

Naturally, the press, especially the papers hostile to the movement, had a field day with the Apostle’s drunken teetotaler. “The disciplines of father Mathew reel from the tap-room to the platform or the altar, as the case may be, brutalised with the vice they are about to renounce and take vows of sobriety with lips still moist with the liquor of intemperance,” was how the *Dublin Evening Mail* put it.²⁰ But even the liberal and Mathewite *Dublin Evening Post* concurred. One of their correspondents in Cork reported early in 1840 that between 1,500 and 2,000 new pledge-takers arrived in the city daily when Mathew was in residence, and that the contrast between those arriving and those returning home was astonishing. On the way into town he saw men and women “reeling under the immediate effects of drunkenness, with bloated faces and fiery eyes, and all the attributes of the brute about them”. Departing the town he saw a people “bewildered, as if just awakening from feverish dreams — their faces pale and haggard from exhaustion and excitement”.²¹

The writer added that most of these pledge-takers were the very poor who had come from places far from Cork and had travelled many days, often in foul weather. As a result they were truly exhausted, and only their determination to take the pledge kept them going. Once they had done that they

19 Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 238–243; see also the comments about this marvelous book in Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 17–19.

20 *Dublin Evening Mail*, January 24, 1840.

21 *Dublin Evening Post*, January 9, 1840.

were near collapse. Yet there is something in this description of transformation that is as haunting as it is impressive. Pale faces replace bloated ones, punctuated by fiery eyes; quiet bewilderment succeeds raucous comportment, and the sensation of awakening from a bad dream is part of the spell.²² Most observers interpreted the heavy drinking that preceded pledgetaking as simply a farewell to whiskey but, as we have noted, it was not a last fling for everyone. Hence the scorn that the *Dublin Evening Mail* and other hostile commentators heaped on the movement.

More than hypocrisy was involved. Heavy drinking over a period of days is the essence of Carnival, and Carnival is the expression of anxieties and dreams shared by a community, some of them considerably repressed, surfacing periodically in ritual form. The only holiday that the people make for themselves, it is the quintessential comment on and challenge to the powers that be and everyday life. The world is turned upside down in Carnival; a churl may become a king, but only for a night and a day.²³ Carnival is a fleeting thing; transience is its nature. Yet it recurs, and so far as the phenomenon examined here is concerned, not only in configuration with the Christian Lent. The Celtic seasons of the year along with the migratory habits of the spalpeens influenced its timing. *Samhain* and the coming of winter, the part of the year when dark spirits walked abroad and spalpeens had time on their hands, was one appropriate moment for Carnival. So was the spring and the festival of *Beltaine*, when the spalpeens would start their annual trek. At *Lughnasa*, midsummer, they would begin to make their way to the ports and the boats to England. Each of these occasions was marked by festivities that were carried over into the journey itself.²⁴

- 22 If any confirmation is needed it comes from the Constabulary Circular. Forty-eight police officers responded to the question: "Is it true or false that numbers of the People take the pledge in a state of intoxication, or at least get drunk after determining to take it?" Thirty-eight answered yes; five others added qualifications to their affirmative answers. Six answered no, that was not true of the people from their districts. One of the six got his opinion from the local parish priest who said that he (no mention of Father Mathew) would not pledge a drunken man.
- 23 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), pp. 246–254, is of course the primary source for and inspiration of all studies of Carnival and the carnivalesque; see also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 188 ff. and *passim*, for the oppositional modes, Carnival and Lent. For a different opinion, see John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 42. Bossy argues that Carnival is essentially Christian, serving as a "rite of separation" that prepares people for Lent. It is a complementary rite, not an antithetical one.
- 24 These ancient festivals received a Christian veneer. *Samhain*, celebrated on the eve of All Saints' Day, has come down to us with its ghosts and goblins as Hallowe'en. *Beltaine*, celebrated on May 1, became May Eve, and the feast of St. James, July 25, was sufficiently close to the first day of August, the traditional date of *Lughnasa*, to be confounded with it. The connection between these two holidays is still remembered in the ancient pilgrimage rite of climbing Croagh Patrick barefoot on the last Sunday in July. The various wells and other sacred places where patterns were held usually had saints' names such as St. John's Well and St. Bridget's Well, and a particularly important and well-attended pattern was held on the Saint's Day. Connolly, *Priests and People*, pp. 104–106, 108–109, 136–137.

These journeys of the rural poor, if not inherently communal (and it seems extremely likely they were), certainly became so in the process of reaching a destination, a fertile vale, a port, or Father Mathew in Cork. One man or small group moving along an upland path would join others going the same way. During halts they may have done some of their drinking, pattern-like at holy wells and other sacred spots.²⁵ Like Victor Turner's Mexican villagers, they would have made their way from one shrine to another, ascending through a succession of sacred sites, each one a place of communion with the spirit that drove them until they reached the holy of holies, Father Mathew in Cork or wherever he happened to be. Certainly Turner's work, grounded as it is in that of Durkheim and Van Gennep, is extremely helpful in understanding this aspect of the great temperance movement. The people who walked sometimes hundreds of miles for days on end in search of Father Mathew were on a pilgrimage.²⁶

Turner accepts the following definition of pilgrimage: "a journey which is made to a shrine or sacred place in performance of a vow or for the sake of obtaining some form of divine blessing."²⁷ Mathew's pilgrims desired his blessing and expected to make a vow, which is how most of them viewed the temperance pledge, as a solemn promise to God. They also hoped for the re-invigoration of the old culture and its folk religion and the gift of happiness and prosperity for their families and communities. Essentially, this is the chief purpose that pilgrimages serve, according to Turner. They occur during times of social crisis or disintegration.

Communities under threat of social disruption or disintegration sometimes generate strong feelings of social bonding that Turner calls "communitas".²⁸ These feelings or attitudes grow in strength as a result of the special brotherhood bonds that are a part of pilgrimage, and the ultimate quest of all pilgrimages is a kind of complete communitas. Pilgrimages are also liminal events when people pause on a threshold of change, between past

25 By this time most members of the clergy shunned these places and discouraged their parishioners from visiting them, but as we have seen many spalpeens and cottiers were not exactly regular parishioners. *Ibid.*, p. 141 ff.

26 Malcolm, *Ireland Sober, Ireland Free*, p. 113, allows that the people who went in search of Father Mathew were thought to be on a pilgrimage, but she does not pursue the point, which a reading of Victor Turner's major work might have suggested. Turner has built a mighty edifice upon Durkheim and Van Gennep. His own seminal work is *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), but I found two more recent articles, in which he has some second thoughts about *The Ritual Process*, very useful. They are to be found in Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). On pages 28, 33, 45-47, and 53-58, the author sets out his ideas about the "limina of history" and "communitas". The second article, "Pilgrimages as Social Processes", as its title suggests, is even more important for the purposes of this discussion.

27 Turner, "Pilgrimages as Social Processes", p. 173.

28 Communitas is more than a feeling or attitude or an event. Perhaps it is best defined as a process as the title of Turner's essay suggests. *Ibid.*

and future, a view that supersedes and subsumes Van Gennep's notion of initiation rites.²⁹

Pledge-takers had passed through the fiery furnace; despite this fundamental transformation — indeed, because of it — they had come to be successfully reintegrated within their communities and the old dispensation.

Pilgrimages seem to be regarded by self-conscious pilgrims both as occasions on which *communitas* is experienced and as journeys towards a sacred source of *communitas*, which is also seen as a source of healing and renewal. In this kind of thinking, too the health and integrity of the individual is indissoluble from the peace and harmony of the community; solitude and society cease to be antithetical.³⁰

On one level the problem appeared solved. What Turner elsewhere calls “social dramas” or periods “of aharmonic or disharmonic process” were brought to an end through *communitas*.³¹ What is the social drama, the source of disharmony here, however? Briefly put, we might describe it as an unravelling process caused by demographic, economic, and political change. Ireland's population in 1740 was a little over two million people; by 1800 it had doubled, and by 1840 doubled again. Commercialism of agriculture, characterized by more efficient methods, consolidation of farms, and a turn to grain growing at the expense of pasture and other forms of arable land use following the end of the Napoleonic War, along with the march of the English language deep into the western and southwestern countryside, did a lot to marginalize cottiers and spalpeens and to make them even poorer. Rents, especially for small holdings such as conacre land (when obtainable at all), greatly increased (at more than the rate of inflation) as the pressure on land (on account of the rise in population) became enormous. On the other hand, prosperous farmers and middlemen, both of whom held substantial blocks of land on long leases, were protected from the worst of this inflation. They did on the whole fairly well from the mid-teens to the mid-thirties, and spalpeens, especially in the later period, were pressed to the wall.³² What was unusual about the period from 1839 to

29 Properly “liminoid” rather than “liminal”, since the former term applies to a more evolved although still pre-industrial social order, but the difference is inconsequential for our purposes. The root of both words, first used by Van Gennep in his discussion of initiation rites, is *limen*, literally threshold. The discussion of these matters in Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 30–39, is quite good. Turner considers both Carnival and theatre to be liminoid processes. As for initiation rites, clearly the pledge fits Van Gennep's definition. Daithi O'Hogain notes that the Irish were especially taken with rites of passage such as Christian baptism, but, owing perhaps to the lack of cathetical facilities, not confirmation. Pledging may have taken its place. O'Hogain, *The Hero in Irish Folk History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), pp. 52–53.

30 Turner, “Pilgrimages as Social Processes”, p. 203.

31 Turner, “Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors”, in *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, pp. 23, 35–38.

32 Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland*, pp. 109–121. Quoting the report of the Drummond

1843, when the temperance movement was at its height, was that the entire agricultural community was in trouble. The slowly worsening economic condition of the two agrarian underclasses, cottiers and spalpeens, fell close to collapse; these classes suffered terribly as a result of repeated partial failure of the potato crop and heavy summer rains that made the grain harvests much worse than usual.³³

Farmers now found themselves in something of the same unhappy predicament as those two underclasses. While they had formally quarrelled about rent and the availability of conacre land, there was for a time an alliance of sorts.³⁴ Farmers, as we have seen, did not at first join temperance societies in large numbers, but they were sympathetic to the movement. These new conciliatory feelings and an enlarged sense of community contributed to a lessening of the social tension.

Yet no amount of *communitas* could change demography or alter an agricultural system growing more commercial and capitalistic. Periods like 1839 to 1843 would prove the exception. The Great Famine of the middle and later 1840s would be bad for many farmers; it would mean death or emigration for a majority of Ireland's poor. Mathew's visits to temperance societies throughout Ireland were times when silver, or copper at least, showered down on the heads of many, and these occasions, frequently repeated, helped to keep *communitas* and the Carnival spirit alive. One important and expensive innovation paid for by Father Mathew were the temperance bands. They were a way of keeping the members out of mischief and out of the shebeens, and bands certainly fostered community. It might have been better if he had found less extravagant counter-attractions, however; as of the summer of 1841, Father Mathew had spent 1,600 pounds equipping his bands with instruments.

The bands were noisy, too; after all, that was their point. John Francis Maguire speaks of the "shriek and roar of the genuine temperance band", made more cacophonous in the end for the lack of training and musical aptitude in those entrusted with instruments.³⁵ These instruments, used vigorously rather than artfully, wore out fast, especially the bass drum.

If the big drum yielded to the merciless vigour of its lusty operator, whose conscientious performance was the pride of the room and the admiration of the

Commission, which reported in 1839, Cullen tells us that "these signs of growing prosperity are, unhappily, not so discernible in the condition of the labouring people. ... The pressure of a super-abundant and excessive population ... is perpetually and powerfully acting to depress them."

33 James S. Connolly, Jr., *The Land and the People of Nineteenth Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 32–33. Malcolm mentions the partial failure of 1839 but not those of the two subsequent years in *Ireland Sober*, p. 114.

34 Clark and Connolly, eds, *Irish Peasant Violence*, p. 33.

35 Maguire, *Father Mathew*, p. 175.

neighbourhood, Father Mathew was probably consulted as to the condition and prospects of that much-aggrieved instrument; and if it were hopelessly invalidated, as it too often had every reason to be, a subscription from the President for the purchase of a new victim to the prowess of the "great drummer" was expected.³⁶

Both the Constabulary Circular and a set of documents known as Outrage Papers for the period from 1840 to 1842 contain a number of complaints about the activities of these bands: their loud playing, which caused much annoyance and disruption, especially on the Sabbath; and the lowly nature of the bandsmen, which the middle and upper classes found disturbing. "Five hundred persons of the lowest order perambulated the streets of New Ross shouting, and accompanied by a [temperance] Band to the great annoyance of the persons who were there at prayer in the Church."³⁷ About a year earlier the Chief Constable in Navan had written to his superiors about a Temperance Procession composed of thousands of people, played into the town of Kells by many bands. Father Mathew was expected, and "the most pitiable objects made their way inconceivable distances to be touched by him."³⁸

The quality were not used to seeing these sorts of people in their towns. They might pass quickly through, but they did so with heads down and hands in their pockets. They did not shout or try to make music. They did not dare disturb the upper ranks at prayer. These Sunday marches seem to have been timed to conflict with Protestant Church service. Since "disturbing divine worship" was against the law, the bands usually took care to arrive a little before or after the service, but there can be no doubt of their provocative intentions. Spalpeens and cottiers were taunting their betters, coming down from the hills and entering their towns in force, blowing rude noises in their faces.

This sort of unprecedented anti-deferential behaviour could be turned upon the priests who led their local temperance societies, even upon Father Mathew himself. Though the police officials answering the Constabulary Circular and filing reports that have found their way into the Outrage Papers told of a significant rise in unruly behaviour of this sort, they sometimes tempered their concerns with a good word about the local priest and the respectable Roman Catholics of the locality. The Chief Constable in Rathkeale, County Limerick, for example, wrote that the better sort of Catholics disapproved of the noisy processions, "as they consider them quite unnecessary to the furtherance of temperance".³⁹

36 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

37 Outrage Papers, 31689, January 20, 1842, State Paper Office, Dublin. In Ireland at this time Church means the Established Church; Chapel covers a host of unendowed sects including Catholicism.

38 *Ibid.*, 22/653, January 21, 1841.

39 State Paper Office, Dublin, Constabulary Circular.

“The Repeal Year”, Daniel O’Connell announced, was 1843, the year when his efforts to repeal the Act of Union and re-establish an Irish Parliament would succeed. So it was hoped. The many “monster meetings” at which O’Connell spoke were well attended by the temperance bands. Father Mathew, already concerned about reports in the previous two years as to the raucous behaviour of the bands — he may have sanctioned processions like the Cork Easter Monday one in the hope of exercising some control — was beside himself, as more and more bands and societies fell into O’Connell’s grasp.

Father Mathew was kept busy writing to teetotal leaders throughout the country, urging them to take whatever action was needed to keep the bands away from nationalist gatherings. To one society’s president, he explained that he would stay far away from his town, Carrimacross, while the agitation raged there. It was up to this man to keep the locals away from the Repealers; if they were to perform at any of their meetings “it would be ruinous to teetotalism.”⁴⁰ Father Mathew left the details up to him, but advised that “the easiest way is to keep the Musical Instruments in your possession until the day after the Meeting.” This piece of advice was never sent; Father Mathew had second thoughts and crossed out the words from his letter, but he frequently made such suggestions to the many priests to whom he wrote on the subject of the wayward temperance bands. When they acted on his recommendations, stormy little arguments sometimes followed. A group of teetotalers from County Limerick deputed one Patrick O’Grady to write to the Apostle in order to complain about the behaviour of their priest, Father Donovan, who had taken away their brand-new drum, which the teetotalers had bought with their own money. Perhaps Father Donovan hinted that he acted on instructions from Father Mathew, for O’Grady demanded that Mathew get their priest to give the drum back so “they might bum it if they pleased.”⁴¹ Either that or they would hand in their cards and medals and have nothing more to do with temperance.

O’Grady’s letter shows a loss of respect for the local temperance leader and for the Great Apostle himself. Carnival has only one King, and the rest of its participants make up a fraternity of equals. The more teetotalers flocked to O’Connell, the fewer accepted Mathew’s leadership. He may have understood what was happening, but what seems to have worried him most was that the partisan anti-British character of the Repeal Movement would drive away his Protestant friends in Ireland and England and cause them to withhold the financial contributions he was coming to rely on.⁴²

40 State Paper Office, Dublin, Mathew Papers, Theobald Mathew to E. Carolan, Esq., [1843].

41 State Paper Office, Dublin, Mathew Papers, Patrick O’Grady to the Rev. Theobald Mathew, Ballyvagh, County Limerick, September 10, 1843.

42 State Paper Office, Dublin, Mathew Papers, Theobald Mathew to His Grace the Duke of Leinster, [November–December 1844].

The relations between Mathew, O'Connell, and the teetotalers and the fate of the movement are a complicated and important issue. Justice cannot be done to it here. Yet the conventional wisdom, that O'Connell stole Mathew's movement from him and perverted teetotalism, compromising its purely moral character and finally destroying it in the bargain, is only partly right. In a sense, O'Connell, who led a strictly constitutional, anti-revolutionary, and peaceful agitation, may have saved the temperance movement from falling into revolution or chaos. We need to consider whether the movement from the spring of 1840, the time of the Constabulary Circular, to the spring of 1843, when the Repeal Campaign began to gather steam, can be entirely understood in terms of our analysis of the carnivalesque.

In Carnival roles are inverted: the lowly are raised; their superiors are cast down; and all follow a prince of revels, whose task is to relieve sorrow and care. Hurly-burly, charivari, rough music (an apt description here) are all part of Carnival, but Carnival by its very nature is transient. It can be repeated at times, especially during periods of crisis with increasing frequency, but it cannot last; it cannot become the everyday world. When people begin to believe that it can, when they develop expectations of an entirely changed world where the mighty have been forever cast into darkness and the low take their places to bask in the land of milk and honey, they are no longer Carnival celebrants but millenarians.

Two things especially seem to have deeply troubled the police officers, magistrates, and people of property who answered the Constabulary Circular and who wrote letters to the Chief Secretary's Office at Dublin Castle, many of which are now among the Outrage Papers. One was the sheer number of people who had joined the temperance cause. That these teetotalers invaded their towns and acted in quite untypical and rude fashion was upsetting and infuriating, but that they did so in such great throngs was very worrying. Were they out of control, or on the verge of going out of control? Although the raucous antics of the bands suggest that might be the case, the reverse was frequently reported. Many processions were not disorderly, but had the look of parades. Hundreds or thousands of teetotalers from many different societies would march with military precision on various occasions to a central point, usually a large open field. They would then listen to speeches from their priests, sometimes Father Mathew and perhaps some other visiting temperance worthy. All the while respectful quiet and decorum would be maintained.

George Hill, Sub-Inspector of Police in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, returned his circular letter with the comment that he was certain some ulterior motive lay behind these monster temperance meetings. His counterpart in the Carofin District of County Clare, George Morgan, wrote that the local organization was suited for "political purposes", and he did not mean peaceful or legal ones. The registry of members, a hierarchy of leaders, secret meetings, and the fact that the local priests were in control all seemed quite sinister to him. The priests, he added, "will refuse the rites of the

Church to those who do not join". The police officer in charge of the station at Oughterard, County Galway, was of the opinion that the cause would "be used for the furtherance of certain political views and object". He added that the local leaders "were in almost all cases parish priests, thus an immense power will be added to the great influence these functionaries already possess", but what power did he mean? The Chief Constable at Flin, County Limerick, had similar misgivings: "From the privacy of their meetings, the unity of the members, it would appear that there is something carried on that's not right. I will keep a close look out." In answer to one of the questions asked in the Circular — "What Influence has the Taking of the Pledge had on the General conduct of the People, especially at Fairs, Races, and on similar occasions?" — most respondents gave a favourable reply; yet they sometimes added, as did the officer in Charleville, County Cork, "that the Protestants in general look on this sudden change and reserved manner as a prelude to some awful crisis." Patrick Cheevers, the Resident Magistrate in Listowel, County Limerick, thought that "a sort of radical party" was behind it all, the members of which think their cause is "the cause of the People", and he concluded that those who joined did so "to derive some share of importance". Louis Anderson, the Chief Constable in Cahir, County Tipperary, opined that the "working class" in joining felt that their large numbers derived "some sense of power". A police officer in Kenmare, County Cork, characterized temperance as a species of "ranting politics", adding that "respectable persons of property here look on it as an instrument of revolution." Finally, George Morgan, the Sub-Inspector in Clare who commented on the priests who refused the sacrament to non-members, wrote: "I cannot help thinking, too, that the exhibition of physical force by the movement of such large masses is calculated to produce much evil in giving a confidence in their own strength to a people so exciteable as the Irish."⁴³

The notion that Catholic priests were conspiring to create a rebellion was patently absurd, yet the feeling that something besides moral reform lay behind the great transformation that temperance brought was not so misplaced. Thomas Carpenter, the Chief Constable of Dingle, County Kerry,

43 All the responses from police officials and magistrates in this paragraph come from the Constabulary Circular. Was the officer in Kenmare using the word "ranting" in its classical antinomian sense? Probably not, but he seems to have shared with "the respectable persons of property" a fear of revolution. That a majority of the respondents answered the question about the improved behaviour of the people in the affirmative, often adding that they looked healthier now that they had stopped drinking, is an important point, as it testifies to the health-bringing qualities of abstinence and perhaps even more to a remodeled family or personal economy. Money saved on drink could be spent on food and other essentials. These remarks contrast with the one made by the Chief Constable of Navan about "the most pitiable objects" tramping on the road to Kells, but the latter wrote this in 1841 after the second consecutive partial failure of the potato crop. For a time before the agricultural crisis deepened, temperance made a difference to the well-being of the people.

reported that at the recent St. Patrick's Day procession through his town the teetotalers from the surrounding districts were led by a priest mounted on a white horse, a posturing that was quite unusual for a priest. One of Carpenter's constables tried to divert the path of the marchers; the priest ignored him, but several teetotalers broke ranks to shove him aside. Somewhat later one of the marchers, now in a state of drunkenness, Carpenter alleged, attacked another constable, and the priest was heard to say that the officer deserved what he got. Although the participation of a priest in this sort of encounter was exceptional — no other instance like it appears in the Circular or the Outrage Papers — feelings of tension and resentment between teetotalers on the one hand and the respectable classes and the authorities on the other grew worse in 1841 and 1842. The Chief Secretary at Dublin Castle advised caution and restraint on the police in these years, and police officers, especially in remote districts where their forces and reserves were modest, wrote to complain that if things got out of hand they could not maintain order. Complaints from respectable Protestants, such as one from the gentry in the neighbourhood of Manor Hamilton, County Leitrim, calling for vigorous police repression of unruly temperance processions, were answered politely but firmly in the negative.⁴⁴

It is clear from both the Circular and the Outrage Papers that most priests tried to hold back their more obstreperous members rather than urge them forward. Their efforts at restraint appear in a number of battles, which the priests tended to lose as time went on, over medals, sashes, banners, ribbons, uniforms, and "party tunes". Richard Gannon, the Sub-Inspector in Bansha, County Tipperary, returned his Circular with the information that the local priest, "a good man", had restricted the wearing of the temperance medal among his flock to their attendance at mass and temperance processions. As the medal might be wanted elsewhere, since it often served an entire family's health needs, we might think the priest's rule unexceptional, yet several policemen answering the Circular reported that the medal was invested with magical power, and that its wearers thought themselves invincible to the policemen's bullets. The police with all their weapons could do nothing to harm them. This priest's restrictions saved them from testing that theory.

Besides having magical powers both as a curative and a charm in battle, the medal was also "a passport through Ireland". Some police officers thought it had another purpose as well as a different sort of pass. It had taken the place of the passwords and signs exchanged by members of secret agrarian societies that paid back landlords for their rack rents, parsons for their tithes, and, in the case of cottiers and spalpeens, farmers over issues of conacre. These Ribbon Societies, so named for the colour of the ribbons members wore, flourished throughout the twenties and early thirties. Father

44 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers 16/7781, April 14, 1841, and 7/8643, June 8, 1841.

Mathew and other temperance priests had campaigned vigorously against them, but that did not stop some policemen from thinking that these societies had come out in the open. What was once covert was now overt; the separate, highly localized, unco-ordinated societies had coalesced into a national network bound together by the pledge, the medal, and the whole paraphernalia of temperance. It was a clever ruse that permitted the temperance system to act "as a cloak for Ribbonism".

Controversies having to do with sashes, banners, and uniforms revolved largely around colours. In 1836 the Chief Secretary saw legislation through Parliament that limited the ability of the Orange Society, the ultra right-wing anti-Catholic group then enjoying a revival, to assemble, hold marches, and carry "party" banners, insignias, and flags. For a time the society was outlawed entirely. The Whigs controlled Parliament and had appointed a liberal Irish administration, whence came the pressure for this legislation, for they regarded the Orange Order as having a grip on local government and elite Protestant opinion. It was a hindrance to public order as well. For the sake of local government reform, for social peace in the countryside (the order was highly offensive to Catholics), and in order to appease their O'Connellite allies, then in their pre-Repeal phase, the Whigs went after the Orange Society.

The Mathewite Societies were the other side of the coin. Just as the Orange Order had once marched on July 12, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne that had paved the way for the Treaty of Limerick, its bands banging out tunes like "The Boyne Water", so the teetotalers and their bands commemorated St. Patrick's Day, Easter, and patron days with processions and tunes like "Patrick's Day" and "Garryowen".

The Chief Secretary's Office, working through the Constabulary, prevailed on temperance priests to forego or curtail these processions whenever possible.⁴⁵ The priests in turn negotiated as many concessions as they could. Teetotalers wanted to wear green on St. Patrick's Day and other national occasions. They wanted green or green and white uniforms for their bands as well. Their clerical leaders usually suggested black, a decent, middle-class colour that was worn at temperance funerals. Sometimes they compromised on white, which as an emblem of purity and morality in many cultures hardly seems controversial.

This is certainly the case, however, in Ireland. Irish folklore is extremely rich in stories in which dark colours, especially black, represent evil, misfortune, and generally everything bad; light colours, especially white, stand for what is fine and good. St. Patrick, it is written, first climbed the mountain Cruachan Aigle that would later bear his name as Croagh Patrick where he spent the 40 days of Lent. Throughout that time dark demon birds filled the

45 State Paper Office, Dublin, Constabulary Circular, Robert Cray, Sub-Inspector, Bruff, County Limerick. Cray reported that the local temperance men wanted to wear their medals on green ribbon to funerals of fellow members, but their priest, "a most excellent man", insisted on black.

sky and blotted out the sun, nearly driving the Saint mad. Towards the end of Lent “an angel then came to comfort him, bringing beautiful white birds to sing melodies for him.” These white birds, the angel told him, were the souls of the Irish he would save through his preaching. An alternate form of this myth has Patrick driving out a frightening demon who ruled over Ireland before his arrival. He was called Crom Dubh, the Black Croucher, and the old holiday of *Lughnasa* was first Christianized in commemoration of this event. Sometimes Crom Dubh is depicted as a dragon, with Patrick driving a stake into his heart and casting him into Lough Dearg (Red Lake), renamed from Fionnlock (White Lake) on account of the great quantities of the monster’s dark blood that flowed into it.⁴⁶

Whiteness in this positive sense had what nineteenth-century people would have called a racial significance. Physical anthropologists point out that the Irish are among the fairest people in the world. Moreover, a very white skin has long been regarded as a mark of male and female beauty among the Irish. As Deirdre said upon first seeing her lover Naisi, “hair like a raven, skin like snow, cheeks like fire. I could love a man like that.” By contrast the English and the Anglo-Irish seemed dark-skinned. *Sean Buil*, a sort of punning version of John Bull which the Irish used among themselves to refer to their hereditary enemy, literally meant Swarthy John.

That temperance bands were able to march more frequently in green or green and white playing their tunes as we approach 1843 was infuriating to Orangemen who were forbidden to do either. There are a number of complaints in the Outrage Papers about such “injustices”. “The Mathewites assembled in great number and profaned the Sabbath by playing drums and other warlike instruments so near the Church to the distress of the Congregation,” one irate Protestant wrote to the Chief Secretary.⁴⁷ He went on to threaten retaliation in the form of Protestant bands, without Orange regalia, playing Protestant tunes, perhaps meeting the temperance bands on some remote country road. Police officials who wrote the Chief Secretary’s Office to comment on these sorts of threats feared the worst if such confrontations became reality.⁴⁸

46 O’Hogain, *The Hero in Irish Folk History*, pp. 6–8, 10, 52–53.

47 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers, 4/9927, Samuel H. Lewis to the Chief Secretary, Ballyjamesduff, May 17, 1843; and Outrage Papers, 2/3973, Memorial of the Protestant Inhabitants of Creggan, County Armagh, addressed to the Lord-Lieutenant, May 2, 1841, complaining of the “teetotal medalmen walking in military order with flags, sashes and music, we are also threatened with a grand display on the Easter Holidays.” The memorialist went on to protest the unfairness of the administration’s policy as “for some years our roads have been lined with police on the Memorable twelfth of July to prevent Processions and Bonfires while Roman Catholics are thus permitted to parade and their bonfires blaze around us unmolested.” Armagh was a county equally divided between Catholics and Protestants and notorious for its religious hatreds. The Orange Society was founded there in 1795 as a result of a series of attacks, murders, and pitched battles in which the Protestants were victorious.

48 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers, 24/19469, A. M. Hope to the Chief Secretary, Marlboro,

If priests were losing control over their temperance men by 1842 and 1843, there are signs that the teetotalers were giving vent to their true feelings long before, at least when no priest was present. The Chief Constable of Charleville, County Cork, volunteered quite a lot of information about his district in the spring of 1840. During a recent procession through his town without a priest in the lead, the local Protestant parson had words with some of the medal men. Typically enough he complained about the noise they were making, and they answered that "Father Mathew would soon pull down all your churches and put you all under one head." Known as the Pastorini Prophecy, the belief that Protestantism would soon be extinguished in Ireland and elsewhere and that "all the world are to be of *one religion*" had circulated throughout Ireland since its publication in Dublin in 1790, but with great captivating force from the later stages of the Napoleonic Wars until the middle twenties when it began to lose some of its power.⁴⁹ The author of the prophesy had predicted the extirpation of Protestantism by 1825 at the latest; when that date came and went, many poor Catholics turned away in disappointment.

"Why was there such a great upsurge of millenarianism and anti-Protestant feeling at this particular time — the early 1820s?" Donnelly's answer to this question is that "the social consequence of the economic crisis, and especially the dread of famine after the harvest failure of 1821 played a crucial role."⁵⁰ Famine was once again a terrible possibility with three successive partial failures of the potato crop beginning in 1839. When memories of rebellion were invoked at times like these, as they had been in the early twenties, they combined with the dread of famine to make a potent millennial mixture.⁵¹

There were still people alive who had witnessed and taken part in the 1798 Rebellion, harshly repressed by the British. Many more knew of it

January 2, 1842. "Some Protestant gentlemen are talking about marching at the head of a band playing 'The Battle of the Boyne' and then there will be trouble."

49 James S. Donnelly, Jr., "Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4", in Clark and Donnelly, eds., *Irish Peasant Violence*, pp. 110-113. Charleville may have been the centre of a millenarian cult or cults that flared up every few years. In the early summer of 1832, with news of an approaching cholera epidemic and a countryside suffering from yet another poor potato crop, word spread "that the Virgin Mary had appeared at the alter of the chapel at Charleville, and had left there certain ashes which she warned were the only protection against cholera." On her instruction bits of burning turf were carried from one house and village to another. "In a space of four hours ... the message spread across an area of more than forty miles ... to ... the northern border of the county." Within a few days this message and the burning turf reached the outskirts of Dublin. The authorities suspected some hidden motive in all the commotion, perhaps a secret communications system or a signal for rebellion was being tested. See Sean S. Connolly, "The Blessed Turf: Cholera and Popular Panic in Ireland, June 1832", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 91, pp. 214-217, 227-229.

50 Donnelly, "Pastorini and Captain Rock", p. 123.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

from stories and legends that had circulated with Pastorini's and other prophecies of Catholic victory. The Charleville Chief Constable who told of the incident involving the parson and the teetotalers also reported a conversation he overheard at about the same time between some "workmen". "We lost the battles of Vinegar Hill and [New] Ross by Drunkenness," one said, "but we are more secure and united now. When the Battle comes no whiskey." George Hill, a Sub-Inspector of Police in Queen's County, said that in Wexford, from which he had recently arrived, he heard many people say "that the battle of Ross would never again be lost by drunken men" and that, at a recent by-election in the King's County, a fellow officer had told him that "numbers of people shouted '98' and temperance."⁵² From another part of County Cork came the report of words said at the conclusion of a St. Patrick's Day meeting when, apparently, all the priests and gentry had gone home. Someone made an "inflammatory speech", telling them to "prepare for the war against their enemies": "They would have to wade up to their necks in Protestant Blood." He added that "the Poorhouses now preparing would be made Prisons for them [the Protestants], and they would have no English Laws here."⁵³

Are these complaints the tip of an iceberg, hints that reached the surface of a dark millennial conspiracy? Or are they merely the paranoid utterances of police officers driven to hysteria by a phenomenon they did not understand, but which they feared could only be productive of mischief? It is certain that they were not encouraged to submit these sorts of opinions, not if the endorsements to the reports among the Outrage Papers are any guide. Those endorsements (comments on the reports by the person reading them in Dublin Castle, ordinarily the Under-Secretary) when made were returned to the reporter. Such comments invariably played down any kind of conspiracy theory or expectation of serious trouble in the countryside, let alone millennial rebellion. Police officers were advised to act with circumspection, to use the law justly, in both senses of the word, and to do nothing provocative.

A "yes" answer to the first of the questions posed above is consistent with the analysis attempted here. We cannot know how deep or widespread these feelings were, but a movement that began on a note of carnivalesque revelry took on millenarian character as the agrarian crisis grew worse. Had Father Mathew preached a different sort of message from the strongly conservative, devoutly deferential one that was his stock-in-trade, had there been more priests who went to the head of their men on a white horse, things might have been different. Leadership is neither inconsequential nor

52 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers, 24/2713, George Hill, Sub-Inspector, Mountmellick, Queen's County, March 23, 1841.

53 State Paper Office, Dublin, Constabulary Circular, W. Bate, Sub-Inspector, Skibbereen, County Cork, March 23, 1840. The sequestration of all able-bodied applicants for poor relief in poor houses, where they would be subject to a regimen of simple diet and hard labour, was mandated by the Irish Poor Law of 1838, a statute with harsh consequences for many Irish people, who hated and feared it.

unimportant; nor, given the right conditions, will millenarianism flourish whatever leaders do or say. On the contrary, “prophets”, as Michael Adas calls his millennial leaders, are essential if millenarian sentiments are ever to be galvanized into revolt.⁵⁴

O’Connell was a different sort of prophet, a more effective leader, who knew how to shape and articulate peasant grievances into goals that were politically possible. The earlier mood did not disappear as the Repeal cause gathered steam but it abated. For every teetotal bandsman heard to cry out “Repeal or Blood” there was a troop of them with armbands that spelled out “Repeal and the Queen”.⁵⁵

As the pace quickened during the summer and autumn of 1843, the atmosphere of Carnival revived. An English visitor wrote of the monster meeting at Mulaghmast, County Kildare, on October 1, 1843, “the men yelled and danced with rage; the women screamed and clapped their hands. The vast multitude — I believe there were really 100,000 present — moved and moaned like a wild beast in agony.”⁵⁶ Is this a description of Carnival or of people awaiting the millennium? Though containing obvious millennial sentiments, the singsong jingle-like quality of a typical repeal ballad hawked at these meetings worked against the words of the text.

Since Luther lit the candle we suffer penury,
But now it is extinguished, in spite of heresy,
We’ll have our Irish Parliament fresh laws we’ll dictate
Or we’ll have satisfaction for the year of ——

The labourers and tradesmen that’s now in poverty
They sit within their parlour and sing melodiously.
They’ll have mutton beef and bacon with butter eggs and tea
And religion it will come again to welcome the repeal.

Then Luther’s generation must take a speedy flight
And go to Hanover from the lands of sweet delight,
All hereticks must cast their stricks and leave this fertile land,
For it was decreed that Harry’s breed should fall by the old command.⁵⁷

Finally, the return of heavy drinking decidedly tipped the scales to Carnival. For many, including some of Father Mathew’s old friends and

54 Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. xx–xxv.

55 Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist: Daniel O’Connell, 1830–1847* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), p. 221.

56 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers, 6/9475, 30/7347.

57 D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 146. The year not mentioned in the first stanza was, of course, “98”, the year of the last great rebellion. As Thomas Davis asked in his well-known poem, “Who Dares to Speak of 98?”

supporters, it made a mockery of the movement. "Drunkards and Owners of Spirit Houses are some of the most prominent agitators among the Temperance Party (so called) and they have used very insulting language to the Protestant Party." The writer, a police officer in Cavan, told of a recent meeting during which a drunken priest delivered "a very exciting speech" to the assembly, quite a Carnavalesque touch.⁵⁸

O'Connell also had a way of drawing the millennial fire to himself, taking it in and spouting it out with rhetorical flourish. It sounded alarming, but balanced as it often was by reservations and statements to the contrary, its effect was more a solvent to such feelings than an encouragement. Not only did O'Connell draw these millennial emotions to his person like a magnet, he subsumed them and accepted the responsibility for and the consequences of them. During a speech at Mallow in June, attended by 400,000 people, he delivered his famous "defiance". "I say they may trample me, but it will be my dead body they will trample on, not the living man."⁵⁹ He, not they, would make the sacrifice and be judged; he would stand up to the English and go down fighting like a champion of old, while the people cheered him on.

In the end, the Repeal cause went down, too. O'Connell was arrested, prosecuted, and jailed for his part in it. He came out of prison a broken man. Less than a year later in the summer of 1845 the first signs of the potato blight, which would recur over the next several years, became apparent. It was the beginning of the Great Famine that transformed Ireland. It greatly reduced the numbers of cottiers and spalpeens, eventually destroying these two classes and thus making impossible any movement that relied on them. It certainly put an end to Carnival for a good long time. The Irish, especially these two underclasses, were in for a lengthy season of Lent.

An article in the *Scottish Farmer* told of the living conditions of some spalpeens travelling to that country in 1862. They were packed into crowded ships and filthy cattle trucks during the journey. Gathering in market towns to await the local hiring fairs, "many of them slept on the hard pavement, choosing a dry or sheltered corner, but had scarcely any body clothes to cover them and used their arm or bundle for a pillow."⁶⁰ When hired they got to sleep on straw. They "were clean neither in clothing nor in person. ... Many had only one shirt, perhaps washed but once during the harvest and, if washed by the owner, in cold water without soap." Part of Sunday, their day of rest, was spent in the barn where they lived "examining their shirts", that is trying to get the lice out of them and off themselves. They

58 State Paper Office, Dublin, Outrage Papers, James Battersby, Cavan, County Cavan, May 22, 1843. "Exciting" in the sense of causing excitement, elevated feelings, or alarm. County Cavan within the Province of Ulster had a substantial Protestant population.

59 *The Emancipist*, p. 222. The Mallow Defiance is perhaps O'Connell's best known speech from this period and is remembered as the most violent and provocative.

60 Boyle, "A Marginal Figure", p. 319.

lived on penny loaves of bread and the porridge given to them by farmers' wives so that they could take as much as they earned home to Ireland. Despite these privations, the writer for the *Scottish Farmer* found it remarkable that they drank no alcohol. Was this a small tribute to temperance or merely testimony to necessity? Perhaps both. Abstinence had become ingrained as a survival strategy and as an article of faith.