

# **ANTI- CATHOLICISM IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

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E. R. Norman

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Volume 36

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN VICTORIAN  
ENGLAND

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E. R. NORMAN

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E. R. Norman

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FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1968

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## PREFACE

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The *Introduction* to this selection of documents is substantially the Thirlwall Prize-winning Essay for 1967. I am grateful to the assessors of the Prize for permission to publish it in this form, and to Professor Owen Chadwick, who read the manuscript and suggested corrections. I am also indebted to the editors of *Irish Historical Studies*, for allowing me to reprint part of an article on the Maynooth question which I first published in that journal.

E.R.N.

Jesus College  
March 1967



**FOR MY PARENTS**

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# INTRODUCTION



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## The Anti-Catholic Tradition

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In 1875 *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, probably the best known text in the very ample library of British anti-Catholic literature, was republished in London.<sup>1</sup> Among the engravings illustrating the sufferings of the early Protestants was one depicting the Massacre of St Bartholomew. It was vivid and crude, but a point was made; and it is strange to realize that this scene of the dispatch of sixteenth-century Huguenots—a scene which is today enclosed in the specialist history-book—was almost as familiar to the Victorians as the Bible itself. Those with any degree of literacy must have slid through almost daily mention of it in the massive religious journalism of the nineteenth century. The less-endowed would have recognized the event from cheap prints and from frequent reference in the pulpit. For this representation of the Massacre of St Bartholomew, together with numerous other tableaux on similar themes, belonged to a tradition of anti-Catholicism whose wide acceptance and long endurance, among all classes in society, secured it an important place in Victorian civilization. The same edition of Foxe also included an introductory essay by a Protestant clergyman which adequately exemplifies the attitude which gave strength to the tradition. 'Let us then hold up the inhuman system to merited execration', wrote that divine of the Roman Catholic religion; 'let parents teach their children, and children teach their children, to dread and to oppose this abomination of desolation'.<sup>2</sup>

The huge volume of 'No Popery' literature in the nineteenth century indicated clearly—as Newman pointed out—that Catholicism was 'the victim of a prejudice which perpetuates itself and gives birth

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the place of this work in the Protestant tradition, see William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, London, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Ingram Cobbin, 'Essay on Popery', in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, London, 1875, p. iv.

to what it feeds upon'.<sup>3</sup> This prejudice accumulated easily enough. Popular hatred founded largely on ignorance of the real tenets of Catholicism, and more informed antipathy established through inquiry into the beliefs and organization of the Catholic Church, were able to join hands because, as Newman again noticed, English Protestants 'think our creed is so irrational that it will fall to pieces of itself, when the sun of reason is directed upon the places which at present it is enveloping'.<sup>4</sup> This judgment was an accurate enough assessment. Catholic beliefs, especially the sacerdotal nature of the Christian ministry (which the Protestant Archbishop Whately called 'religion by proxy'<sup>5</sup>), the primacy of St Peter and the See of Rome, the invocation of saints, veneration of the Virgin, transubstantiation, popular miracles and so on,<sup>6</sup> seemed to some Protestants mildly derisory, to others downright wicked, and to some, even perverted. The claim of infallibility for the Church, exacerbated by the Vatican Decrees of 1870, seemed final proof, to those who sought it, of the essentially unenlightened condition of the whole of Catholicism, structure and doctrine alike. 'Popery is not changed—has not grown—has not advanced with the times—is not liberal—does not study national interests or individual happiness—but is still the same old persecuting enemy.'<sup>7</sup> Thus said 'Patrick Murphy' in 1865, in a work entitled *Popery in Ireland*, which described the rescue of a young girl from a convent where she had been 'imprisoned' for reading the Bible. Protestants, in fact, commonly supposed that the Bible was 'popery's only antidote, the sword that slays the monster'.<sup>8</sup> The miraculous element in the lives of Catholic saints also appeared to be a high indication of superstition. Newman's belief in the liquefaction of the blood of St Januarius at Naples, for example, seemed utterly fantastic to Protestant Englishmen. Blanco White, who had been a Catholic priest in Spain before his defection to England, to Anglicanism, and ultimately to Socinianism, took special pleasure in ridiculing the simple credulity of his Spanish former co-religionists. The full spirit of the anti-Cath-

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, (1851), London, 1892 edition, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard Whately, *Essays (Third Series) on the Errors of Romanism*, fifth edition, London, 1856, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> For a full list, see Karl von Hase, *Handbook to the Controversy with Rome*, translated by A. W. Streane, second edition, London, 1909, 2 vols.

<sup>7</sup> *Patrick Murphy on Popery in Ireland, or Confessionals, Abductions, Nunneries, Fenians and Orangemen. A Narrative of Facts*, London, 1865, p. viii. The author was in fact G. H. Whalley, M.P. for Peterborough, and the work, despite its subtitle, has strong fictional qualities.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

lic tradition breathes through his account of the diverting occasion when he first managed to look into the shrine of St Ferdinand at Seville. The saint, who had been declared incorruptible, was plainly made largely of painted parchment.<sup>9</sup> But that was abroad, and as every British Protestant knew, 'the scenes of commerce, pleasure, dissipation and vice, which abound in continental cities on the Sabbath, mark them at once as under the dominion of the "Man of Sin".'<sup>10</sup>

Although superstitious belief and idolatrous worship were frightful enough, Protestants also supposed the 'Man of Sin' to be inextricably involved with vile practices. Monks and nuns, confessors and popes were all popularly imagined to indulge themselves with contemptible vices.<sup>11</sup> The Protestant tradition certainly suspected that the rule of celibacy was largely a fiction, and that the seclusion of monastic cells invited (almost) unthinkable practices. 'In the days of Henry VIII,' wrote the Reverend Ingram Cobbin, 'when the monasteries were fully explored in England, the abbots, priors, and monks kept as many women each as any lascivious Mohammedan could desire, and their crimes [also?] renewed the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah.' Convents, he declared, were 'no better than brothels of the worst description'.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to superstition and moral corruption, the Protestant tradition also distrusted the political claims of the Church of Rome. Bound by a 'double allegiance', to Pope and Crown, Catholics were imagined to be potential—and sometimes (as in Ireland) even actual—subversives of the Protestant Constitution. Most nineteenth-century commentary pointed to the temporal sovereignty of the Papacy in Italy and the continued, though theoretical, existence of the deposing power of the Papal throne. Even Gladstone, in the famous Vatican Decrees controversy of 1874, lent his authority to this aspect of the case against Rome. In the popular imagination it was always the Jesuits, of course, whose secret network wrought subversion of free constitutions and liberal laws everywhere: part of a grand design to enslave the minds of men in the dark 'medievalism' and 'priestcraft' of the Vatican. The Papal States in Italy were held up as an example of this despicable force where it was successful (Doc. 13). 'Judge the Pope by the prevailing belief of Protestant England, derived from the

<sup>9</sup> J. Blanco White, *Practical and Internal Evidence against Catholicism*, Second edition, London, 1826, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> Cobbin, *op. cit.*, p. xvii. And see Doc. 12.

<sup>11</sup> See Herbert Thurston, *No Popery, Chapters on Anti-Papal Prejudice*, London, 1930, p. 15ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cobbin, *op. cit.*, p. xi.



misrepresentations of the press, its platform, or its pulpit,' wrote J. F. Maguire, the Catholic member of Parliament for Cork City, in 1870, 'and one beholds in him a combination of temporal despot and spiritual imposter, at once the scourge of an afflicted people, and the arch-priest of Satan.'<sup>13</sup> With this view of Catholicism went the assumption that its adherents' unenlightened bigotry inclined them automatically to intolerance. The numerous and lurid accounts of the savaging of Protestants during the Reformation, and the popular engravings of the terrors of the Inquisition, added such proof as was thought necessary. Even Blanco White, who was too complicated a man to be incautious in his criticisms of Rome, was capable of assuming the 'indubitable fact that *sincere* Roman Catholics cannot conscientiously be tolerant'.<sup>14</sup>

The ideology of anti-Catholicism drew upon a tradition extending backwards to the Reformation and beyond. It influenced the behaviour of all classes in English society in the nineteenth century. Working-men frequently gave vent to their interpretation of the tradition in localized petty rioting, and as the immigration of poor Irish labourers increased during and after the famine years of the later 1840's, with the resulting depression of the labour market, such disturbances became almost endemic. English working-men did not discriminate between the unskilled Irishmen and their religion. The notorious Stockport riots in 1852, when two Catholic chapels in a district of heavy Irish settlement were sacked and desecrated by a mob of working-men, showed such popular causes of religious disharmony at work. The coming of the Irish did, however, give a new mobility to the Catholic population in England and Scotland; it altered its distribution as well as its size. The immigrants settled as an urban residuum, in Liverpool, Glasgow, Swansea and London, and they roamed the countryside as navvies. The available statistics do not offer a very accurate indication of their numbers, but the 1841 census gave a figure of 400,000 Irish-born in England, Wales and Scotland, or 1.8 per cent of the population.<sup>15</sup> By 1861, this had risen to a figure of 600,000 in England and Wales alone.<sup>16</sup> Yet this did not account for the children of Irish immigrants families born after arrival, nor therefore, does it form a reliable guide when trying to assess the number of Catholics in Britain. The indigenous Catholic population consisted of a very small minority

<sup>13</sup> J. F. Maguire, *Pius the Ninth*, London, revised edition, 1878, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> J. Blanco White, *op. cit.*, p. v.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, London, 1963, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Gwynn, 'The Irish Immigration', in *The English Catholics, 1850-1950*, ed. G. A. Beck, London, 1950, p. 279.

of unskilled town workers, and an upper-class minority, to whom were added the mid-century converts from the Church of England—mostly men from the same class. In Ireland, of course, the majority of the population, and the least wealthy and influential parts, were Catholics: in the 1861 census they were  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions out of a population of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  millions.<sup>17</sup> For England there can be no such certainty. The religious census of 1851—a unique survey—yielded 252,783 Roman Catholics, but this was only a figure of church attendance on a particular Sunday, and the real number, swollen by immigration, was probably some 610,000.<sup>18</sup> Many contemporaries believed the figure to be very substantially in excess of that, and as part of the Protestant alarm, especially in the 1850's, resulted from a supposition that Catholicism was advancing rapidly, inflated estimates found sympathetic acceptance. Thus when in 1851 T. C. Anstey, a Catholic member of Parliament, told the Commons that there were  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million Catholics in England and Wales,<sup>19</sup> few would have chosen to scrutinize his figure for reliability. Against immigration must be offset the 'leakage' of Catholics to infidelity and Protestantism, in the conducive conditions of the Irish ghettos of the big cities. And some immigrants did not stay: some passed on to America or the colonies, and others were temporary harvest labourers who returned at the end of the season to their homes in Ireland. By the end of the 1880's however, there were something like  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million Catholics in England and Wales,<sup>20</sup> and that was enough to be a constant reminder to those Protestants who regarded them as a fifth-column.

Apart from the ordinary clergy, the most powerful agency for the diffusion of anti-Catholicism among working-men were the itinerant preachers—familiar figures in Victorian religious life. Meetings which the anti-Catholic preachers addressed in the towns where they stopped often turned into violent mobs. William Murphy was one of the more famous of the preachers against the claims of Rome, and evidently a master at incitement. In June 1867, for example, his meeting in Birmingham broke up into rioting so vicious that the police had to use their sabres on the crowds; 'it would appear from the list of wounded that they used them pretty freely'.<sup>21</sup> Murphy's route could be followed

<sup>17</sup> A. Hume, *Results of the Irish Census of 1861*, London, 1864, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12. This is Horace Mann's estimate.

<sup>19</sup> *Hansard*, Third Series, cxiv, p. 93, (4 February, 1851).

<sup>20</sup> K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, London, 1963, p. 123.

<sup>21</sup> *Annual Register*, 1867, Chronicle, June, p. 79. 'Anti-Popery riots at Birmingham'.

across the country from the newspaper reports of the disturbances. Occasionally he paid the price for exciting the multitude. In 1871 he was attacked by a retaliatory mob of three hundred infuriated Catholics and was severely injured.<sup>22</sup> But the most celebrated of these preachers was unquestionably Alessandro Gavazzi, a lapsed monk from Naples whose attacks on his former co-religionists prompted literally hundreds of 'No Popery' disturbances during his preaching tours of Britain and North America in the eighteen-fifties.

Above the labouring population expressions of anti-Catholicism were more articulate and much more purely ideological in origin. The political claims of the Catholics were the usual cause of an outbreak, and here it was of course the Irish question which brought the Protestant tradition most frequently into the centre of political life, and kept it there throughout the century. The Act of Union in 1800 had incorporated a large Catholic population into the area governed from the Westminster Parliament. Government and public opinion found itself faced, as a result, first with the divisive question of Catholic Emancipation (Docs. 1 and 2), and then with a series of demands by Irish Catholics: for denominational education, for modifications to the Protestant Church Establishment, for the abolition of oaths for office-holders which described their religion as 'damnable and idolatrous', and so on. The debates on these matters, in Parliament and in the press, released anti-Catholic sentiment with results often critical to parliamentary stability. The number of ministries which owed their demise to Irish questions was very large in the nineteenth century, and although the causes of disaster were always mixed, Protestant distrust of the Irish because they were Catholics, and differences between Protestants over the extent to which they were prepared to carry their distrust, were prominent contributions to political instability. Fear of rebellion in Ireland was allied with the ideological supposition that Catholic loyalty to the Crown was of doubtful reliability. To the Protestant majority, Catholics seemed obvious candidates for control and even suppression. Their religion was believed to be opposed to enlightenment, and therefore to sound civil government as well. It was also a commonplace that Catholic countries were bad at trade and commerce: an indication to most Englishmen that God's blessing was withheld, and that the Roman Church was restricting human potential. Again, Ireland was seen to prove the thesis. In short, educated Protestants regarded Catholicism as inimical to the proper conduct of civil affairs and national prosperity alike. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that they should seek to limit Catholic influence in public

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1871, Chronicle, April, p. 49.

life—yet at the same time remain true to the principle of toleration, an essential of their own creed. The problem, as most men saw it, was how to maintain a safe balance, between containment and concession, in the formulation of policy towards those whose religious principles inclined them unavoidably to intolerance. The task was almost inconceivably difficult for most men, for they simply regarded Britain as a Protestant patrimony. Or as Newman put it, ‘as English is the natural tongue, so Protestantism is the intellectual and moral language of the body politic’.<sup>23</sup> The ‘Protestant Constitution’, that is to say, continued to be a meaningful concept in public life long after the reality had been made anomalous by important modifications, such as Catholic Emancipation itself, in the interests of political justice.

Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then from the Gordon Riots of 1780 until well into the present century, there were anti-Catholic disturbances in Britain. The endemic violence of British life in the nineteenth century, especially in Ireland, gave these occasions frightful significance. A Party Processions Act was passed for Ireland in 1833: an attempt to prevent Orange and Green demonstrations spilling over into violence. The Act, which prohibited the public celebration of religious differences, was renewed until 1843, when it was allowed to lapse—with disastrous result. It was reintroduced in 1850 and finally repealed in 1872. In 1849, on the 12th of July, a clash of massed Orangemen and Catholics at Dolly’s Brae, on Lord Roden’s estate, led to a shooting affray in which several men were killed. A worse, if less notorious example, was the rioting in Belfast during the August of 1864. Inspired by hostility to the O’Connell memorial celebrations then going on in Dublin, the Protestant mobs engaged the Catholics of the city in several days of street-fighting. A lot of property was destroyed and some life: seven men were killed and 150 injured. As with the Dolly’s Brae incident, this led to a parliamentary inquiry. And, of course, (though greatly diminished), the violent element of the anti-Catholic tradition has survived in modern Northern Ireland. The Protestants of Sandy Row and the Catholics of the Falls Road districts of Belfast are still liable to express their religious disagreements disagreeably.

The nineteenth century was a religious age, not so much in the sense that people went to Church—for as the religious census of 1851 showed, many did not—but in the amounts of public discussion on religious questions, of theological, devotional and ecclesiastical writing and of Church building at home and expansion overseas. Religious passion was easily inflamed, often between Church and Dissent, but

<sup>23</sup> Newman, *Lectures*, p. 366.

more often still between both these Protestant bodies and the Roman Catholics. Most anti-Catholic agitations were *ad hoc*, however; the committees and societies blown into life by the public outrage over some particular concession to the Catholics, or some act of the Catholic body itself, faded away with the passing of the excitement. There was only one recognizably significant permanent organization against Catholic claims—the Orange Order, founded in Ireland in 1796 (Doc. 4). The Government dissolved the Order in 1836 in an attempt to bring peace to Irish politics, and there were then 1,600 separate lodges in the country,<sup>24</sup> a striking sign that some sort of public need was being satisfied. During the mid-'forties the Order began to re-establish itself,<sup>25</sup> and it has taken a leading part in opposition to Catholic claims ever since, with lodges in English and Scottish cities, and throughout the Empire, as well as in Ireland.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, educated opinion began to demonstrate an increasing tolerance towards Roman Catholicism. Among working-men no comparable change seemed apparent.<sup>26</sup> The degree of change should not be exaggerated for any section of society: there have been numerous indications of the surviving strength of the Protestant tradition during the present century. To quite a real extent it must be true that anti-Catholic feeling has waned according to a scale set by the waning of all religious feeling in English society. Another point should be made about the 'No Popery' tradition: it was extended overseas to those areas of the World—the United States, Canada, Australia—where British people and British institutions enabled its parallel development. For British anti-Catholicism, though it had obvious points of similarity with European expressions of ideological objection to Catholic beliefs and practices, was quite unique. It was peculiarly related to popularly subscribed precepts about the ends and nature of the British state; it was chauvinistic and almost general. European expressions, in contrast, tended to represent varying class and regional discontents; and frequently actual anti-Catholic outbursts were inspired more by pure anti-clericalism, and more by dislike of priestly domination of political life, than by opposition to the doctrines of the Church.

This is in no sense an attempt to examine anti-Catholic intolerance systematically. During the nineteenth century Roman Catholics were

<sup>24</sup> G. Locker Lampson, *A Consideration of the State of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1907, p. 172.

<sup>25</sup> *Orangeism in Ireland and Throughout the Empire*, by a Member of the Order, (R. M. Sibbett), London, 1939, vol. II, p. 317.

<sup>26</sup> Inglis, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2.

in reality getting an increasing amount of tolerant consideration from a society whose government added legal recognition and sometimes legal benefits. Victorian 'No Popery' agitations were, in fact, almost the last expressions of a long tradition. They were stimulated by men who clung to dying theories of the Constitution and to social *mores* which were changing faster than they imagined. But in certain particulars, and on certain occasions, anti-Catholic sentiments were among the more important religious and political catalysts of the nineteenth century. The sections which follow attempt to direct shafts of light on to four such occasions, in the hope that an illumination of selected small areas may suggest some of the significant aspects of larger ones.

Sometimes 'No Popery' agitation became the vehicle for the discussion of very significant alterations to the religious office of the State itself. The withering away of the ecclesiastical parts of the Constitution in the nineteenth century, and the increasing neutrality of State action in the religious life of the nation, occurred imperfectly—for anomalies survived—but occurred with almost excessive public debate of the issues at stake. Catholic claims to religious equality were like the claims of Protestant dissenters. Both were made against the concept of the confessional State, although for the Catholics this was a matter of necessity, altogether unrelated to the theoretical principles of nonconformity. But there was another difference: the Catholics found their claims met with the strong counter-arguments drawn from the Protestant tradition. Great debates about the nature of the State—about constitutional reform—therefore underlay much of the crude sound and fury of the 'No Popery' outbursts. The second section in this introduction concerns the Maynooth Grant question of 1845. It is a case in point. Although it also illustrates the complicating influence of Irish questions at Westminster, it has been treated here primarily as an issue which certain groups of Protestant dissenters employed to further their campaign for 'a free church in a free state'. The third section deals with the 'Papal Aggression' of 1850. As with the preceding question, popular expressions of the anti-Catholic tradition was very widespread, and the topic is here examined to show the extent to which it was capable of influencing public men, including the Prime Minister, to throw in their lot with the agitators. The following section extends even that theme; for one of the opponents of the popular clamour in 1850 was Gladstone. The Vatican Council of 1869-70 and attendant circumstances, however, converted him to the anti-Catholic tradition; and at just the time when educated opinion as a whole was becoming less susceptible to periodic outbursts of 'No Popery', Gladstone himself succumbed. Liberal principles were no

bar when the adversary was believed to be essentially illiberal. Finally, there is an examination of the way in which the old tradition survived in the popular opposition to the Ritualist movement in the Church of England. The trial of Bishop King in 1890 has been taken as an example of important legal and religious issues raised by the anger of the public against the Protestant 'renegades'. By invoking the anti-Catholic tradition, most men easily lumped the Ritualists and the Papists together. Indeed there were some who saw a connexion which was actual rather than theoretical. In 1868 Disraeli revealed to the House of Commons that 'High Church Ritualists and the Irish followers of the Pope have long been in secret combination and are now in open confederacy.' There was laughter in the House. 'Yes, but it is a fact,' the Prime Minister persisted.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Hansard*, cxci, p. 924, (Debate on Gladstone's motion for a Committee on the Irish Church, 3 April, 1868).

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## Maynooth

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The Maynooth Question, which occupied so much public attention in 1845 (which Harriet Martineau remarked was 'the great political controversy of the year—the subject on which society seemed to be going mad')<sup>1</sup> in fact comprised several issues of unequal significance. As a political question, it lured the Conservative party to the point of grave division; it was a dress-rehearsal for the Corn Law split in the following year. It was also an incident in the Irish policy of the great Peel ministry, a part of the general reconstitution of higher education in Ireland, and an attempt, together with the Charitable Bequests Act and the creation of the Queen's Colleges, to conciliate moderate Catholic opinion and syphon off some quantity of O'Connell's abundant support. In its leading tendency to readjust the relationship of Church and State, as an object lesson in what was called the 'national espousal of sin', and as an experiment—which many supposed Peel intended to follow up—in the 'concurrent endowment' of a religious denomination out of public money, the Maynooth question was seen to involve the defence of Protestantism and the defence of the Constitution. The question may indeed be taken also, not on its own merits, but as the occasion to lay bare the workings of a great popular organization for agitation—as a sort of text-book example of the getting up of public protest in an age which, with Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, Chartists, Ten Hours' Day operatives, and Church-rate abolitionists on every side, had an abundance of such things. It was also, perhaps with the exception of the 'Papal Aggression' episode in 1850, the clearest nineteenth-century demonstration of the abiding popularity of the 'No-Popery' cry. Those seeking an early false-start in ecumenicalism can find one here: serious attempts were made to turn the united Protestant opposition to Maynooth in 1845 into a sustained and per-

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the Thirty Years' Peace*, London, 1878, p. 247.



manent Evangelical organization, containing the various brands of churchmen and the whole range of dissenters who had then hastily found, not without some awkward surprise, that they had something in common—the Reformation. Again: because the question ripped open the relationship of the state to religious opinion—and especially because in the event the state was found to be proposing an extended application of public funds to religious purposes—that swelling body of radical non-conformists who were beginning to articulate their opposition to all state endowments and all religious establishments, took the opportunity, seemingly sent from above, to use the Maynooth question as a vehicle for the propagation of their ‘Voluntaryism’. This split the Protestant front, but it gave a coherence and a sense of strength to the radical nonconformists which did nothing but grow. And because the life of Gladstone was a sort of barometer of the variations in public religious policy in the nineteenth century, the Maynooth question was a point of division in his career too; ‘Mr State-conscience Gladstone’, an opponent nastily called him during one of the great London protest meetings.<sup>2</sup> Two-thousand delegates cheered. Gladstone himself was not unmoved by Protestant dismay at his *volte face* on Church-State relations. To W. F. Hook, who after intense reflection and excruciating flexibility of conscience had finally written to say that he agreed with his changed views, Gladstone was able to turn for some consolation. ‘I greatly rejoice in these slippery days,’ he replied to Hook, ‘to find myself supported by your concurrence in the question.’<sup>3</sup> And as if all this was not enough, the Maynooth question led to a critical re-examination of the Act of Union with Ireland. O’Connell and his Repealers had, of course, pressed this with some urgency; but in the clammy luxuriance of 1845, with a roused English opinion trying to decide whether there really had been a ‘compact’ to maintain the expense of Maynooth as part of the settlement in 1800, the construction of the Act of Union, in at least that particular, passed out of the legislative chamber and into—if not the market-place—at least the dissenting chapel and the parish church.

That all these aspects of the question were remarked upon by contemporaries is surprising. Sir Robert Peel’s endeavour to deal with the Maynooth grant on the ground of expediency was unsuccessful in preventing a voluminous public discussion on the grounds of principle.

<sup>2</sup> Speech of Samuel Blackburn at the Covent Garden meeting, 14 April, 1845, in *Proceedings of the Anti-Maynooth Conference of 1845*, ed. A. S. Thelwall, London, 1845, p. xlvii. This work will hereinafter be cited as *Proceedings*.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook*, London, third edition, 1879, vol. II, p. 237.