

The Rockite Uprising in Co. Limerick - 1821

by Pat Feeley



Thomas Moore, the poet and songwriter, in his book, *Memoirs of Captain Rock*¹, wrote of the agent of Lord Courtenay 'driving the county of

Limerick into revolt' in 1821.

Moore was referring to Alexander Hoskins, the agent of Viscount Courtenay's estates in Co. Limerick, and was simplifying things somewhat in the less-than-serious memoirs in suggesting that Hoskins was solely responsible for the insurrection. Historical events of consequence usually have more complex and more deep-seated causes than the actions of a single individual. This is also true of the Rockite uprising. Hoskins was just the match that lit the fire.

Alexander Hoskins was an Englishman who was new to being a land agent in Ireland. He had no real understanding of how the people saw the land or of the traditions and customs that surrounded the relationship between landlord and tenant. The peasant saw the land as an essential means of existence for himself and his family and as a resource around which the social and economic relations of the countryside were based. Hoskins looked on the Courtenay estate as a business and was determined to run it on commercial profit-making lines. There was the makings of a conflict in these two contradictory views. In line with the views that he held, Hoskins claimed the right to have the rent 'reserved in the leases'. This meant that if the tenant had the right to profit from the land when farm-produce was fetching high prices, the landlord had also the right to the full rent when prices for agricultural produce were low. In his dealings with the tenants, Hoskins was severe, strict and inflexible and, within a short period, he had gained a reputation as a cruel and oppressive agent. When, in the Spring of 1821, the tenants fell into arrears and refused to sign the new leases, he not only began to evict them but called in the army to assist him. This was contrary to government orders to the military. With this the people began to collect arms and to organise resistance to the evictions. This was the beginning of the uprising.

But there were also more deep-



Nineteenth century farm labourers at rest.

rooted, long-standing causes. From the second half of the eighteenth century, Ireland had experienced an accelerated and continuous growth in population. In line with the rest of the country, the western part of Co. Limerick, which was the heart and font of the Rockite insurrection, also had a considerable expansion in population. There was no industry and little regular employment in this part of the country in the early decades of the nineteenth century, so the people were dependant on the land for their sustenance and survival. The increase in population led to an increased demand for land and to intense competition for patches of ground large enough for a family to subsist on. To facilitate this continuous, ever-increasing demand, holdings were subdivided and sublet in generation after generation. To secure a plot of ground, men offered rents that in their hearts they knew they could not pay. The consequence of all this was that large numbers of people ended up living on subsistence holdings, eking out a hungry existence close to the brink of destitution and famine and in regular conflict with their landlords because they could not pay the rents.

Francis Blackburne, a barrister, appointed in 1823 to administer the Insurrection Act in the counties of Clare and Limerick, had this to say to a parliamentary committee of enquiry in 1824: "The population of the parts of the country, where insurrections were most prevalent, is extremely dense. The property is greatly subdivided, and the condition of the lower orders of the people is more miserable than I can describe it. The great increase of people, with other causes which I shall advert to more particularly, had raised the rents of lands in that part to a degree that was perfectly exorbitant".²

Major Richard Willcocks, an inspector of police under the Constabulary Act stationed in the Rathkeale area of Co. Limerick, told the same committee that the people of west Limerick contrived to get a quarter of ground to plant potatoes and they lived off the potatoes if the weather turned out 'favourable'. He had often observed the people eating potatoes and salt. Their habitations, he described, as 'wretched' and he said that he had often seen whole families sleeping together on a bed of sedge scattered on the floor with 'the clothing they wear in the day' as 'part of their covering at night'.³

It is also of importance that at the time of the outbreak, the peasantry were going through one of their periodic crises. The weather during the spring and summer of 1821 was particularly bad, with a lot of very heavy rain. The crops rotted in the fields, and in many places the turf was not saved. People were without food or fuel and famine stalked the thatched cabins. Richard Willcocks, writing on January

6, 1822 to William Gregory, the Under-Secretary in Dublin Castle, described conditions in west Limerick. "The distress of the poorer class in this neighbourhood is beyond description. The severe weather has caused the loss of almost all their turf and they are cutting down orchards for fuel".⁴

At the very root of the problems that the peasants were experiencing were the changes that had taken place in agriculture. These changes came about as a result of a drop in prices for agricultural products. There was a general fall in agricultural prices between 1813 and 1815 but, after 1815, with the end of the Napoleonic wars, the price of tillage products fell more than grassland products. This was notably true of grain, for which prices had been good since the passage of Foster's Corn Law in 1784 and as a result of the war with France and the consequent increased demand for corn from Britain. The slump in prices for tillage products led to a contraction in tillage farming and a move towards pasture farming, with a resultant consolidation of farms and a mounting pressure on subtenants to move off the holdings. Sublettings, which up to this time had been ignored or tacitly encouraged by landlords, now became unacceptable. The situation was aggravated and made more serious by the large and continually expanding population and by the absence of any substantial urban or industrial centres to absorb those being cleared off the land. The rapid decrease in the amount of land under tillage also led to a drop in employment. Tillage was labour intensive and provided employment not only for labourers but for small farmers dependant on getting labouring work off the holding. Those in areas like west Limerick, with a large population competing for insufficient work, saw a life of total destitution facing them if they were forced off the land.

A feature of agrarian disturbances was that they often took place in wild, remote, inaccessible areas where the forces of law and order were not in control. The hilly western corner of Co. Limerick was such an area. In 1820, there was no proper road system and very few bridges in this part of the country. Of the roads and passes that there were, many had been laid down during the rebellion of the Great Earl of Desmond in the sixteenth century. These were hard-packed, mud roads which in wet weather became mucky and water-logged and practically impassable. These Elizabethan roads had been laid out in straight lines from one military point to another with little regard to the nature of the country. As a consequence, the gradients were often high with rises in ascent sometimes amounting to one foot in four.

In April 1822, Colonel Thornton of the army, after an inspection of military

posts in west Limerick, noted that the mountain between Rouska and Abbeyfeale was almost impassable for horses and impassable for carriage, 'even at this time of year'. The road between Newcastle and Abbeyfeale, the principal road in the area, 'nearly admits of the same description' with 'broken bridges and interruptions that make it almost impracticable for carriages'. He considered it 'lamentable' to see such a communication neglected in an area in which houses are, 'so numerous as nearly to give the appearance for the whole distance of one continued village'. The mountains, he said, were of a vast extent and from the difficulty of traversing them, they afforded an, 'excellent place of concealment to outlaws and banditti of all kinds'.⁵

The hills were outlaw territory. Murderers, cattle thieves, robbers and other criminals went to ground there and felt reasonably safe from arrest and prosecution. The police and military found it difficult to get in and when they got in to travel and move about inside. They also found that many of the people, if not downright hostile, were sullen and uncooperative. Many of them lived out their lives within the circle of the hills, seldom venturing even into the lowlands. This tended to keep them backward and ignorant. Richard Griffith, the engineer and geologist, thought that the women of the hill country were inferior to the women of the plains 'because they rarely go beyond the nearest town'.

A witness told a select committee investigating the disturbances: "This conspiracy broke out into insurrection in a remote and wild part of Limerick and Cork where ignorance and superstition were most prevalent; where from long habits of insubordination and impunity the people had become aware of their strength and of the weakness of the authorities opposed to them".⁷

Richard Griffith, who was sent to the south-west in the summer of 1822, partly at least as a result of the agrarian troubles, to build roads and bridges that would open up direct and easy communication through mountains and other districts where there were no roads suitable for wheeled carriages and where it was improbable that good roads would be built by the local grand juries, noted that the Cork and Limerick grand juries were unwilling to contribute money to construct roads in the extremities of their counties and that this had led to the deplorable system of roads in the area. The Kerry grand jury were keen to open up communications with the other two counties but, under the system that operated, they could only lay roads up to the Kerry borders.

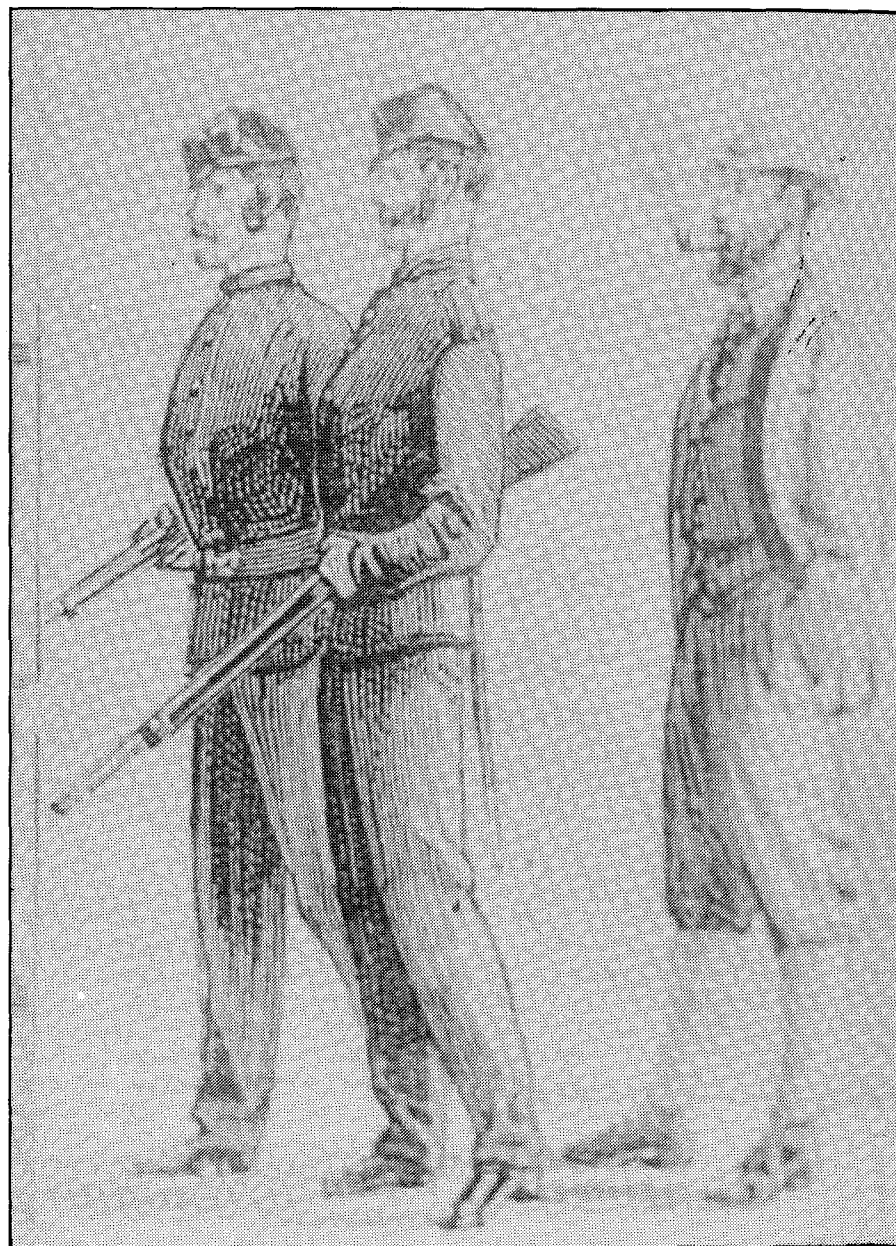
Griffith had no doubt but that the state of communications in the area contributed greatly to the turbulent state of the people who were beyond

the reach of the law so that "their wickedness has frequently escaped punishment". He went on to say: "It is not, therefore, surprising, that during the disturbances of the winter 1821 and spring of 1822, this district was the focus of and asylum for Whiteboys, smugglers and robbers: and that stolen cattle were driven into it from the surrounding flat and fertile country, as to a safe and impenetrable retreat".⁸

Griffith, who was a percipient and penetrative observer, also noted that there were only two resident landlords in the whole upland region and he remarked on the great number of farms held by non-resident middlemen and on the large number of tenants who held land from middlemen and not from a landlord. In many cases there were as many as four middlemen intervening between tenant and landlord and in one instance he discovered seven. This also, undoubtedly, contributed to the discontent of the people for each middleman on the chain had to get his share of the rent, thus increasing the financial burden on the tenant. Griffith also commented on how the smaller tenants and labourers, who were holding land not from landlords but from resident farmers, paid more rent.⁹

There were also smugglers in the hill and Griffith believed that they played a leading role in the insurrection. Smuggling had always been part of the way of life on the south-west coast of Ireland, especially along the Kerry coast. Around the beginning of the 1820s, however, the water-guards on this coast began a campaign to root it out. This had considerable success and, by the end of 1821, they had broken up many of the smuggling gangs. As a result, some of the smugglers left the coastal areas and went to live in the hills where they continued their operations. The smuggling was conducted by a chain of people, some living along the coast and some in the hills. The goods were transported from the coast into the hills and mountains and then down onto the plains of Munster. The smugglers who went to live in the hills were popular with the people because they were able to supply them with cheap goods, notably tobacco. The arrival of these men injected a new spirit of lawlessness into the area. If, as Griffith said, they were leaders of the insurrection, in all likelihood they owed their influence to the cheap contraband which they sold to the people.

The area where the uprising broke out and where it was strongest had a tradition of popular unrest and secret societies. The Rightboy movement of 1785-1788 had its origins in the Mallow area of Co. Cork in the summer of 1785, when notices appeared warning people not to pay tithes, followed by attacks on people and property. Some time later it broke out, seemingly inde-



A Co. Limerick landlord taking a stroll, complete with police escort.

pendently, in the Castleisland area of Co. Kerry. From there it spread to north Kerry and then into west Limerick where it had many adherents, notably in the districts of Rathkeale, Askeaton and Newcastle West.

The two principal grievances of the Rightboys were tithes and priests' dues and their support spanned class divisions, taking in labourers, farmers and shopkeepers and even members of the Protestant gentry in parts of Co. Cork. Mass swearing – in and mass mobilisation swelled the ranks of the movement and thousands of people turned out for some of the demonstrations.

Newcastle West, which can be regarded as the seedbed of the Rockite insurrection, was also a hotbed of the Rightboy agitation. In the 1780s, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Conway, came to Newcastle to address the people on the subject of Rightboyism. He denounced the movement

strongly and tried to get the hundreds of people, who came to hear him, to cut their links with it. But they not only refused but 'had the impudence to send me a copy of their resolutions which they expected I would sign'.¹⁰ It is important to remember that this was only thirty odd years before the outbreak of the Rockite insurrection.

Something else that played a significant part in this insurrection, fueling the most savage and violent excesses, was whiskey. There were two kinds, "Parliament" whiskey, the product of the legal distilleries, on which tax was paid, and poteen, the product of the illicit stills, on which no tax was paid.

In the early half of the nineteenth century, many Irish peasants engaged in illicit distillation. For many small farmers and labourers the making of poteen was a recognised way of making ends meet. The ordinary country-

man could not afford to buy taxed liquor. But poteen, which in 1823 cost 2/6 to 3/- per gallon in the mountains, was within his reach, and its making flourished when the excise duty on whiskey was high and fell off when the tax was low. The money made from poteen was frequently used to pay the rent.

The hill country was ideal for illicit distilling. It was off the beaten track and inaccessible, and the difficulties of travel were to the advantage of the poteen-maker and to the disadvantage of the gauger and the police. The area also had plenty of turf and fresh water, both of which are required for the distilling process. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the making and drinking of illicit spirits were widespread in the early decades of the nineteenth century. John Begley, in his *History of the Diocese of Limerick*, attributes the ferocity of the people during the Rockite uprising to their large intake of raw spirits.¹¹

There is evidence to show that Captain Rock's men were often under the influence of drink when carrying out some of their deeds. In 1822, Colonel Norcott, stationed at Newcastle West, reported the capture of seven men at ten o'clock in the morning near Rathcahill, some miles from Newcastle West. The men, who were wearing white shirts, masks and women's clothes, were about to drive a herd of cattle into a house with the intention of setting fire to the house with the cattle inside. They were apprehended by a party of gentlemen out shooting, assisted by the parish priest of Rathcahill, the Reverend Rochfort and some of his parishioners. When examined, the Lady Rocks (as Rockites dressed in women's clothes were called) were all found to be drunk.¹²

In March 1822, the kidnapers of Honora Goold, the daughter of a prosperous Liscarrol farmer, when taking her into the mountains of west Limerick to a hiding-place, stopped at a pub in Freemount, Co. Cork, for drink.¹³ They took the abducted girl with them into the public-house where they were seen by the publican and the other customers and openly demonstrated their disregard and contempt for the authorities and the forces of law and order. But their activities also show how central alcohol was to their way of life. The heavy drinking that went on at this time is at least understandable in that so many of the ordinary people were without prospects, without hope and without a future. For these alcohol was a panacea and an opiate.

Drink was also consumed after crimes had been carried out. Pat Dillane, the notorious blacksmith from Glenmore near Newcastle West, (who was the leader of the gang that shot and clubbed to death Thomas Hoskins, the teenage son of the agent, Alexan-

der Hoskins, in a gravel pit near Barnagh in August 1821), went off to drink whiskey after the murder, after taking a watch and five ten pennies from the dead boy's pockets and after hiding the murder-gun in a rick of turf.¹⁴

Fear and intimidation were also used by the agrarian rebels to force people to join and support them and to prevent them from informing or siding with the authorities. In areas where they were strong, they controlled the people and they laid down rules and regulations in regard to land, tithes and other matters. They bound and held the people to these codes of behaviour through persuasion, intimidation, the administration of oaths and by inflicting punishment on those who transgressed. The most cruel and savage beatings, maimings and woundings were often inflicted on their own people to discourage them from breaking the agrarian code or for refusing to take the oath. But even without the use of violence, they exercised considerable sway, especially in parts of the country where the government forces were weak.

When Maurice Leahy and his sons, in whose house the abducted Honora Goold had been held, were brought to trial on charges in connection with this, they claimed that they had allowed their house to be used only because they were afraid of the gang who had kidnapped the girl. They elaborated on this saying that 'a great terror prevailed in the mountains against any who did not obey the insurgents'.¹⁵

So great was the power of the rebels and the fear that they inspired, and so credulous the people, that some of the peasants in the hill country were persuaded to work on an old disused road through the mountains of Glashoreagh 'to facilitate the march of Captain Rock's army from Abbeyfeale'.¹⁶

On those who informed or went over to the other side, the Rockites wreaked a dreadful vengeance. In a letter to the authorities in Dublin Castle, Thomas Vokes, a County Limerick magistrate, told of the fate of a man named O'Neill who had given information to Major Willcocks of the police. O'Neill was savagely murdered. His relatives were so terrified of being associated with him that they would not even come to look at his corpse. It fell to the police to take his remains to the graveyard and as they were doing this, a crowd of observers jeered and whistled and laughed.¹⁷

Men were also forced to take part in outrages and acts of violence at gunpoint. Pat Dillane stated that he often used a loaded gun to persuade those who had lost their nerve to carry out deeds that they had been ordered to carry out.

It is important to remember that the agrarian secret societies believed that natural justice was on their side. They

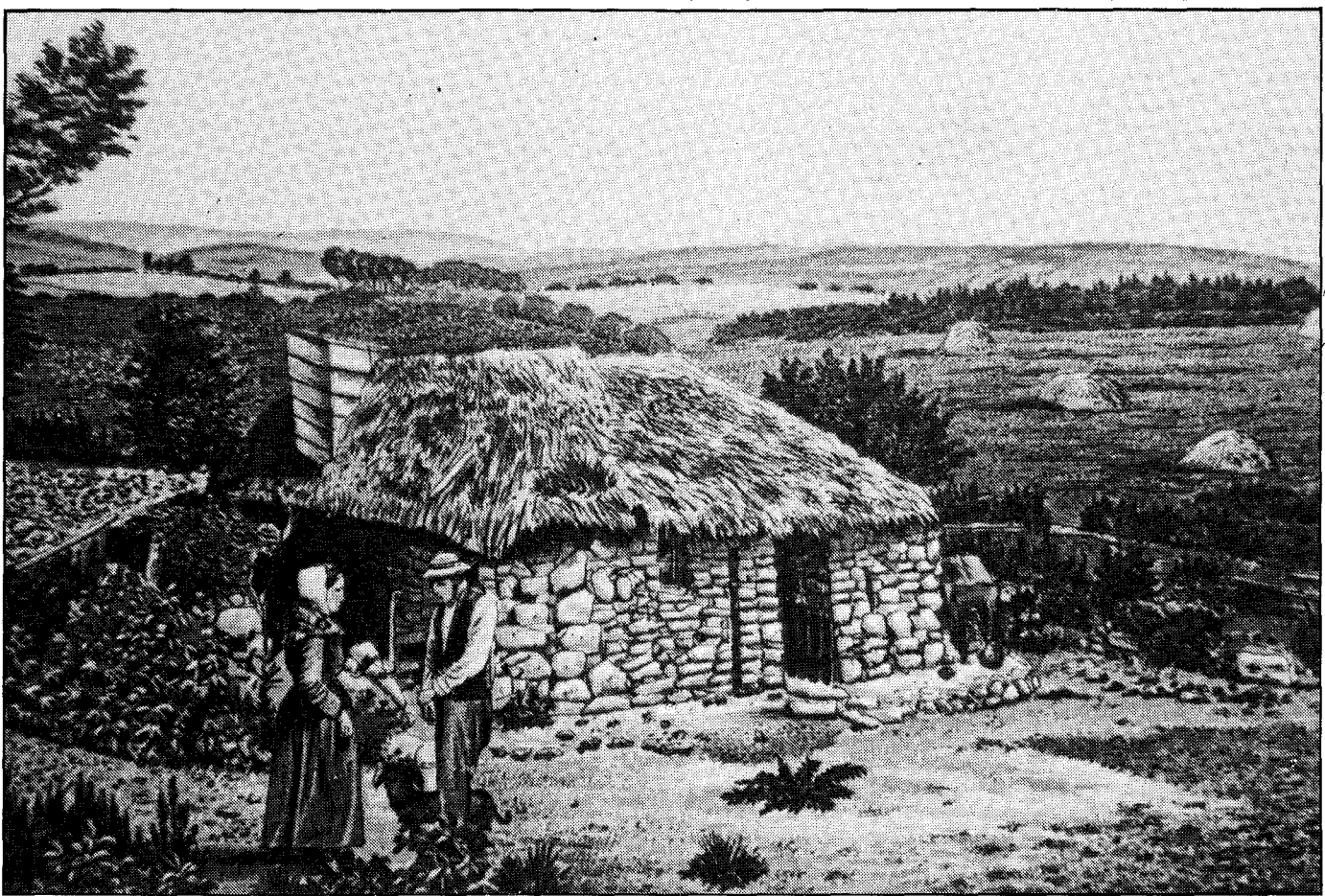
believed that man had a God-given right to live off the land. They thought it wrong that his rent should be sharply raised. And they considered it immoral that he should be evicted and turned out on the road to beg, steal or starve. They saw society divided into two classes, the rich and the poor, and they saw themselves as the defenders of the poor. A large number of the ordinary people accepted their role and reciprocated by giving them support and sympathy and by joining the societies.

The notices and pronouncements of the rebels often had an egalitarian, levelling note running through them and showed a lack of deference and respect for those of supposedly superior status.

The Rockites believed that the state and its agents, the police and the military, did not represent them or the interests of their class. It represented and protected the interests of the establishment, the landed gentry, the well-to-do professional classes, the wealthy merchants and businessmen. Since the interests of this ruling elite were frequently diametrically opposed to those of the peasantry, notably in respect to rents, tithes and control of the access to land, the rebels believed that they had right and justice on their side when they opposed the authorities and their forces. For the same reasons they did not feel bound by some of the laws which they saw as maintaining and advancing the power of the establishment whose rule they frequently termed a 'tyranny'.

There was also a sectarian dimension in the relationship between the peasantry and the ruling establishment. The vast majority of country people were Roman Catholic. Those who ruled over them were mostly Protestant. The local magistrate was generally a Protestant. So was the clergyman to whom they paid tithes. So were many of the officials of local and central government. So were many of the law-enforcers, the yeomen, the police and the soldiers. The Rockites associated these three forces with Protestantism and this association was probably strongest in the case of the yeomanry.

The yeomen had been active and prominent in putting down the 1798 rebellion. Their excesses and cruelty during this campaign were such that the authorities in the 1820s found it expedient to station the vast majority of them in Ulster. In October 1821, there were only 2,400 yeomen in Munster but feelings against them, nonetheless, ran high. William Sandes of Listowel, writing in October 1821 to Major Daniel O'Mahony, the commander of a yeoman brigade, said: "For God's sake, my dear major, get arms and ammunition for the corp(s) and don't let a body of loyal men be murdered who have brought down on themselves the vengeance of the insur-



A nineteenth century rural homestead.

gents by their exertions to save their country".¹⁸

The yeomen were often engaged in activities that angered the ordinary people. They were involved in the seizing of illicit stills, the distraining of tenants for failing to pay rents or tithes, and in searches for arms and for suspected agrarian rebels. They were also disliked for their lack of discipline. In confrontation situations, when faced with an angry crowd, they were more likely to shoot than the regular troops. This happened near Ballybunion, Co. Kerry, in the later part of 1821, when local yeomen fired on a crowd of country people with fatal results.¹⁹

It should also be said that many of the yeomen were Orangemen who took part in the annual, triumphalist Orange marches and celebrations. There were even yeomen bands which marched through towns and villages playing provocative, loyalist and sectarian tunes. To the Catholic peasantry, this was proof, if proof was needed, of their allegiances. "Sometimes they struck out at the yeomen. In October 1821 a gang of Rockites murdered an Adare yeoman, John Walsh, a fifer in a yeoman band."²⁰

Generally speaking, the police force was not regarded as being as sectarian as the yeomanry. Although, as we shall see, it was not free from sectarianism either. But, this aside, its activities alienated the people too. The police

were one of the main forces in the campaigns against the agrarian societies – setting spies, encouraging informers, arresting suspects and giving evidence in court. When the Insurrection Act was in operation, they had to enforce it. This included seeing that the curfew was kept and in doing so they frequently cleared public-houses at bayonet point and broke up wakes and country dances. They also prosecuted poachers and seized their nets and sometimes used their firearms and bayonets in unauthorized circumstances. None of these activities did anything to win them the affections of the people.

There were also high-ranking officers in the force who were sectarian. Major Richard Going, who in 1821 was a chief constable of the Police Preservation Force for Co. Limerick was one of these. Going connived at the formation of Orange lodges within the force.

He was in command of the police near Askeaton, in 1821, when they fired on a mob of about two hundred Whiteboys who were attacking the house of a tithe proctor. The police shot two men dead and mortally wounded a third. On Going's instructions the bodies of the dead men were buried in quicklime by two of their captured comrades who were compelled to carry out this grim task. Going believed that this act would strike fear and terror into the hearts of the people, for burial with a priest and relatives present was

something that they held sacred and dear. But things did not turn out as he had hoped. A rumour began to circulate through the countryside that one of the insurgents had been buried while still alive, whipping the already inflamed feelings of the peasantry to a white hatred. Some weeks later, when Going was riding from Limerick to Rathkeale, he was waylaid and attacked by a number of men. In a frenzied and murderous attack, they fractured his skull and shot him five times, making, as an account of the time put it, 'a riddle of his body'. A military escort was required to recover the body and his death was announced by bonfires in the hills 'and echoed by a savage yell of exultation from the villages'.²¹

The army too was seen as part of the Protestant establishment. In 1822 and '23, English and Scottish cavalry regiments, like the Rifle Brigade, were brought in as reinforcements to hunt down the Rockites. The Catholic peasantry, amongst whom they were stationed, were reminded of the religious allegiances of many of the soldiers of these regiments when they marched on Sundays to the normally sparsely-attended Protestant churches. The hostility of the insurgents to the army was to be seen in the warnings they sometimes sent to Protestant clergymen not to hold services for the soldiers. It was also noted that temporary barracks for

the troops, especially for those stationed in outlying areas, were usually provided by clergymen and gentlemen of the Protestant faith. This helped to reinforce the idea that the army were there to support and to protect Protestants and Orangemen.

Probably the most striking example of the hostility of the rebels to the army was an incident that took place near Kildorrery, Co. Cork, in February 1822. A group of soldiers wives, about twelve in all, travelling with their children in wagons and carts, in advance of their husbands, to new quarters, were stopped by a band of about forty men. The men pulled the women from the vehicles and raped a number of them. The attack was clearly an act of revenge against the husbands who were members of the 1st Rifle Brigade. One of the gang said that 'he would let the Riflemen know that it was Captain Rock's men' who abused and ravished the women.²²

Another important factor in the insurrection was the widespread belief amongst the people in a millenium, a second coming of Christ. The idea of a millenium was taken seriously by a great many people in all walks of life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Christ's words about the coming of the Messiah in glory and majesty were taken literally by his disciples and after his death the Apostolic church continued to believe in a second coming. Their beliefs were based on a body of inspired prophecy, the core of which was to be found in the Books of Daniel and Revelation, the Apocrypha and the 'synoptic Apocalypse' of Jesus. The texts 14 and 20 in the Book of Revelation were especially important.

Millenarians believed that the world would be transformed by the second coming and by the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. This they believed, would last for a thousand years and would be followed by the day of General Judgment. During the period of the millenium, the Saints (the Christian martyrs and those who had suffered for Christ) would reign with Jesus and there would be justice, equality and peace on earth.

Around the early 1820s, there was a widespread belief in a millenium amongst ordinary people in many parts of Ireland. This belief came from what were known as the prophecies of Pastorini. 'Signor Pastorini' was the *nom de plume* of Charles Walmsley, an English Catholic bishop, who towards the end of the eighteenth century wrote a pseudo-scholarly book, titled for short, *a General history of the Christian church*. This in essence was a commentary on the Book of Revelation. Walmsley's reading of the Apocalypse led him to say, amongst other things, that God's anger would be visited on the heretics before the second coming of Christ. He foretold that this would take place fifty

years after 1771, introducing the sixth age of Christ's church, the last before the second coming. Many country people came to believe that these prophecies began to be fulfilled in 1821 and were to culminate in the final dissolution of the Protestant establishment in 1825. This was to usher in the millenium. Christ's coming was to follow the cataclysmic destruction of the existing social order. This particular form of the belief is known as post-millenialism.

There were at least six editions of Walmsley's book published in Ireland but it was in the form of inexpensive tracts and handbills that the prophecies penetrated the Irish countryside. It would seem that it was from the west midlands, King's County and east Galway, that they came into Munster. They were strongly and widely held in Co. Limerick. This was the view of Richard Willcock's, the police officer, who was well-informed and perceptive and of Francis Blackburne, the barrister. In May 1823, Blackburne told a parliamentary committee: "When I went to Limerick, I made it my business ... of inspecting every notice and every publication dispersed through the county and connected with seditious subjects, from which distinct evidence of what was operating on the mind of the people might be collected; and I do not think that in a single instance has one of these papers been produced to me that has not a distinct allusion to the prophecies of Pastorini and the year 1820".²³

Some of those who joined the Rockites were the most fanatical millenarians. They believed in the rightness of their cause and were prepared to lay down their lives for it. In northwest Cork, thousands took part in the insurrection that took place in January 1822. Some of these, who were about to set out to attack the town of Newmarket, went to the priests to get confession and absolution and to prepare for death in a just cause.²⁴

During the period of the disturbances, the Rockites set fire to and burned a number of Protestant churches in Cork, Kerry and Limerick. This could, on the one hand, have been their way of showing their opposition to paying tithes. But tithes had been a grievance in all the agrarian uprisings since 1760 and in none of these had churches been burned. It seems more likely to be connected with their belief in the imminent destruction of the Protestant establishment and their desire to hasten this.

In February 1822, a band of insurgents from the west Limerick hills attacked the Protestant church at Killeedy, Co. Limerick. They burned the church and the glebe house and destroyed stock, corn and hay, the property of the Reverend Mr. Geraghty, the Protestant clergyman. Some saw this as a sectarian attack. One local Protestant remarked some days later: "This Pastorini is doing a great deal of mischief in the country". It may not,

however, have been sectarian. For the previous spring, the Rev. Geraghty had prosecuted some men for burglary and robbery at the Limerick Assizes and the burnings could have been a reprisal for this.²⁵

The causes, then, of the Rockie uprising of 1821 were complex and diverse. It was not simply caused by Alexander Hoskins evicting some tenants. But there was one basic consideration that under-pinned everything. This was access to, and some control over, the land. The peasant was dependant on the land for his very life and existence and he would fight and kill to have and to hold it.

From Limerick the disturbances spread to north and east Kerry, to Cork, Clare and Tipperary, and from Tipperary to Offaly, Laois and Kilkenny. The rebellion of Captain Rock lasted from 1821 to 1824 and was the most violent and destructive of all the agrarian insurrections.

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23. Clark and Donnelly *op. cit.* p. 115.
24. *Ibid.* p. 124.
25. S.P.O. S.O.C.P. 2517/64 and 2355/31.