



Thomas Spring Rice and the Peopling of Australia

by David Fitzpatrick

Before his elevation in 1839 he represented Limerick City from 1820, and Cambridge from 1832, serving in various Whig administrations as Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Treasury Secretary, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, and Chancellor of the Exchequer. As we shall show, his familiarity with the workings of Westminster and Whitehall was to serve him well when he set about removing his surplus peasantry to Australia. Study of his political life may also illuminate the broader social preoccupations that prompted him to

The origins of the Australian people cannot simply be explained in terms of abstract economic forces propelling the surplus population of the British Isles towards the vacant spaces of the New World. Such forces may help us understand migration in general, without explaining the decision of a few hundred thousand Irish emigrants to choose Australia. The Irish origins of nineteenth-century Australians were highly localised, depending upon the enterprise of scattered organisers and pioneers who managed to persuade neighbours and kinsfolk that the greater risks associated with transplantation to Australia were worth taking. Australia's peopling had no unifying theme, and its narration requires study of disparate local initiatives with limited relevance to other periods or places. One thread in Australia's story is the migration from north Limerick of several hundred settlers through the ingenuity of Thomas Spring Rice, 1st Baron Monteagle of Brandon.

I. Noblesse Oblige

The Spring Rices of Mount Trenchard, on the south bank of the Shannon estuary near Foynes, were moderate landowners with an immoderate sense of public duty. In the 1870s the 2nd Baron Monteagle was returned as the seventh greatest landlord in Co. Limerick, with an estate valued at £5,046 per annum and covering 6,445 acres. Though he owned additional property in Kerry, Monteagle was not among the 305 landowners with Irish estate of 10,000 acres or more.⁽¹⁾ The Spring Rices were a family of substance rather than magnificence, whose public prominence was achieved by effort rather than birthright. As Stephen Gwynn observed, they were 'by no means the traditional hardriding, fox-hunting, convivial country gentry, whose sons have constantly distinguished themselves in war and not seldom in administration. The Spring Rices were methodical people, diligent officials, with a high sense of public duty; and their tastes were for the more cultivated pleasures.'⁽²⁾

Sir Stephen Rice had become Chief Baron of the Irish Exchequer in 1687, while two years later Askeaton was represented in the 'Patriot Parliament' by Edward Rice.⁽³⁾ Three of the 1st Lord Monteagle's sons became senior civil servants, while his grandson, Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, was Britain's controversial ambassador in Washington during the First World War.

Thomas, alone of his line in modern time, achieved political distinction.



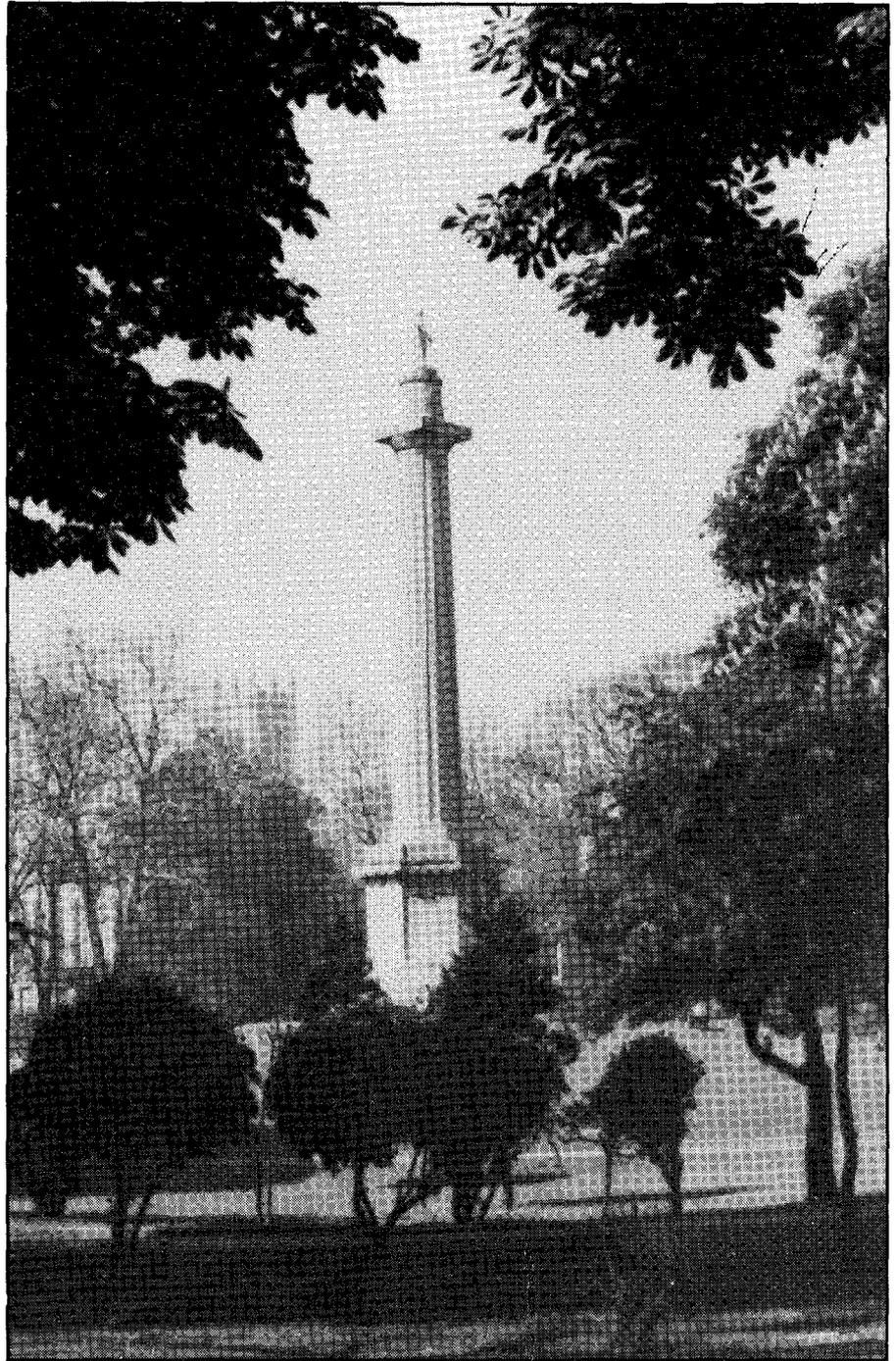
Bust of Thomas Spring Rice, 1st Lord Monteagle of Brandon, by Thomas Kirk.



become an organiser as well as advocate of systematic emigration.⁽⁴⁾

In politics Spring Rice was a Whig reformer with liberal but not radical inclinations, whose support for the Union and for Irish reform was equally strong. He first achieved fame as a crusader against the malpractices of the Limerick corporation, being pictured by a local admirer in 1820, wand in hand, as trampling with his top boots upon the hydra of corruption.⁽⁵⁾ He censured abuses of the grand jury system, deplored proselytism with its tendency 'to embitter the religious animosities and internal discord of Ireland', and berated Lord Liverpool in 1827 for failing to grant Catholic Emancipation: 'The refusal is that of England; the demand being that of the Irish nation.'⁽⁶⁾ Yet when charged with opposing O'Connell's demand for repeal of the Union in April, 1834, Spring Rice spoke glowingly of Ireland's economic and social advance since its release from the old Irish parliament, which 'of all Parliaments that ever existed, ... was the most corrupt and the most subservient.' His enthusiasm bubbled over into a phrase for which he was never forgiven, that 'I should prefer the name of West Britain to that of Ireland'.⁽⁷⁾ Though his intention was to emphasise that Ireland was no more 'a province of Great Britain' than England, Scotland or Wales, his adversaries in the debate made adroit use of Spring Rice's *faux pas*. Dominick Ronayne (Clonmel) likened him to Castlereagh, as 'an Irishman or West Briton - as he chooses to call himself - who is the first to propose that the Union with England shall be maintained inviolable?'. O'Connell expressed his indignation with characteristically feline malice: 'I admit, as a proof of the prosperity of Limerick, there is a new square there - it has a statue in the centre, too, but, then, I believe there is not a single house in Rice's Square. Upon the pedestal of that statue the people ought to write "the wonderful West Briton". - What a fortune he would make if he could get that statue, and bring it to every fair in Ireland, as a show for a shilling.' Spring Rice won the vote, but lost much of his nationalist following.⁽⁸⁾

The Ireland of his dreams would have contained a contented people guided by benevolent mentors such as himself, backed up by reforming governments dissociated from past misrule. In 1815, when still in his twenties, he wrote of 'the elevated duties of the Irish country gentleman; ... It is a sphere of personal privation, and of personal exertion. But, when a mind is awake to that first of all delights, the power of becoming extensively and permanently useful, all privations are forgotten, all labour is well repaid. A



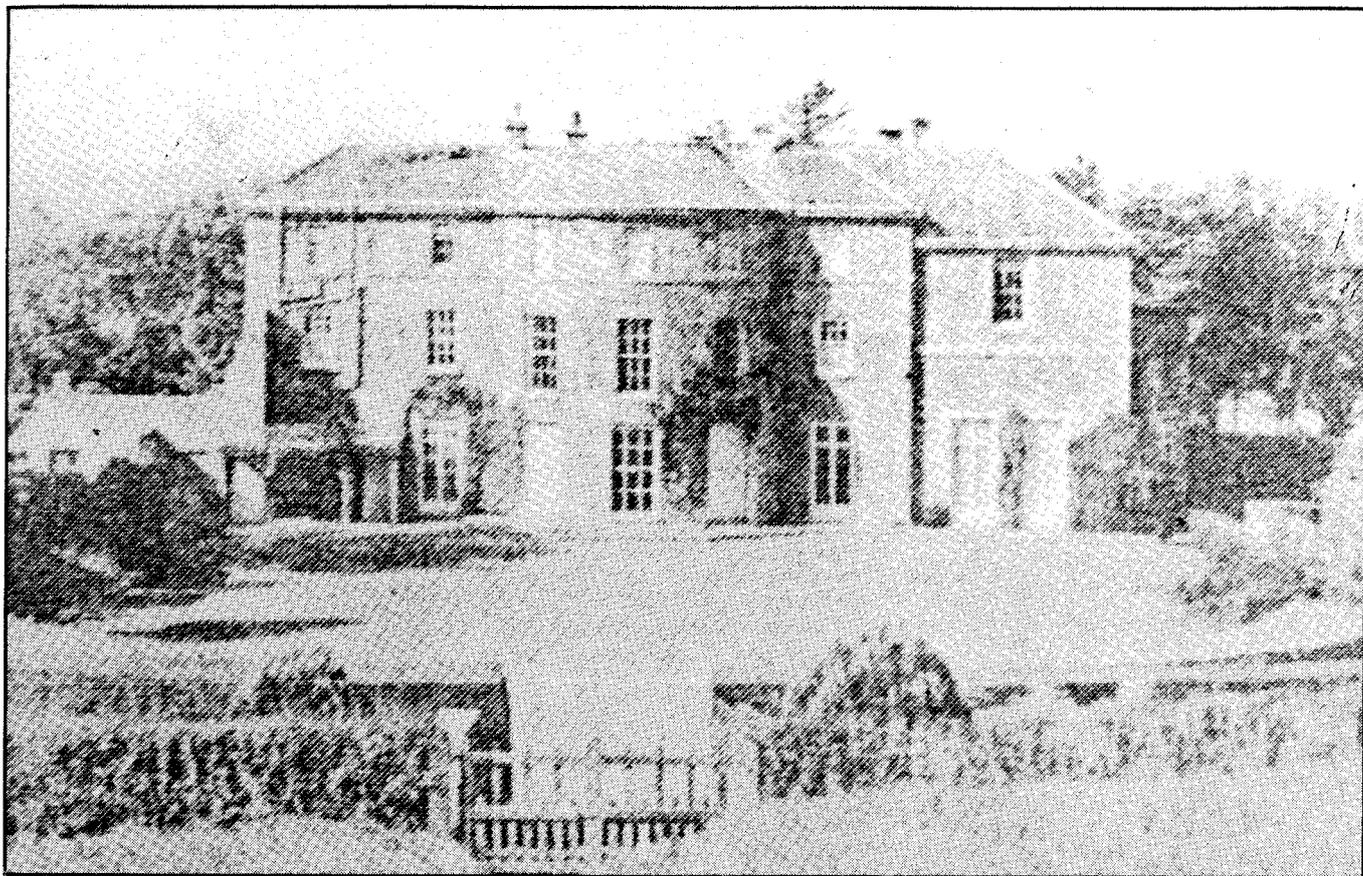
Monument to Thomas Spring Rice, M.P. for the City of Limerick, 1820-1832, People's Park, Limerick.

peasantry capable of improvement, and grateful for every benevolent assistance, look up to the landlord as to a protector and friend. He may not only assist their distresses, but may enable them to assist themselves.⁽⁹⁾

Yet all too often, Ireland's social harmony was disturbed by renewed acts of misgovernment, such as the obtuse measures of famine relief introduced by Lord John Russell's administration in late 1846. It was a raging Irishman rather than a cringing West Briton who berated Charles Trevelyan of the Treasury as follows:

The sword of conquest passed

through our land but a century and a half back - insurrections in 1798 and 1803 - partial outbreaks at later times - tithes collected at the bayonet point - penal laws continued till 1829, and then reluctantly repealed - these things have destroyed our country - have degraded our people, and you, English, now shrink from your responsibilities; you keep gabbling about the incompetency of the Celtic race and the injustice of Irish landlords; ... remember a Wilberforce said that England owes us a debt for the wrongs of centuries; endeavour to repay it, not by pauperising us, but



Mount Trenchard, home of the Spring Rice family.

by raising us above our present condition.⁽¹⁰⁾

The politician was appalled at the thought of separation, but the Irish gentleman was often more appalled by the consequences of Union. In his ambivalence and extravagance of response, Thomas Spring Rice was a characteristic 'Anglo-Irishman'.

The 1st Lord's quirky paternalism and eruptive Irishness were as much family as personal traits. His eldest son Stephen expressed his moral earnestness not only in Wordsworthian sonnets and conversations with his fellow-Apostles from Cambridge, but also in organising and administering Famine relief. As indignant as his father at English vilification of his class, he asked rhetorically: 'What was the life led by an Irish squire at that time? You might have seen him leaving home before daylight, that sunrise may find him within his relief district, into the destitution of which he has to inquire. ... But he does not go home to rest. His whole night, and far into the next morning, is occupied in reducing into an available form the rough memoranda of each case which he has collected in the daytime.'⁽¹¹⁾ In 1863 he upbraided the proprietor of the *Saturday Review* for asserting that Irish society was ruled by secret combinations rather than by law. Stephen Spring Rice identified himself as 'a resident Irish country gentleman. My occupations are

those of my class; and in trying to follow them in a spirit of loyal attachment to the Queen and the empire at large, the two classes from whom I receive most opposition are the violent English politicians, and the violent Irish. The meaner of the former sort deliberately shut their eyes to the misgovernment of centuries. ... In fact, we may say of them, that they visit the sins of their fathers upon our children.'⁽¹²⁾

Stephen's eldest son, Thomas, who became 2nd Baron Monteagle, shared the vision of his forbears. He prayed that an enlightened upper class might collaborate in local administration with a carefully nurtured middle class, so averting social revolution. In 1883 he defined that 'upper class' as 'a resident gentry, bound by ties of common interest, personal knowledge, and mutual good feeling, to those around them, and at the same time enabled by their position to command a wider range of vision, and to place at the service of the public an intelligence trained by higher cultivation and attainments and by a deeper hold upon principles - trusted stewards of public interests in local affairs.'⁽¹³⁾ Like so many resident gentry, Monteagle advocated peasant proprietorship rather than 'dual ownership', involving progressive rent reductions which implied that landlords had 'universally and systematically rack-rented their tenants'.⁽¹⁴⁾ In 1879 Monteagle had pro-

voked unrest on his own estate by refusing abatement of rent for the majority of his tenants, whose burden had remained unchanged over the preceding decade of prosperity. His response to agricultural crisis, which he confidently predicted would never again generate 'such a national disaster as the potato famine', was to stimulate employment by initiating works of improvement.⁽¹⁵⁾

Any one of these three Spring Rices might have served as the model Irish gentleman depicted in *Noblesse Oblige* by Horace Plunkett, with whom the younger Thomas worked closely as a founder and president of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society.⁽¹⁶⁾ With his sister Alice and daughter Mary, the 2nd Lord created an amazing array of cooperative ventures at Foynes and Mount Trenchard, including industry, poultry and credit societies, sawmill, wheat-growing cooperative, wholesaling depot, library, workmen's club and branch of the United Irishwomen. His colleague Robert Anderson recalled that 'perhaps he was not a man of outstanding ability, but he was a man of fine education, of stainless integrity and honour, brave but always gentle and conciliatory. ... He used to remind me of a benevolent eagle. He was very tall and slight.'⁽¹⁷⁾ By contrast, his grandfather was remembered as 'a nobleman of high intellectual attainments' who was also 'short



in stature' to the point of inviting caricature.⁽¹⁸⁾ Short or tall, brilliant or merely worthy, the Spring Rices laboured earnestly to make Limerick and Ireland more prosperous and more harmonious.

III. The Spring Rices And Their Set

The patrician mentality should be interpreted in its social as well as lineal setting. Not surprisingly, the Spring Rice family intermarried with other north Limerick gentry of similar social, intellectual and moral outlook. The accompanying chart illustrates the most persistent of these entwinements, with the Curraghchase Hunts (renamed de Vere in 1832) and the O'Briens of Cahirmoyle. Both seats were fairly close to Mount Trenchard, being 11 miles east and 8 miles south-east in turn. Neither family matched the Spring Rices as landowners, though the de Veres possessed 4,163 acres valued at £2,108, while the O'Briens owned 4,990 acres worth £3,630 per annum.⁽¹⁹⁾ As the chart shows, Thomas's sister Mary married Sir Aubrey Hunt, his first wife's cousin; while his grand-daughter Mary was first wife to Edward O'Brien, who retained control of the Cahirmoyle estate even after his father William Smith O'Brien had returned home following penal servitude in Van Diemen's Land.⁽²⁰⁾ These three families were further enmeshed by two alliances between de Veres and O'Briens, one of whose branches eventually acquired both the surname de Vere and the Curraghchase estate.

These three families of resident gentry provided the core of a social set within which hospitality, good turns and earnest talk were constantly exchanged. The 1st Lord Monteagle's portrait was hung at Curraghchase, where 'in advanced life' as in youth its subject was accustomed to play Mozart's flute sonatas to his sister's accompaniment.⁽²¹⁾ At various times Foynes and its island provided homes for members of all three families, so that when the young Douglas Hyde toured the district in 1891 he paid successive calls on Charlotte Grace O'Brien at Ard-an-oir, the Monteagles at Mount Trenchard, and Stephen de Vere on Foynes Island where Hyde 'killed a white rabbit at forty yards, and a crow'.⁽²²⁾ Naturally, the Spring Rices' set was not restricted to de Veres and O'Briens, extending to other hospitable and cultivated Limerick families such as the Quins of Adare and the Monsells of Tervoe.⁽²³⁾ Few regions of Ireland could have boasted of so dense a concentration of liberal-minded and educated patrician families, so unlike the common run of philistine Irish *rentiers*.



Between 1881 and 1883, Charlotte Grace O'Brien conducted a licensed lodging house in Queenstown (Cobh) through which 3,000 intending emigrants passed in its first year of operation.

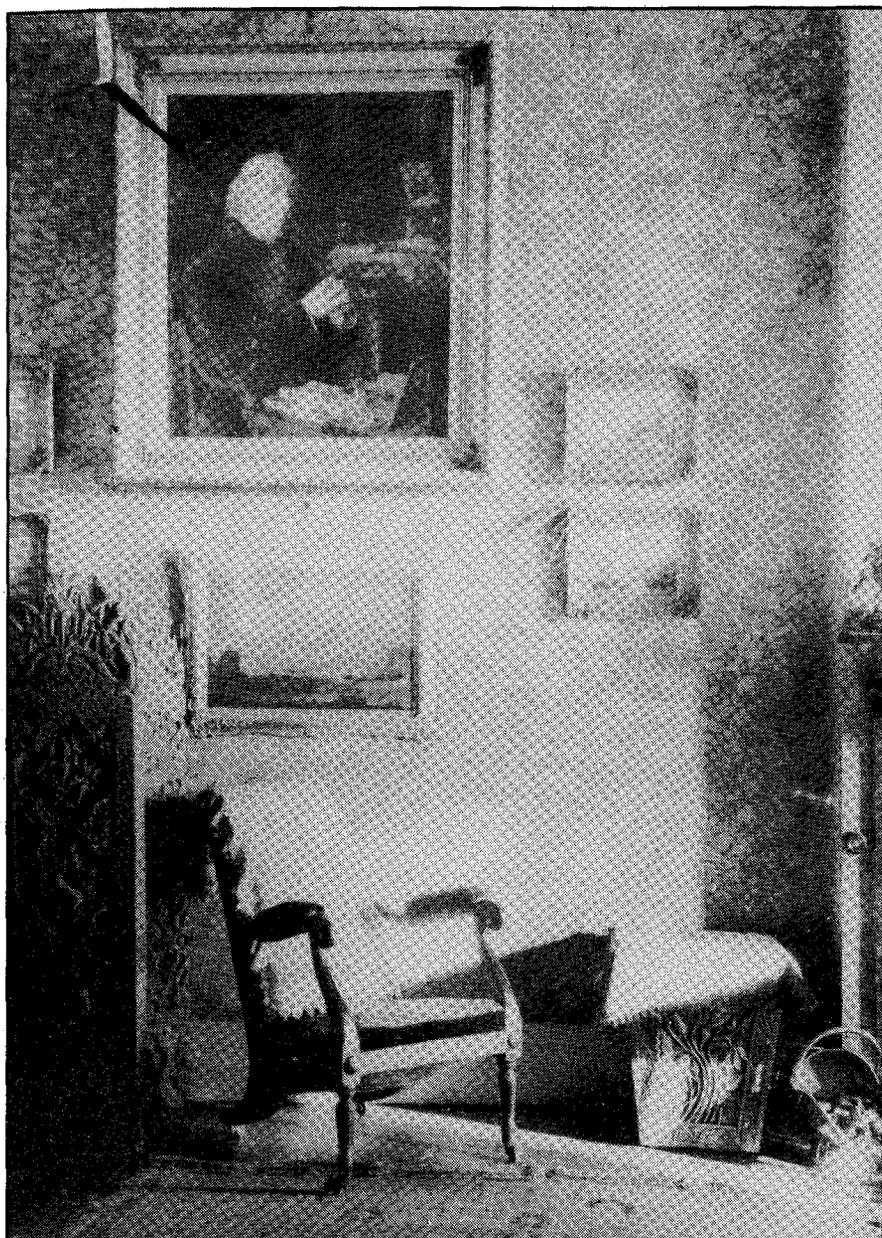
The composition of the Spring Rice set was not the product of shared origins, religion or party affiliation. The Rices were early Tudor settlers in Kerry who acquired property in Limerick as Elizabethan 'undertakers'; the O'Briens proudly traced their genealogy to Brian Boru; whereas the founder of the Irish Hunts was a Cromwellian officer descended in a female line from the de Veres (Earls of Oxford). Fine distinctions between Cromwellian, Old English and Gaelic origins counted for little in the social fabric of the enlightened Limerick gentry. These families shared a common fascination with religion rather than a common orthodoxy, and were highly responsive to the debates and questionings associated with Newman's drift towards Rome. Two sons of Sir Aubrey de Vere and a daughter of William Smith O'Brien were converted to the

Roman Catholic Church in middle life, as were Edwin Wyndham-Quin (3rd Earl of Dunraven) and his brother-in-law William Monsell (1st Lord Emly).⁽²⁴⁾ Stephen Spring Rice rejected the 'formality' of the Newmanites and resisted conversion, but remained an engrossed Anglo-Catholic, given to composition of sonnets with such titles as 'Edification (On the Baptism of an Infant in St. Peter's)'.⁽²⁵⁾ Issues of doctrine and church organisation provoked earnest but friendly disputation among the Limerick *literati*: excited by common questions, they had wit enough to arrive at various answers.

The same applied in politics. Monteagle's brother-in-law, Sir Aubrey Hunt, who stood unsuccessfully for Limerick County in 1820, identified himself not as a Whig but as 'a Liberal Tory, or a Canningite', who nevertheless supported Catholic Emancipation and moderate parliamentary reform.⁽²⁶⁾ William Smith O'Brien, who represented Ennis between 1828 and 1831 as well as Limerick County between 1835 and 1849, was successively a Tory, Whig, Repealer and Confederate, a progression which alienated most of his kinsfolk, including his wife Lucy and son Edward.⁽²⁷⁾ The last member of the circle to represent the county in parliament was Stephen de Vere between 1854 and 1859, when he sat with his fellow-Liberal and fellow-convert, William Monsell. Yet their successors remained politically active outside the House of Commons at both local and national level. The Spring Rice set worked hard at the turn of the century, when 'conciliation' of the classes seemed for a moment possible, to promote industrial regeneration and prove their patriotism by practical effort. While the 4th Earl of Dunraven promoted land purchase and devolution, and the 2nd Lord Emly championed the



Curraghchase, home of the de Veres, described by Samuel Lewis in 1837 as 'the elegant residence of Sir Aubrey de Vere, Baronet, in the centre of a wide, fertile, and undulating demesne'.



Portrait of Aubrey Thomas de Vere, hung in his study at Curraghchase.

Labour cause in Limerick City, Edward O'Brien and his son Dermot worked with Monteagle and Plunkett to foster cooperative agriculture in the county.⁽²⁸⁾

As social and political conflict intensified in the early twentieth century, the questioning spirit of the Spring Rice circle generated unexpected and radical responses to that challenge. William Smith O'Brien's daughter Charlotte became a Parnellite as well as a Roman Catholic in the 1880s, while her niece Nellie O'Brien supported Sinn Féin, founded the Irish College at Carrigaholt in Co. Clare, and represented the Gaelic League on the Irish Guild of the Church of Ireland.⁽²⁹⁾ Common interests in yachting as well as militant nationalism brought members of all three families together in the summer of 1914, when running guns for the Irish Volunteers provided better sport than Hyde's

crows or white rabbits. Mary Spring Rice concocted the first plan for illegal importation of arms from Germany, using an old trading smack based at Foynes, though, after inspecting the vessel, her friend Erskine Childers decided to use his own yacht, the *Asgard*. The load was shared by the *Kelpie*, sailed by Mary's cousin Conor O'Brien (whom she considered 'useless at a crisis') with his sister Kitty and two sailors from Foynes. Mary, Conor and his close kinsman Hugh Vere O'Brien all subscribed towards the purchase of the arms landed at Howth and Kilcoole, while Mary herself crewed for Childers on the *Asgard*. Kitty O'Brien was 'as good as a man', perhaps the highest compliment that her fellow-sailor Diarmid Coffey could bestow upon a woman; while Mary Spring Rice was variously described by her crew as 'a wonder' who 'was hardly

ill at all and looks and is most useful', and as 'so splendid – such a help, such a good sailor, so brave and unshrinking'. Mary had a jolly voyage, would have been 'horribly disappointed' if the Arms Proclamation had been rescinded, and, after landing the weapons, capped her adventure with a sociable luncheon, and tea at the United Afts Club.⁽³⁰⁾

Mid-way between the landings at Howth and Kilcoole, Hugh Vere O'Brien was supervising the landing of 150 rifles smuggled to Foynes by the Limerick and Claremen of New York. He was among the first gentlemen to join the Irish Volunteers, and, having two residences at Ballyalla (Ennis) and Monare (Foynes), he helped drill the Volunteers of both counties.⁽³¹⁾ Nine days before the gun-running Hugh's mother had expressed disquiet about his activities: 'He had asked me if I should mind the Volunteers coming over to drill on the Island – adding as an inducement that Monteagle had lent them the Memorial Hall in Foynes. It goes against my inclination to refuse Hugh anything but I did not like the idea at all.'⁽³²⁾ Though Hugh protested that the Volunteers to which he and his cousin Conor belonged were 'not political', involvement in the movement was often a prelude to broader entanglements. Conor O'Brien was to become an Inspector of Fisheries for the 2nd Dáil; while Mary Spring Rice lent a boat to the West Limerick Brigade of the I.R.A., carried its messages to Dublin, and was rewarded at her funeral in 1924 by a guard of honour representing Labour, the I.R.A. and the Gaelic League.⁽³³⁾

The political melodrama which excited that generation of Limerick gentry had its roots in the romantic and backward-looking nationalism which had so engrossed their nineteenth-century predecessors. Sir Aubrey de Vere composed an admirable if interminable 'Lamentations of Ireland', which his son Aubrey matched in his epic 'Inisfail' and other works treated with respect by Auden as well as Yeats.⁽³⁴⁾ As the genealogical chart demonstrates, a remarkable number of Spring Rices, de Veres and O'Briens wrote verse which was eventually published. Much of that writing had no political or Irish reference, while the best-known work of Sir Cecil Spring Rice was that sententious hymn written on the eve of his departure from Washington in 1918, 'I vow to thee, my country – all earthly things above'.⁽³⁵⁾ Even so, amidst the confusion and inconsistency expected within a broad circle of thinking people, one may detect a rough development of outlook which had literary, political and social implications. The confident paternalism of the pre-famine gentry gradually gave place to gritty attempts to pre-empt



social revolution through constructive action, until at last the inexorable approach of that convulsion drew many sons and daughters of the gentry towards militant and sometimes illicit pursuit of nationality. Even the Earl of Dunraven, deaf and, in his eightieth year, announced at dinner with Lord French and other Dublin Castle administrators at the height of the 'Troubles' that 'he would declare himself a Republican if he wasn't afraid to'.⁽³⁶⁾ Three-quarters of a century earlier Thomas Spring Rice had adopted a similar tone of alienation and defiance in his claim to Trevelyan that mis-government had 'degraded our people, and you, English, now shrink from your responsibilities'. They, Irish, did not do so.

III. The Emigration Issue

It was a commonplace among the enlightened gentry that properly controlled emigration was essential for the regeneration of Ireland; though, as Monteagle stressed in 1848, they 'contemplated no system of emigration that would not be advantageous to the emigrant, acceptable to the colonies, and beneficial to the mother country'.⁽³⁷⁾ Although north Limerick was not among Ireland's most 'congested' regions, the menace of poverty even before the famine persuaded the Spring Rices and their circle that efficient management of estates required humane removal of 'surplus' population. In his Confederate days William Smith O'Brien reiterated his unpopular view that 'to lay the foundations of an Irish colony in another hemisphere is surely no ignoble task, even for an Irish patriot'. In January, 1847, he proposed that up to 50,000 families should be sent annually to the colonies, at the joint expense of the state, the colonists and the regions of origin.⁽³⁸⁾ In 1842 and 1847 his brother Sir Lucius and sister Grace provided loans and outfit for emigrants from the Dromoland estate; while his daughter Charlotte Grace conducted a celebrated campaign during the Land War for the better supervision and moral protection of female emigrants leaving Queenstown. Though 'utterly opposed to the English policy of state-aided emigration', she set about facilitating voluntary movement by opening and running an emigrant hostel at Queenstown, prompting an official inquiry into the vulnerability to male intrusion of sleeping female passengers, touring America to organise reception facilities for Irish girls, and exploiting social and family contacts to seek legislative reform. After a steerage journey from Liverpool to Queenstown, she enlisted her brother's children as intermediaries:

'Tell Uncle Monteagle that I have a new point for him to fight on in the need to have the law revised.'⁽³⁹⁾

The de Veres responded likewise to the emigration issue. Aubrey Thomas de Vere regarded the provision of state as well as landlord assistance to emigrants as 'a debt of honour on the part of the State', arguing that 'a chronic poverty weighed down a vast population wholly out of proportion to the means of subsistence; a "heroic" measure of State-aided emigration could alone have met that evil, ... but the strong head and the strong hand needed for such a work were not found'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ His brother Stephen contributed heavily to the reform of passenger legislation as a result of his own steerage passage to Quebec in 1847. De Vere paid for the passages of 150 labourers and others from Curraghchase, supervised the first batch himself and personally nursed them upon arrival in fever-ridden Quebec. His chilling accounts of conditions on shipboard and on arrival at Grosse Isle had a devastating public impact, skilfully fanned by the elder Uncle Monteagle. As the secretary to the Emigration commissioners observed, de Vere had 'made the dumb to speak'.⁽⁴¹⁾ De Vere hoped not only to improve the conditions of passage, but also to prompt 'a great effort by the state, the counties, the landlords, and the people, in combination, to locate elsewhere the hands that cannot here be paid for their labour, and the mouths that cannot otherwise be fed'.⁽⁴²⁾

Support for state-funded colonisation among the gentry of north Limerick is confirmed by the list of signatories giving 'general Approval' to John Godley's elaborate plan for resettlement of 1,500,000 Irish Catholics in Canada at the cost to the state of £9,000,000 within four years. Among the signatories in March, 1847, were Sir Vere De Vere (brother of Aubrey and Stephen) and Monteagle's son Stephen Spring Rice; supported by their friends or kinsmen the 2nd Earl of Limerick, Viscount Adare (later 3rd Earl of Dunraven), William Monsell and Richard Bourke of Thornfield.⁽⁴³⁾ Bourke had assisted several of his displaced tenants from Limerick to Australia after his retirement in 1838 as Governor of New South Wales, and was 'sure they are much better off there than they were in Ireland'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ After the famine, Stephen de Vere continued to deplore the state's failure to shape and control the flow of population from Ireland to the New World, and to praise the private services of philanthropists such as Caroline Chisholm of Sydney ('one of the most remarkable women of modern times').⁽⁴⁵⁾ But political interest in state assistance waned as voluntary emigration waxed; and de Vere's principal reward for the 'great noise' gener-

ated by his exploits as a gentleman in the steerage was an unsuccessful campaign by William Monsell to secure him the modest post of Lieutenant-Governor of Montserrat.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Pre-eminent among Limerick's patriotic advocates of state-assisted emigration was Thomas Spring Rice himself. After participating in Wilmot Horton's parliamentary select committees on emigration in 1826-7, Spring Rice chaired a series of major committees which urged state assistance as a partial but vital remedy for Irish poverty. His committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland reported in 1830 that removal of Ireland's 'excess of population' to the North American colonies 'would add to their wealth and power', and might be funded through state loans repayable by the colonists.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Spring Rice's tenure as Colonial Secretary in summer 1834 (in succession to Edward Stanley, another landlord with Limerick tenants whom he had once sought state assistance to remove) was too brief to enable him to translate precept into practice. But he strongly backed the innovatory programme of Governor Bourke in Sydney, 'one of his oldest and most valued friends', who introduced the 'bounty' system of emigration in 1835 and sought to transform the colony from a penal settlement to a free and open community.⁽⁴⁸⁾

It was the famine emergency that gave more urgency to Monteagle's longstanding advocacy of state-funded emigration, as he struggled to exploit his remaining influence with Lord John Russell's Liberal ministry to apply the lessons of his own harrowing experience as an Irish landlord. In October, 1846, he sent the Colonial Secretary a memorandum on emigration by his son Stephen, 'who has been working very hard with me in these most calamitous times'. This modest scheme proposed that emigration should be facilitated by raising wages payable on relief works, so making 'the paymasters at once Emigration agents and Savings Bank Managers'. Earl Grey offered only lukewarm support, warning against 'the mischievous effect of keeping up what I believe to be the entirely unfounded notion that Ireland is over peopled' and objecting to any outlay of public money. Despite slightly greater interest on the part of Trevelyan and Russell, the proposal lapsed.⁽⁴⁹⁾ A few months later both Thomas and Stephen helped raise support for Godley's plan, and Monteagle annotated Lord John Russell's view of 'any effort of emigration as a merely subsidiary measure' by exclaiming: 'but an indispensable one'.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The government's immobility prompted Monteagle in June, 1847, to move the creation of a select committee on colonization from Ireland in the House



The Charing of Thomas Spring Rice, M.P., 1820, oil painting by William Turner of Oxford (by permission of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce).

of Lords. He declared that 'emigration was now absolutely demanded by the present distressed state of the Irish population; and the question was simply, whether that stream of emigration ought to be directed to the shores of this country, or towards our colonial possessions?' After reminding Grey of his past advocacy of state funding, Monteagle rehearsed the benefits of colonization to both the colonies and Ireland, which as all Irish landlords and gentlemen agreed 'ought to be held bound to furnish a reasonable portion of the cost of that benefit'. Monteagle spoke mainly of British North America, but added that 'the Australian colonies presented an almost unlimited field for colonisation, and an encouraging example of successful enterprise', despite recent financial crisis.⁽⁵¹⁾ Grey replied discouragingly that emigration could only be 'subsidiary to other measures now in progress' as a palliative for Irish poverty, while schemes like Godley's should be let 'slumber upon dusty shelves'. Colonisation might benefit the colonies, but could not 'at once seriously diminish the pressure of destitution in Ireland'.⁽⁵²⁾ Nevertheless, Grey did not oppose formation of Monteagle's select committee, which submitted four reports of which the last was dated August, 1848.⁽⁵³⁾

In that month Monteagle's acrimonious altercation with Grey was resumed when the Colonial Secretary introduced a brief debate on Australian emigration, without offering any promise of further state funding. Monteagle zestfully lampooned Grey's 'small and miserable scheme', voicing the outlook of a Whig patrician rather than a modern Liberal by declaring that 'the *laissez faire* system of his noble Friend was an absurdity'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Thereafter Monteagle directed much of his fire upon the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Clarendon, reminding him that the recent assisted emigration from the Crown estate at Ballykilcline, Co. Roscommon, had 'transformed into consumers of British manufactures abroad men, who would only have been White Boys and Molly Maguires without either principles or breeches at home'. In a long memorandum Monteagle advocated incentive subventions rather than full state funding, so limiting the cost to an annual charge of £180,000 on Irish land. He complained of discrimination against Ireland in provision for emigration to Australia, since the expensive voyage to Plymouth was unsubsidised, and proposed the appointment of an Irish emigration agent to act on behalf 'of those excellent public servants Murdoch and his colleagues' (the Emigra-

tion Commissioners in London).⁽⁵⁵⁾ Clarendon pointedly replied 'that although as an Irish Proprietor you would have no difficulty in advocating the Project you might hesitate to propose it if you were still Chancellor of the Exchequer'.⁽⁵⁶⁾

At first it seemed that Russell, upon Clarendon's urging, might implement some such scheme. Yet by January, 1849, Treasury opposition had aborted that hope, whereupon Russell sent Monteagle some fatuous words of commiseration: 'Do not despair of Irish Emigration - Every plan is difficult, but no plan is the most difficult of all. Yrs. truly J. Russell.' Clarendon was 'much dispirited' at Russell's capitulation, noting that Grey's rival 'Canadian plan' had also been ditched in response to colonial opposition.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The miniscule scale of state funding through the poor rates and colonial land funds continued to disgust Monteagle, but his reiterated protests met with ever cooler responses from Clarendon.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The moment for the 'heroic' solution for Irish poverty had passed.

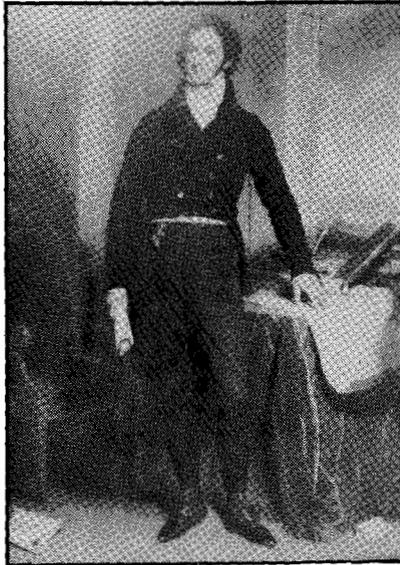
IV. Monteagle's Australian Emigrants

Though the political influence of Monteagle and his circle proved insufficient



to sway state policy, it was adeptly exercised to direct much of the scarce official funding actually provided towards the 'surplus' population of north Limerick. It seems that about 600 emigrants from the Spring Rice estate were despatched to Australia between 1837 and 1857, of whom a third appear in the voluminous correspondence preserved in their benefactor's archive. These testimonials deserve more systematic reproduction and analysis than is attempted here.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Monteagle's manner of assisting his emigrants was unusual in that he provided only modest subsidies or loans to supplement the free passage that he arranged with the Emigration Commissioners. By the early 1850s his second wife was supervising allocations of these subsidies, corresponding constantly with the Emigration Commissioners about particular candidates, and holding morning levées to prepare the emigrants for their adventure.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The Monteagles had themselves become, in effect, the Irish emigration agency which Thomas had called for in 1848.

Funding Monteagle's emigrants was a highly personal process of cooperation involving civil servants, landlord, prospective emigrants and their kinsfolk in both Limerick and Australia.



Portrait of Thomas Spring Rice while member for Limerick (1820-32), in studious pose. This painting by Sir Martin Archer Shee was commissioned by the Limerick Chamber of Commerce for £300, and hung in December, 1822.

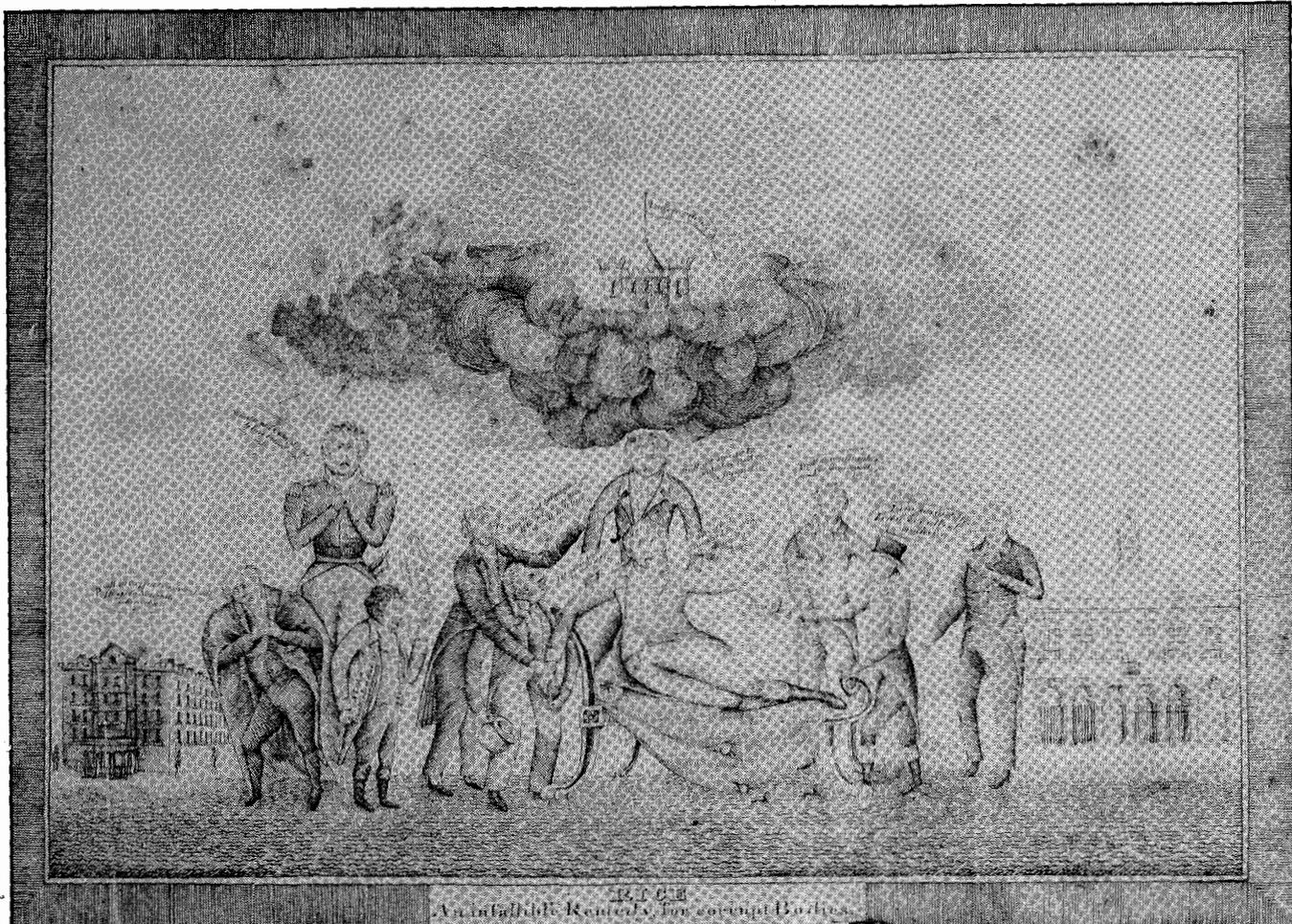
As Lady Monteagle's housekeeper reported in about 1853:

Cornelius [Sullivan] is most anxious about getting out says they have 10£ lately sent – that he could pay 5 or 6£

for his passage if your ladyship cant get him out at the usual sum 2£ – his Sister and Cousin would dread going without him – he says their Relations in Australia have purchased 15-100 acres of land – and want to get them all there – as they can spare the money to send – Sydney is the place they want to go.⁽⁶¹⁾

Through delicate handling of tenant susceptibilities and civil service punctilio, the Monteagles managed to prevent the Limerick estate from becoming a 'wretched pauper warren', without incurring the cry of 'inhumanity' as they consolidated farms.⁽⁶²⁾ As Patrick O'Farrell remarks, 'he was properly believed a benevolent landlord, but his motivation was not entirely altruistic'.⁽⁶³⁾ His aim, which he evidently accomplished, was to reorganise and improve his estate while retaining the devotion and gratitude of those who left it.

The evidence of laudatory letters from emigrants, preserved and sometimes printed for circulation by a politician eager to document the popular demand for emigration to Australia, requires careful interpretation. Dissatisfied emigrants doubtless held their peace, while those who wrote to the Monteagles may have exaggerated



The Limerick Corporation, which had existed since 1197, was dissolved in 1840, following Thomas Spring Rice's petition to the House of Commons. This cartoon of the time describes Rice as 'An infallible Remedy for corrupt Bodies'.

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Female Emigration
NEW SOUTH WALES.
 The Committee for promoting the Emigration
Single Women
 A Superior First Class SHIP of 600 Tons,
CORK.
 On Thursday, the 26th of May next,
SYDNEY.
A FREE PASSAGE

Between 1832 and 1836, state assistance for female emigrants to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land was supervised by voluntary emigration committees, such as the Cork committee which issued this call for emigrants in 1836 (copy in State Paper Office, Dublin). The committee included Catholic as well as Protestant clergymen, landowners, land agents, and Cork merchants of many political groupings (some with reformist views akin to Spring Rice's).

their success in order to encourage further emigration and exaggerated their gratitude in order to curry favour. In his commentary on the correspondence, O'Farrell has emphasised the base motives of Monteagle's informants with their 'naked greed, selfishness and the desire to restrict the spoils of immigration to close relatives only'. The fact that one emigrant 'expressed back to Monteagle a landlord's view of the benefits of emigrations ... does not

necessarily impugn his sincerity'; but O'Farrell's reader is left uneasy.⁽⁶⁴⁾ It would indeed be surprising to detect unblemished altruism and self-denial in either landlord or tenant at any period, especially amidst the 'roars of anger and cries of suffering' which Stephen Spring Rice associated with the famine in Foynes.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Less censoriously, one might marvel at the ingenuity with which the Monteagles manipulated a flawed system, and with which their beneficiaries forged a livelihood in Australia and coaxed out their kinsfolk to form family networks in unfamiliar surroundings.

In March, 1848, Patrick Danaher, the correspondent whose sincerity O'Farrell has called into question, reported that Monteagle's female emigrants were 'all in respectable places' in Melbourne, earning 25 or 26 shillings weekly, while the men had found jobs in bricklaying or public works at 4/6 per diem. Those longer established in Port Phillip had done still better by marrying an hotel-keeper, saving enough 'as exempts him from personal labour', keeping a grocery or 'living independently in the Country'. Five years later, Danaher referred to several Monteagle emigrants who had done moderately well in the diggings, underlining his own success by momentarily concealing his 'naked greed' in order to remit

£13 to his 'poor remaining parent'.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The generosity of the successful emigrants was illustrated by a letter from Wollongong (which was soon to be followed by £5 towards the passage of the writer's brother) which Monteagle showed to Nassau Senior in 1852:

The comfort I can afford you is bread, butter and tea, honey, beef, pork and cabbage, potatoes and milk; a horse and cart to ride to Mass, or a horse, bridle and saddle, which you please. If you come to me yourself and your son, we shall never see a poor day again.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Cornelius Sullivan's sisters in Geelong sent home £10 without laying down conditions as to the recipients, merely expecting 'one of the boys or two of them if they can come' and perhaps a girl:

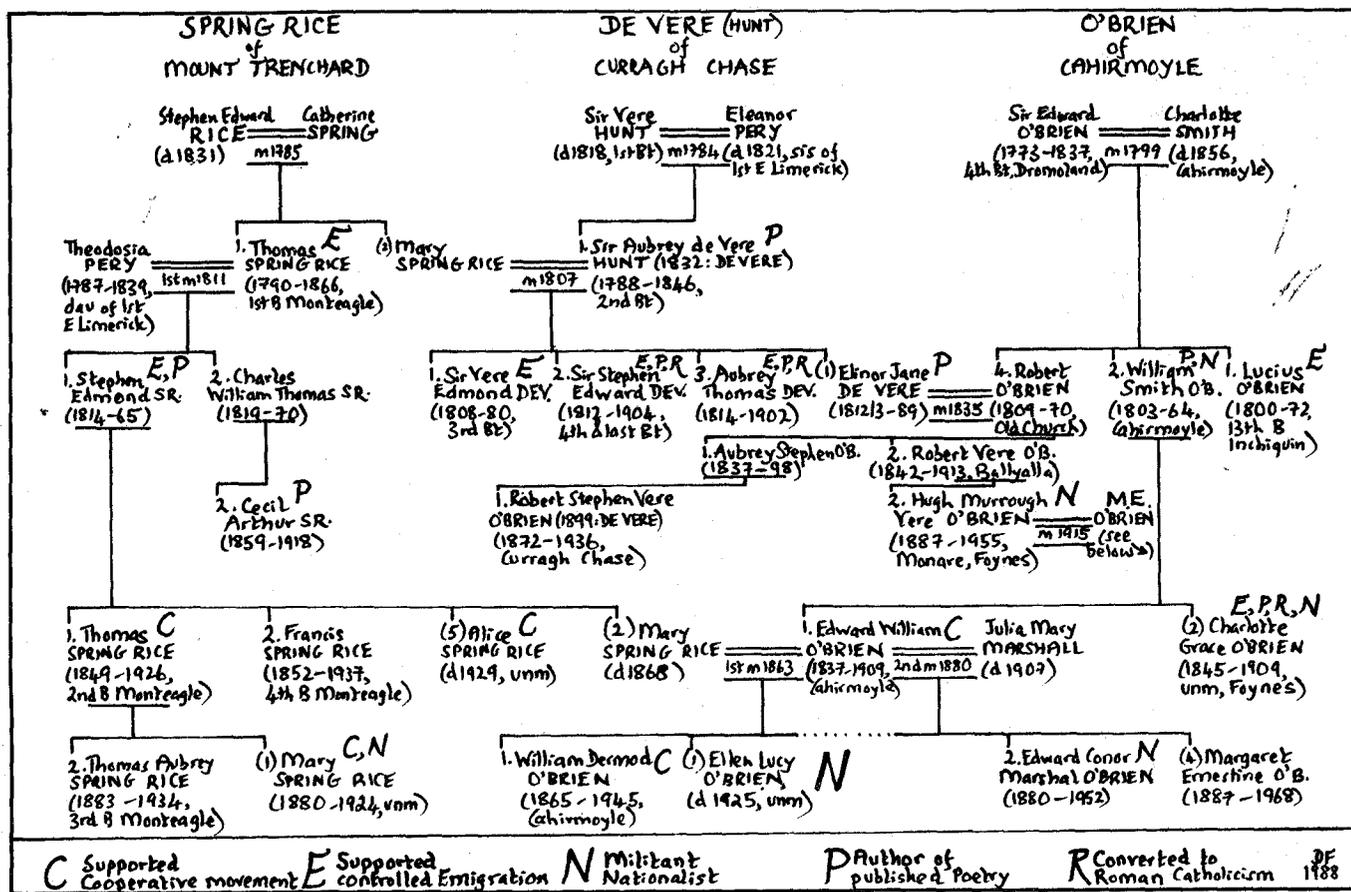
Der brothers let nothing prevent ye to come out to thiss colony where you would think no more of five pounds than you would of one penny at home ... We feel very lonesome to be without a brother here in a foreign land Adieu farewell but not I hope for ever.

Like many of the correspondents, they bestowed blessings upon the Monteagles 'for sending us out to such a fertile Contrary all with gold by far better than farming or any other trade in the world.'⁽⁶⁸⁾ Their loneliness and munifi-



LX. DON QUIXOTE ABOUT TO LIBERATE THE GALLEY SLAVES "How the knight of the sorrowful figure set at liberty several unfortunate persons, who were carrying [sic], much against their wills, to a place they did not like".

Sir Francis Burdett's radicalism, that was once too much for the High Whigs, has evaporated with age. He took offence at the alliance of the Whig Ministry with O'Connell, and is here represented as Don Quixote, come to liberate the Ministers from their enslavement to the Irish agitator. But Burdett's attempt was not as successful as the Don's. Behind O'Connell march Melbourne, Russell and Spring Rice; the fourth in order of the captives is Sir John Cam Hobhouse, another old-time Radical, formerly Byron's friend and now President of the Board of Control (India). He was created Baron Houghton in 1851. He is said to have invented the phrase "His Majesty's Opposition". His Memoirs are well worth reading.



A genealogical chart of the Spring Rice, de Vere and Smith O'Brien families.

cence were echoed by Ellen Kenny, who sent £5 towards the passage of her parents or else of Benjamin Kenny, a carpenter in Shanagolden: 'My Lady I wish to let you know that I have not one belonging to me in this Country which I feel very lonely but I hop I will not be long when I will have my Parent with your assistance.'

The effusive gratitude prevailing the correspondence should not be attributed to the cunning of selfish peasants wheedling cash from their secretly resented ex-masters and mistresses. Most of the later letters enclosed rather than requested money, and sought the good offices of those 'trusted stewards' the Monteagles in putting their remittances to good use and securing state assistance. Patrick Kelly and his wife in Melbourne would 'ever pray for the Lady and your Lordship, for sending us from a starved Country to where we can have good earnings and enough to Eat. My Lord, I hope you will send out both my Brothers in laws for this order of Twelve pounds 8£ for the two Michael and Richard Hartnett' and 4£ for my cousins in law Mary Forein and Johanna Forein'. The Hartnetts' widowed mother also besought Monteagle 'to interfair with the Commissioners to get the necessary papers for the remaining part of my family.'

Bridget Barrett, whose sister had sent six pounds towards passages for herself and two brothers, most humbly petitioned Lord Monteagle that he might 'be humanely pleased to exercise your Lordship's powerful interest on their behalf with the Emigration Commissioners to grant them a passage.' James Raleigh received no less than £60 from his brother-in-law in Melbourne, with which he asked Monteagle to 'procure me a free passage'. Likewise, John Culhane was seeking mediation rather than money when he asked for his married daughter and her husband in London to accompany the residue of his family to Australia, at his own expense: 'Do you most respected Lady Mount Eagle lend your knoble hand and hart to the good cause and I presume to say that my famiele which consists of six in number will live and die together in Melbourne'.

The story of Thomas Spring Rice and emigration to Australia offers heartening evidence that benevolence, self-interest and communal benefit were not incompatible, even under the stress of famine. Spring Rice, in common with many of north Limerick's resident gentry, responded humanely and creatively to crisis, despite the failure of the state to undertake systema-

tic colonisation. The same spirit of paternalism suffused other aspects of their estate management and local enterprise, and remained detectable in the support given in later generations to cooperative activity and even militant nationalism. It would be absurd to infer that the Spring Rices and their set were characteristic of the resident gentry of Ireland, let alone of the agents for absent landlords who determined policy on emigration and 'improvement' for most of the great estates. It would be equally absurd to dismiss Monteagle's benevolence as veiled exploitation, or to deny his delicacy in minimising the fracturing of social and familial networks caused by estate reorganisation. At times Monteagle despaired of his task, as in the midst of Famine when he ruefully remarked to Aubrey de Vere that 'I once knew a gentleman who was popular in this country - his name was Thomas Spring Rice.' Yet it would be difficult to concoct a less appropriate epitaph for him than O'Connell's 'wonderful West Briton', unless perhaps that proposed in an earlier issue of this journal by Finbarr Crowe:

I see, but keep my stony silence,
Who would heed me if I spoke?
'Spring Rice, haughty Lord Monteagle
What can he know of Irish folk?'



Monteagle spoke a great deal, was widely if insufficiently heeded, and knew much about Irish folk. In passing, he also made a distinctive contribution to the formation of an Australian folk.

Notes

1. *Thom's Official Directory* (Dublin, 1883), pp 724-50, giving annual valuation as in 1873 but excluding land leased to others.
2. Stephen Gwynn (ed.), *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice* (London, 1930), i, p. 4.
3. Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its History and Antiquities* (Dublin, 1866), pp 115, 238.
4. See article by John Andrew Hamilton in *Dictionary of National Biography*, xviii, pp 835-7.
5. Lenihan (1866), pp 444-8.
6. Thomas Rice, *An Inquiry into the Effects of the Irish Grand Jury Laws* (London, 1815); (T.S.R.), *Catholic Emancipation, considered on Protestant Principles* (London, 1827), pp i, 8.
7. Thomas Spring Rice, *Speech ... on the Repeal of the Union with Ireland* (London, 1834).
8. *Hansard* (3rd Series), xciii, cols. 176, 283-4; Lenihan (1866), pp 487-8.
9. Rice (1815), pp 23-4.
10. (Board of Works, Ireland), *Correspondence with Lord Monteagle and Hon. Stephen Spring Rice* (Dublin, 1846), p. 12 (1 October 1846).
11. *Recollections of Aubrey de Vere* (London, 1897), p. 246.
12. Stephen Spring Rice, *Irish Crime. A Letter to Alexander Beresford Hope, Esq.* (Dublin, 1863), p. 4.
13. Lord Monteagle, 'Address', *Jnl. of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, viii (1883), pp 380-1.
14. Monteagle (1883), p. 395.
15. Monteagle, *To my Tenants in the County of Limerick* (n.p., 1879).
16. Horace Plunkett, *Noblesse Oblige: an Irish Rendering* (Dublin, 1908); Patrick Bolger, *The Irish Co-operative Movement* (Dublin, 1977), pp 67, 71, 78, 89-90.
17. Bolger (1977), pp 284, 286-7; R.A. Anderson, *With Horace Plunkett in Ireland* (London, 1935), p. 9.
18. Lenihan (1866), p. 760; *DNB*, xviii, p. 837.
19. The chart shows extracts from the genealogies of the three families, drawn from the standard peerages and baronetages. The parity of sons is indicated by the numbers 1., and that of daughters by (1), etc. For size of properties see note 1.
20. Stephen Gwynn (ed.), *Charlotte Grace O'Brien: Selections from her Writings and Correspondence with a Memoir* (Dublin, 1909), pp 28, 33; Blanche M. Touhill, *William Smith O'Brien and his Revolutionary Companions in Penal Exile* (Columbia, Missouri, 1981), pp 228-9.
21. De Vere (1897), p. 22.
22. Dominic Daly, *The Young Douglas Hyde* (Dublin, 1974), pp 145-6. Daly misconstrues these diary entries as evidence of a 'contrast between Hyde the crusader for all things Gaelic and Hyde the Anglo-Irish country gentleman': in fact, most of his hosts in Foynes shared his Gaelic enthusiasms.
23. The first wife of William Monsell (Gladstone's Under-Secretary of State for Colonies from 1868

- to 1871, created Lord Emly in 1873) was Anna Wyndham-Quin, daughter of the 2nd Earl of Dunraven. The Rev. Charles Monsell married Harriet O'Brien, sister of Robert O'Brien (whose connections with the Spring Rices and the de Veres are specified in the chart).
24. Wilfrid Ward, *Aubrey de Vere: a Memoir* (London, 1904), pp 183, 198; Gwynn (1909), p. 103; (4th) Earl of Dunraven, *Past Times and Pastimes* (London, 1922), i, *passim*; *The Catholic Who's Who* (London, 1911), pp 119-120 (Lord Emly).
25. Ward (1904), pp 54, 176; Aubrey de Vere, *Antar and Zara ... and other Poems* (London, 1877), p. 275 (one of several sonnets by Stephen Spring Rice there published).
26. De Vere (1897), pp 10, 212.
27. See note 20.
28. Dunraven (1922), ii, *passim*; Lord Emly's address to Land and Labour Association, Herbertstown, 2nd July, 1899, in State Paper Office, CSB, 1953S; Anderson (1935), pp 275-6.
29. Gwynn (1909), p. 49; Michael Hurley (ed.), *Irish Anglicanism 1869-1969* (Dublin, 1970), pp 106, 117.
30. F.X. Martin (ed.), *The Howth Gun-running and the Kilcoole Gun-running 1914* (Dublin, 1964), pp xiv-xv, 13-4, 35-7, 118, 67, 106, 68-97 (Mary Spring Rice's diary of the voyage).
31. *Clare Champion*, 8th August, 1914; *Saturday Record*, 8th August, 1914; Monthly Confidential Reports of County Inspectors, RIC, for Limerick (July, 1914) and Clare (June, 1914), in Public Record Office (London), CO 904/94.
32. Florence Vere O'Brien to her sister Frances, 20th July 1914, in Trinity College Dublin, Mss 5004-6.
33. Martin (1964), pp 68, 108; *Cuimhnionn Muimeach* (Cásg, 1966), pp 7-8.
34. Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (London, 1954), p. 232. Works by all three de Veres, William Smith and Charlotte Grace O'Brien were culled by Mrs. Elizabeth Murrin for her *Quotations in Poetry and Prose* (Baltimore, 1912), a useful compendium of Irish clichés.
35. Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, *Poems* (London, 1920), p. 176.
36. Diary of Mark Sturgis, ii, p. 113 (3rd November, 1920), in PRO (London), PRO 30/59/2.
37. *Hansard* (3rd Series), ci, col. 37.
38. William Smith O'Brien, *Reproductive Employment; a Series of Letters to the Landed Proprietors of Ireland* (Dublin, 1847), pp 49-50; cf. William Smith O'Brien, *Emigration* (London, 1840).
39. *Devon Commission*, HC 1845, xx (Cd. 616), evidence 586/36; Oliver MacDonagh, 'Irish Emigration during the Great Famine 1845-52' (M.A. Thesis, NUI, 1946), p. 194; Gwynn (1909), pp 79, 72 *et passim*.
40. De Vere (1897), pp 9, 58.
41. De Vere (1897), pp 252-4; correspondence of Stephen de Vere in de Vere Papers, TCD, Mss 5053/4, 5075, 5075a; Monteagle Papers, National Library of Ireland, Ms 13400/2.
42. De Vere to Monteagle, 13th March 1847, in TCD, Ms 5053/4.
43. MacDonagh (1946), p. 68; *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonization from Ireland*, HC 1847, vi (737), evidence q. 1627; (737-11), appendix 25.
44. *Devon Commission*, HC 1845, xx (Cd. 616), evidence 614/44, 48-9. The Earl of Dunraven and the Earl of Limerick sent 11 and 5 emigrants respec-

- tively from Limerick to Canada in 1851: see *Papers relative to Emigration*, HC 1852, xxxii (1474).
45. Stephen de Vere, lecture on emigration to Limerick Catholic Young Men's Society, TCD, Ms 5074.
46. Letter to Stephen de Vere, 21st November 1853, in TCD, Ms 5053/25.
47. *Report of Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, HC 1830, vii (667), p. 49.
48. *Third Report from the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom*, HC 1827, v (550), evidence q. 4395-6 (Stanley); *Hansard* (3rd Series), ci, col. 30; article by Hazel King on Bourke in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, i, pp 128-33; C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, ii (Melbourne, 1968), p. 254.
49. Monteagle to Grey, 9th October 1846 and Grey to Monteagle, 14th October, in NLI, Ms 13400/1.
50. Annotated memorial by Lord John Russell on Godley scheme, NLI, Ms 13400.
51. *Hansard* (3rd Series), xciii, cols. 99, 106-7.
52. *Hansard* (3rd Series), xciii, cols. 108-9, 117.
53. The reports subsequent to that cited at note 43 may be found in HC 1847-8, xvii (415 and 593); HC 1849, xi (86).
54. *Hansard* (3rd Series), ci, cols. 20, 36.
55. Monteagle to Clarendon, 21st October, 1848, in NLI, Ms 13400/2.
56. Clarendon to Monteagle, 30th October, 1848, in NLI, Ms 13400/2.
57. Russell to Monteagle, 27th January, 1849, and Clarendon to Monteagle, 28th January, 1849, in NLI, Ms 13399/2,6.
58. Clarendon to Monteagle, 26th October and 13th November, 1849, in NLI, Ms 13399/6.
59. S.C. O'Mahony, 'Monteagle Emigrant Letters', paper to conference on Australia and Ireland, TCD, 22nd April, 1987. Relevant documentation is available at the Mid-west Archives, Limerick, in addition to the Monteagle Papers in the National Library.
60. Nassau William Senior, *Journals, Conversations and Essays relating to Ireland* (London, 1868), i, p. 303.
61. Jane Headley to Lady Monteagle, 5th April, 1853 (?), in NLI, Ms 13400/4.
62. Cf. Monteagle to Earl Grey, 9th October, 1846, in NLI, Ms 13400/1.
63. Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Sydney, 1986), p. 69.
64. O'Farrell (1986), pp 88, 56.
65. De Vere (1897), p. 247.
66. Patrick Danaher to Monteagle, 20th March, 1848 (printed text) and 2nd February 1853 (discussed by O'Farrell), in NLI, Ms 13400/1.
67. D. Downey to his brother, 2nd February, 1852, quoted in Senior (1868), i, p. 304.
68. Ellen and Mary O'Sullivan to parents and brothers, 7th October, 1852, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
69. Ellen Kenny to Lady Monteagle, 27th November, 1852, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
70. Patrick Kelly to Lord Monteagle, 9 June 1853, and undated petition from Widow Hartnet and family, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
71. Petition of Bridget Barrett to Lord Monteagle, 13th October, 1853, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
72. James Raleigh to Lord Monteagle, 18th October, 1853, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
73. John Culhane to Lady 'Mount Eagle', 8th September, 1856, in NLI, Ms 13400/3.
74. Ward (1904), p. 126.
75. Finbar Crowe, 'Spring Rice', in *Old Limerick Jnl.*, 12 (1982), p. 33.