Songs of Agrarian Strife

by Pat Feeler

The main grievances of tenant farmers, in those parts of the country where the Ulster Custom (see Appendix I) did not operate, were the non-recognition of any property right of an occupying tenant, and the situation where a tenant had no right to compensation for any improvements that he carried out to his holding. The Land Act of 1870, sometimes known as the Gladstone Act - the product of considerable agrarian agitation and violence - sought to address these two grievances, even if in a weak, diluted form. The Act laid down that tenants who carried out improvements should be recompensed by the landlord for such improvements and acknowledged that the tenant had a property right of occupancy. It also set out the manner in which the value of improvements was to be ascertained. The Act thus enables all the tenant to be recompensed. The Land Act of 1870 was intended to clarify the issues relating to the tenant's property right.
when Michael Hayes, a tenant farmer and bailiff in his sixties, discharged a pistol into John Waller Braddell, the agent of Colonel Hare’s estate on which Hayes was a bailiff and tenant. Colonel Hare and Braddell had decided to rid the estate of Hayes and his family, whose violence and lawlessness had become a nuisance to them, although in earlier times they had encouraged and prompted Michael Hayes into acts of ruthlessness. Hayes was seen as one of the ordinary people and had many relatives around Doon and Cappawhite, but he had become in the words of one commentator ‘a vile and hard-hearted instrument’ of the landlord.12

No one was ever charged or tried for the ambush at Dwyer’s farm in Ballycooey in 1878, near Tipperary town, in which a young man, Darby O’Gorman, and Samuel Morrow, a policeman, were killed and a number of others wounded while distributing eviction notices to the tenants of the townland for William Scully. There were a number of men involved in the shooting and local lore has it that one of these was a Kerry farm labourer working in the locality.13

Hired Assassins and Innocent Victims

In the case of Francis Hynes and the shooting of the cattle herd. John Doolaghty, on a Sunday in July 1882 near Ennis, there is, and always has been, some doubt as to whether he did the deed or not. The weight of evidence at the trial was against him. Having studied the case in some detail, my own feeling is that he probably did it, or, if not, the killing was perpetrated by one of his brothers whom he shielded. Hynes came from a markedly different class to any of the other killers. He was the son of James Hynes, a solicitor who had served time for indecent assault, and his better known brother, John, who was hanged, were the grandchildren of William Twiss, a man of land, property and considerable wealth. Their parents, however, experienced a dramatic fall in their fortunes and the mother died when some of the children were quite young. George and John received little or no education and grew up to be poachers and desperados.15

The story of the Maamtrasna massacre is the most bizarre, complex and mysterious of all the cases that we are considering. This is the story-the murder of John Joyce and five members of his family on the night of Thursday August 17th in 1882, in the miserable hovel where they lived, in a secluded valley in Maamtrasna. A few days later three so-called independent witnesses came forward to identify ten men whom they claimed were the killers. And when they said they had followed in the dark of the night to the murder-house. The ten were put on trial for the murders and three of them, including a man named Myles Joyce, were hanged. Two became approvers or crown witnesses and five others had their death sentences commuted to penal servitude for life. It is now believed, however, that only four of the accused were involved in the crime and that three of the murder gang, including the man who planned, organised...
and paid for it, were never brought to justice. With the exception of this man, Big John Casey of Bunachrick and his son John, who were well-to-do sheep farmers, all the others, killers, victims and condemned innocents, were poor sheep farmers and labourers. Thady Casey and David Daly, were charged, tried and convicted. At least two of the three had worked at Castle Farm and the gang seems to have been composed of farm labourers and sons of small farmers who were often labourers too.

The last of the agrarian crimes we are going to look at is the clubbing to death of James Donovan, an emergency man on a farm in the Glenlara district near Newcastle in County Down. He was found murdered in the early hours of an April night in 1894. John Twiss, whom we have already mentioned, of Cordal, near Castlesland, a convicted Moonlighter, noted poacher and a thorn in the side of the police, was tried, convicted and executed for the Glenlara murder. Twiss affirmed his innocence of the crime in a remarkable speech from the dock after he had been found guilty. The speech, though rambling and repetitive, was notable for its strange idioms, its striking images and its patent honesty. It elevated the poor, ignorant countryman to another level and gave credence to his claim that the was "of the blood of gentlemen."

**Part II: The Villain as Folk Hero**

Now we come to the songs. Most, but not all, of these were written around the time the murders took place. We have, for instance, four songs on the hanging of the two Cormack brothers, William and Dan, in May 1858, but only one of these was written at the time. The other three were composed around 1910 when in a ferment of nationalist fervour the bones of the two men - or what passed for their bones - were exhumed from the convicts' graveyard in Nenagh gaol and buried in a specially constructed mausoleum in Loughmore cemetery, in their own parish. Another song that was not written at the time of the incident (the murder of O'Gormon and Morrow at Ballycoey in 1878) is _The Battle of Ballycoey_. This is the work of J.F. Finnan ("Myles") (1865-1912). It has not the run, structure or rhyme scheme of the street ballad. All the other songs, with the exception of two, are from the hands of the anonymous ballad-maker. The ballad of John Twiss is generally credited to Eugene O'Mara of Cordal, while the Poff and Barrett ballad was written by a national teacher, Daniel O'Brien, who was a witness at the trial. In speaking on the quality of the songs I shall say that the song I like best is the one entitled _The General Fox Chase_ in Zimmermann's _Songs of the Irish Rebellion_ and elsewhere, but also known as Farmer Michael Hayes. There are many different and abbreviated versions of this song. John Faulkner, who sang it for the radio programme _The Song and the Story_, has one version. The late Tom Lenihan of Milltown Malbay sang it in its entirety. Its attraction for me rests in its form. The pursuit of Hayes, the killer of Braddell, is presented in the form of a fox chase. The use of animals and birds in songs as symbols of men is quite common, and the blackbird and linnet are frequently used to represent the hero and leader. The image of Hayes as a wily fox is apt. The song is a sophisticated composition. One could almost accept its imagery at face value, as does James N. Healy who, in _Old Irish Street Ballads, Vol. 3_, lists it under hunting songs. He dates it as 1865. In a manuscript in the Folklore Department of U.C.D. I came across a good version of this song on the same story, _The Gallant Farmer Hayes_. The opening verse goes:

**You heard of that brave gallant farmer Who went with the rent for to pay The agent refused to take it As true as I hear people say.**

(Source: Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D., main manuscript collection, vol. 54, pp 348-49. Collected in Cork, 1934.)

In another manuscript in the same place there is yet another song on the same case, some lines of which run as follows:

**In Cappawhite I slept one night Being aroused in the morning early I ran to Toon and soon reached Doon Where I knew each nook and corner.**

(Source: Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D., main manuscript collection, vol. 407, p 223. Collected in Limerick, 1937.)

We are told in this source that the author of this song was prosecuted and imprisoned and when released had the good sense to frame the next one in the form of a fox chase.

Of course the great anomaly of the Hayes case is the fact that, before his falling out with his former employers, he was a most ruthless and pitiless instrument of their policies. One source credits him with evicting 1,000 tenants. I was first inclined to regard this as an exaggeration until I read elsewhere that he had been responsible for driving off the tenants of a whole townland. But when he assassinated Braddell he became a hero amongst the people and obviously received considerable support and succour, for he was never taken. The song mentions places widely flung throughout the country where the hunt for Hayes took place. I took this also to be a wild exaggeration of, even a spoof on, the actual case. But sources reveal that there was a most unrelenting search in places as distant as Tyrone, Skibbereen, Dundalk, Liverpool and Tipperary. At one point the authorities had two gunboats cruising off the Cork-Waterford coast to prevent his reported imminent escape by sea. But still their search was all in vain, for I gave them leg bail.

**The General Fox Chase**

(TEXT: Broadside in P.J. McCall's collection, N.L.I. Missing lines, between square brackets, from a broadside probably printed in Liverpool; Linenhall Library, Belfast.)

_I am a bold undaunted fox that never was before to tramp, My rent and taxes I was always willing to pay; I lived as happy as King Saul and loved my neighbours great and small, And had no animosity for either friend or foe._

I made my den in prime good land between Tipperary and Knocklong, Where my forefathers lived for three thousand years or more, But now of late I was betrayed by one that was a fool and knave, He told me I should quit the place and show my face no more.

As soon as he ejected me, I thought 'twas time that I should flee, I stole away his ducks and geese, and murdered all his drakes, I knew I could no longer stand because he had the hounds at hand, So I tightened up my garters, and then I went away, But soon there was a look out by land and sea to make me out, From Dublin quay to Belfast town, along the raging sea.

By telegraph they did me insert, a great reward for my arrest, My figure, size, and form, and my name without a doubt. The broke their brogues, some thousand pairs, this reward for to obtain, But still there was no tidings of me or my retreat; They searched Tipperary over, the cornfields and Gallymore, They went along by Wexford but there did not delay; Through Ballyhale and Stranmore they searched the woods as they went on, Till they were hungry and cold at the approach of day.

Now, search the world far and near, the like before you did not hear, A fox to get away so clear as I did from the hounds. They searched the rocks, the gulf and bays, the ships and liners at the quays, The ferry-boats and steamers as they were going to sea;

Around the coast they took a steer from Poolbeg lighthouse to Cape Clear, Killarney town, and sweet Tralee, and then crossed into Clare. When they landed on the shore they searched Killarask from top to toe, The bathing places in Milltown or otherwise Malbay, And Galway being a place of fame they thought 'twas there I was (concealed,) But still their search was all in vain, for I gave them leg bail.
They searched the train in Oranmore as she was starting to Arklow, and every waggon, car, and coach, that went along the road. Connemara being remote they thought to that place I might resort. When they were getting weary they resolved to try Mayo. (In Ballinrobe they had to rest until the hounds were quite refreshed.) From thence they went to Westport and searched it high and low. Through Castlebar they took a trot, they heard I was in Castlerock, but still they were deluded where I lodged the night before.

In Swinford town, as I sat down, I heard a dreadful cry of horses, so I took another notion to retaliate my chase; I being weary from the road I took a dram at half past four, I was then renovated whilst the hounds were getting weak; the night being dark at Castlebar, I knew not how to make my way. I had neither den nor manger to shield me from the cold, and the moon began to rise; I said I'd make for a foreign clime.

Dear Christians listen to what I will mention, with sincere repentance upon you I call, to pray for pardon to the Heavenly Father for James Walsh and for us all. The first day of September my life ended, you will all remember in '62. And Thomas Beckham you should not forget him, he acted both loyal and true.

The laws that punish for depredations could just as easily prevent the cause, if in the wisdom of your legislature that gave the sons of Erin equal laws. It would do away with hanging and transportation, and this emigration going abroad; if you got your land at a fair valuation your rents you really would disregard.

Now I ask this favour from every neighbour, to give no circulation to those lines I've penned, until I'm twelve months buried, for a certain reason, and before that period the times might mend.

The shooting of a landlord from The Illustrated London News.

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Now I ask this favour from every neighbour, to give no circulation to those lines I've penned, until I'm twelve months buried, for a certain reason, and before that period the times might mend.

The cause of murders in the Irish nation I will declare it going before the Lord, in hopes when I am buried that your legislation may cause some alteration in their humane laws. When a poor tenant he is badly treated by an unfeeling agent without much cause, and that he is driven then to desperation, he sees the danger and breaks the laws.

Notwithstanding that you are badly treated by those ambitious agents who claim your rent, whilst the pampered landlord in a foreign nation, where the fruits of your labour are daily spent.

(Another song from the same time is the Lamentation of James Walsh, one of two killers of Francis Fitzgerald. Four men in all died arising from this affair, the murdered man, his two assassins who were hanged, and Denis Dillane, the instigator and paymaster of the murder, who was also executed. A lamentation was composed for him and the whole thing was seen as a great tragedy in the area. What I like about the Lamentation of James Walsh is its reflective and analytic aspects. It generalises on the murder to consider the causes of agrarian crime and blames the laws governing land tenure and ownership which were so heavily on the side of the landlord that the tenant was forced to operate outside them.

Lamentation of James Walsh

Dear Christians listen to what I will mention,
With sincere repentance upon you I call,
To pray for pardon to the Heavenly Father
For James Walsh and for us all.
The first day of September my life ended,
You will all remember in '62,
And Thomas Beckham you should not forget him,
He acted both loyal and true.

Your humble servant is now the second
That is going to suffer for the very same,
As we were both concerned in one transaction,
I will die on the gallows and give no blame;
Though being in circulation at my resignation
I have an information of so many names,
But I'd sooner suffer than I would discover,
One act is enough to disgrace my name.

When I did surrender it was no wonder,
I saw no chance to escape the laws,
I was so well surrounded in woods and mountains,
I often sat down and began to pause.
By a proclamation through this nation,
For my apprehension there was a great reward,
So for fear of danger to those who entertained me,
Myself I gave up to the barrack guard.

The cause of murders in the Irish nation
I will declare it going before the Lord,
In hopes when I am buried that your legislation
May cause some alteration in their humane laws.
When a poor tenant he is badly treated
By an unfeeling agent without much cause,
And that he is driven then to desperation,
He sees the danger and breaks the laws.

The laws that punish for depredations
Could just as easily prevent the cause,
If in the wisdom of your legislature
That gave the sons of Erin equal laws.
It would do away with hanging and transportation,
And this emigration going abroad;
If you got your land at a fair valuation
Your rents you really would disregard.

Now I ask this favour from every neighbour,
To give no circulation to those lines I've penned,
Until I'm twelve months buried, for a certain reason,
And before that period the times might mend.
Notwithstanding that you are badly treated
By those ambitious agents who claim your rent,
Whilst the pampered landlord in a foreign nation,
Where the fruits of your labour are daily spent.)
My name was entered for emigration,
The money I paid when I did agree,
So to commit murder was not my inclination,
There was something strange in this I can't see.
I must say one thing it was a great temptation
That interfered with my libertie.*
The Lord have mercy on the souls departed!
You will act ever cautious when you think of me.

*libertie=liberty

Some of the songs like the Ballad of Francis Hynes, the Poff and Barrett Ballad, and The Maamtrasna Murderers, were written close to the time of the events on which they are based. The song that I used in the RTE Radio programme on the Maamtrasna massacre was written soon after the execution of the three men, Pat Joyce, Pat Casey and Myles Joyce on December 15 1882. We know this because After the execution of the three men, Pat Joyce, Pat Casey and Myles Joyce on December 15 1882. We know this because the official version of the case is what is given and the question of false witnesses and perjured evidence is not mentioned. The song on Francis Hynes has references that could only be intelligible to people of the time. Judge Lawson, who sentenced Hynes, is mentioned and there is a verse in praise of the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Charles Dawson M.P., for trying to have the sentence commuted. A song that is remarkable for its factual accuracy is The Ballad of Arthur Herbert. This contains a detailed description of his assassination which coincides with, and was probably taken from, the newspapers of the time. It also reflects local feeling on the killing, the lack of sympathy for Herbert and the perception of him as hard and cruel.

The Ballad of Francis Hynes
He is dead in Limerick jail
Many hearts for him to wail,
On the scaffold Francis Hynes did breathe his last,
Many brave hearts are in grief
That had worked for his reprieve,
He is gone and fills a martyr's silent grave,
His name was probably taken from, the newspapers Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)

For the murder of Dooloughty
Not very long ago,
Francis Hynes, he was arrested for the crime:
Guilty he was found
By a jury packed, well found,
And sentenced by Judge Lawson for to die,
For to die
He was sentenced by Judge Lawson for to die.
Strong evidence was borne,
Affidavits they were sworn
To the jury's intemperate habits at his trial, *
But they feared his heart so brave
For to free him from the grave,
And a martyr died young Hynes that is gone, that is gone.
Long live our great Lord Mayor
Who had worked without despair,
For to gain young Francis Hynes his reprieve
May he prosper to the end
May his spirits never bend
So a prayer for Francis Hynes that is gone, that is gone.
Then a prayer for Francis Hynes that is gone.
Again the Shamrock Shore
In morning gloom is thrown,
For the immortal soul of Francis Hynes;
God received his soul on High
May the memory never die
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone, that is gone,
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone, that is gone,
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone.

(Source: Michael Culloty, Currow, Killarney, Co. Kerry.)

While all the songs are songs of agrarian murder, four are also laments for men whom the ballad-maker believed were innocent and executed in the wrong. As I said previously, I do not agree with the song-writer in the case of Hynes. These songs contain deep expressions of sorrow and grief. Francis Hynes is referred to a number of times as a 'martyr'. But what of the ballad-maker's attitude to, and feeling for, the victim, or to broaden it, his last, That is gone.
For the immortal soul of Francis Hynes;
God received his soul on High
May the memory never die
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone, that is gone,
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone, that is gone,
Of the martyr, Francis Hynes, that is gone.


Twisting Facts
to Suit Feelings
The most remarkable song in this respect is the Moonlight Attack on Curtin's House. This is based on the raid for arms on Castle Farm, near Pires, Co. Kerry, the residence of John O'Connell-Curtin, with a farm of about 250 acres, in 1883. It was a raid that went wrong. The raiders did not intend to shed blood, they just wanted the guns that were in the house. But the father with two sons and two daughters tackled the intruders who entered their house and in the confrontation that
followed two men were fatally shot, John O'Connell-Curtin himself and a young Moonlighter named Thady Sullivan. The family displayed remarkable courage, notably the two young women. Norah snatched the mask off the face of one of the raiders and Lizzie wrestled a gun from the same man. To the objective observer, an armed gang enter a house, demand firearms, and threaten the occupants who defend themselves and their property against the intruders; most people would say that what they did was justified. But not the writer of the song. On the other hand, it must be said that raiding for arms was a recognised feature of life in disturbed districts at this time and in many instances the holders of guns handed these over without resistance. The song presents the attackers as heroes and the shooting of Mr. Curtin, who was shot at the door as the Moonlighters retreated, is described as follows:

He levelled his rifle that ne'er him betray
And left the old blood-hound there squealing.

He then goes on to seemingly libel the family saying that one of their ancestors brought to the gallows “four dozen croppies” in the year of ’98. In 1798 some fighting did take place in the Castleisland area and some local men were executed for their part in the uprising, including a man called Tadhg Leathan Nolan. But the claim that an ancestor of O'Connell-Curtin's betrayed them seems to be a fabrication. For O'Connell-Curtin was not a native of Co. Kerry at all. He came from a prosperous farming family in west Limerick where his father held three farms from the Earl of Devon. Educated by the Jesuits at Clongowes Wood College, he had come to Castle Farm about forty years earlier when he had married Agnes de Courcy who was related to the Sandes family of north Kerry. In fact, O'Connell-Curtin's background was a nationalist one. Lore had it that the family had sheltered Michael Doheny after the abortive rising of 1848 when he was being sought by the police. And O'Connell-Curtin was a joint treasurer of the Furies branch of the Land League when he was killed. He was seen locally as a generous, kindly neighbour who had built four stone-walled, slate-roofed houses for his permanent farm workers at a time when not many of them enjoyed such a standard of housing. The leader of the band of night-walkers was Thady Casey, who was a regular visitor to Castle Farm and whose father had been a recipient of the family's generosity. Yet when Fr. Murphy, the curate of Furies, spoke at Sunday mass of the dead man's charity, sincerity and devoutness, most of the congregation left the chapel. The surviving members of the family had to have police protection and they were boycotted, jeered and booted when they went to mass. The family pew was dragged from the church and smashed and smeared with excrement. Two men, Thady Casey and David Daly, were subsequently sentenced to penal servitude for their part in the affair. They are described in the song as “those two innocent men.” In 1887 the Curtins were forced to sell their fine farm and leave the area. The song is a good example of how the facts of a situation can be distorted and turned on their heads to put a particular slant on an incident.

Moonlight Attack on Curtin's House

TEXT: Broadside ballad reproduced in The Times, 10th February, 1886.

Now listen awhile the truth I will state,
How those moonlighting heroes of late
made a raid,
Down in Castlefarm in John Curtin's place,
They entered the kitchen with masks on their face,
Demanding firearms, they followed his son
Right into the parlour in search for a gun,
From the top of the stair two bullets did come,
Which murdered the poor widow's darling.

A young lad in the ranks, a dashing young blade,
With a darling young heart that was never dismayed,
He levelled his rifle that ne'er him betrayed,
And left the old blood-hound there squealing.

They fought and they rallied through parlour and hall,
Outside in the kitchen old Curtin did fall,
But for damp ammunition we would settle them all,
Which is but the fate of informers.

His grandfather, too, I'm informed of late,
He brought to the gallows in the year '98
Four dozen croppies, the truth we must state,
For which he was highly rewarded;
But the blood of those martyrs for vengeance does call,
It was heaven decreed it that Curtin should fall.
Success to the right boy that gave him the ball,
God prosper him over the water.
the nineteenth century saw the government of Ireland, its laws and its agents, as hostile and alien to them and supportive of, and sympathetic to, the landlord and his representatives; or, as Wolfe Tone put it 'a government of force'. Each of the stories in our study presents us with a cameo of our agrarian history. The greed for land and the determination not to be put off it constitute one of the principal motors of Irish history.

Appendix 1

The 'Ulster Custom' allowed a tenant to sell his 'interest' in a holding to another tenant when he vacated the farm. In Ulster this was regarded as a tenant right, in the rest of the country, wherever the practice existed, it was considered a privilege.

'Emergency men' were drafted onto a farm where a tenancy in dispute existed. These men did the farm work where local labourers were unwilling — or prevented — from doing it.

Appendix 11

Lord Leitrim

O you boys of the shamrock, pay attention to my ditty.
Be alive to your duty, be wise and be witty.
Keep your powder dry, and we'll make the tyrant fall,
And we'll give them what Lord Leitrim got below in Donegal.
Riddle-addie-day-ri, fol-the-rol-the-ree.

It being on the 2nd of April, this old debancher left his den,
He left ballotts, bums and harlots in the castle of Lough Rynn.
To Makin and Kincaid he gave a hellish bawl,
Saying: 'We'll tumble down the cabins in the County Donegal!' With me riddle, etc.

'Twas two crafty-looking renegades old Shine o'er we,
Saying: 'We'll hurl out the Papish and we'll drown them in the sea.
As Crownwell did in days of yore, we'll waste 'em, great and small,
And we'll desolate their farms here below in Donegal.' With me riddle, etc.

'Oh, me lord, I'll feel so horrified,' poor Makin he did say.
For it has foretold me we'll meet Rory on the way.

His lordship then made answer in the presence of Kincaid:
'Of Rory or the devil, sure, I never was afraid!' With me riddle, etc.

Oh, this monster's face began to foam.
His venom he did spew,
And roared out in a hellish tone: 'Sir, tell me who are you?'

Well, my Lord, I'm Rory of the Hill, that makes you welcome all
To a hearty dose of bullet pills below in Donegal.' With me riddle, etc.

'Oh, young Makim cries: 'Spare us our lives, Mister Rory, if you please!'
'No, no, for when you lie with dogs you're sure to rise with fleas.' The boys was laughing at the joke, they stood behind the wall,
Saying: 'We'll pepper 'em up with powder and smoke this day in Donegal.'

Well done, my boys,' says Rory. 'Make ready, present and fire!' At his old brain they took fair aim and they hurled him in the mire.
To revenge the joke, his head they broke, and his carcass there did maul.
They stuck him in a pool, his head to cool, below in Donegal.
With me riddle, etc.

Conclusion

What is one to say by way of some concluding comments on the sources of this agrarian violence? The struggle for the control of the land of Ireland is steeped in violence. The confiscations and plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which gave the land to supporters of the English Crown, were carried out by fire and sword. The ordinary Irish countryman and woman of All for to protect the widows in the County Donegal.
With me riddle, etc.

When young Rory seen him coming, his heart did jump for glee.
He gave three cheers for Tenant Right, Home Rule and liberty.

'O, you boys of the shamrock, pay attention to my ditty.
Be alive to your duty, be wise and be witty.
Keep your powder dry, and we'll make the tyrant fall,
And we'll give them what Lord Leitrim got below in Donegal.
Riddle-addie-day-ri, fol-the-rol-the-ree.'

Oh, young Makim cries: 'Spare us our lives, Mister Rory, if you please!'
No, no, for when you lie with dogs you're sure to rise with fleas.'

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To revenge the joke, his head they broke, and his carcass there did maul.
They stuck him in a pool, his head to cool, below in Donegal.
With me riddle, etc.

Oh, the policemen like beagles gathered round this dirty beast,
And the devils all, both great and small,
They had a sumptuous feast.

With me riddle, etc.

Other versions have: 'who never feared a ball'.

The version of Myles Duggan, of Belleek, Co. Fermanagh (BBC S19536) has:
Assoc. then as he approached them, he did 'em then salute,
Saying: 'Where are you going today, you dirty ugly Orange brute?'

(Source: This text is published and discussed by A.L. Lloyd in Rebels and...
Poff and Barrett Ballad

Come on you lovers one and all, And listen unto me, A mournful execution that happened in Tralee.

Poff and Barrett met their doom, May heaven be their bed, Their dying declaration – Those are the words they said:

James Barrett says: 'I do declare Before my God and Judge That I never injured Thomas Browne Or owed him any grudge.

'I was not in the field that day The fatal shot was fired, Nor never knew the deed was done Till after he expired.

'I am a young man in my bloom, I am scarcely twenty-five; I never injured any man As long as I'm alive.

'In youthful days of manhood I must give up my life, Into the Blessed Virgin's hands, Who's Mother, maid and wife.

'God help my two young sisters Who witnessed so much grief, God comfort my poor parents And grant to them relief.

'Good-bye to all my dearest friends Around my native place, And when my spirit is at rest Don't throw me in their face."

Sylvester Poff next handed, The priest being in his cell, A folded slip of paper, His dying words as well.

"Now, I'm going before my God Upon this very day; I never injured Thomas Browne Or took his life away.

"There is one request I have to ask Before I end my life, I have a helpless family, Likewise a loving wife.

"I hope you won't forget them When I am in the clay; May the Lord have mercy on our souls, That is all I have to say."

Like soldiers bold they soon ran up The scaffold grim and high, You'd think that they were anxious To know who first would die.

Their moments they were numbered Before the trap did fall, And turned around again once more Those words addressed to all.

"We now confess before our God Who reared us from our birth, That we never injured any man Or woman on this earth."

"May the Lord have mercy on our souls And we hope each one will pray Unto the Blessed Redeemer, To wash our sins away."

(Source: Michael Culloty, Currow, Killarney, Co. Kerry. Claims song was composed by a national school teacher, Daniel O'Brien, who was a witness at the trial.)

John Twiss of Castleisland

Farewell my dearest sister Jane, your fond and last adieu, At the early age of thirty-five I now must part from you, For the murder of James Donovan I am now condemned to die Upon the nineteenth of February fifty-five upon the scaffold high.

John Twiss from Castleisland its true it is my name I never did commit a crime, why I should deny that same I own I was a sportsman, with spirit light and gay, But paid spies and informers, my life they swore away.

On the twenty-fifth of April eighteen ninety-four, That was the night, dear sister Jane, long years you may deplore When I was taken prisoner, the police to me did say For the murder of James Donovan we arrest you on this day.

It was at the Cork assizes my enemies all swore That I shot James Donovan and laid him in his gore The jury found me guilty, the judge to me did say On the ninth of February, ninety-five, will be your dying day.

But when I heard my sentence passed to the judge – I did say The jury found me guilty without the least delay. I swear that James Donovan I never yet did know May the Lord forgive my enemies who proved my overthrow.

My blessings on the Mayor of Cork, and the people there also In thousands they petitioned, to release me they did go But my enemies were determined I should my life lay down For paid spies and informers – "A traitor to the crown."

My last hour is approaching, I hear the death bell tol The hangman he has pinioned me, I must now give up my soul You know that I am innocent is all I have to say May the Lord forgive my enemies, on all their judgement day.

(Source: Seamus Mac Mathúna (ed) Traditional Songs and Singers, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Dublin, 1977, p.40)

The Battle of Ballyhooey

By J.J. Finnan ("Myles")

The deeds of heroes true and bold In deathless song by bards are told To serve the timid and the bold, And rouse them into action. Then I shall sing a simple rhyme Of men who fought in our time, Of men who fought a fight sublime To Ireland's satisfaction.

They were no doughty sons of Mars Who dared or glory seek in wars, Yet fortune kindly blest their stars – Their fame no tongue can sully. But true man all who took their stand, Resolved to fight for home and land – They pulverised that hierling band Led by the despot, Scully.

That August day in sixty-eight, Let Irishmen commemorate, For on that day and very date The bullets loud did rattle. Discharged from old, but trusty guns, By Ballyhooey's dauntless sons At those who came to scourge like Huns, Or banish them like cattle.

The bailiffs and the 'force' went down, Those loyal runners for the Crown, The second volley did them brown, They thought their task no laughter. And Scully too was forced to yield, In spite of his protective shield. They bore him bloody from the field Whoever saw him after?

God bless the men who fought the fight, Who fought the battle of the right, Who never sought the smiles of might Through any interceder. Their fame down times long halls shall ring, Their names shall pride and glory bring And future bards their deeds shall sing And of Dwyer their leader.

Their deed did more to loose our chains, Than all our picayunish gains We've got by agitation. It proved to friend as well as foe That Irishmen can strike a blow, And cause the putrid stream to flow Of Saxon legislation.

(Source: The Patriotic Songs and Poems of J.J. Finnan ("Myles"), printed and published by Guy & Co., 114 O'Connell Street, Limerick, 1913.)
The Lamentation of the Two Cornacks Who Died Innocent in Front of Nenagh Gaol

Text: Broadside printed by Haly, Cork; in T.C.D. (White Text: Broadside printed by Haly, Cork; in T.C.D. (White Paper)

Attend, each tender Christian, to what I unfold;
My doleful lamentation will make your blood run cold,
Concerning those two young men that lately suffered sore
In front of Nenagh Prison -- their friends may now deplore.

Being on the 11th day of May, most dreadful for to see,
Those victims standing on the trap in bitter agony,
Saying, "God He is our witness, this crime we do not know,
But from this sinful world we are reconciled to go."

Between Thurles we were born and the town of Templemore;
Our friends and neighbours may lament,
As they were dying innocent upon that gallows high.

They threw themselves upon their knees,
And all who saw the dismal sight shed their friends
And here, as well as Nenagh, many lighted a fire,
And with our patriotic men in peace

They never injured any man, although condemned to die,
And launched into eternity before the Lord of high.

Now to conclude and finish my dismal tragedy,
I call on all that's standing by to join in prayer with me.
As they declared their innocence upon their dying day,
May the Lord have mercy on their souls, good Christians, for them pray.

(Source: Georges D. Zimmermann, Songs of Irish Rebellion, op. cit., pp248-249)

Lamentable Limes on the Execution of the Maamtrasna Murderers

The fifteenth of December in the year of '82,
The officials of old Galway jail a painful sight did view;
The execution of three men upon the gallows high.
For the Maamtrasna murders they were condemned to die.

The city of the tribes must bear this lasting sad disgrace,
Which years of good behaviour from it will not erase,
The crime is more lamented than the hanging of these.
And may we again such a tragedy in Ireland never see.

The clergy have attended them with unremitting care,
We hope their penitence and prayers to heaven have been sincere,
And that they may find favour before the throne on high.
Their sentence was a fearful one in manhood's prime to die.

The five who pleaded guilty, each will have a troubled mind,
When to their dark and dismal cells in Spike they are consigned,
The ghastly scene that brought them there will be before their eyes.
Whether day or night they'll have no peace, these visions will arise.

The judge and jury have discharged their duty with much pain,
The verdict no one could dispute, the evidence was plain.
Then let us pray that their poor souls on heaven may mercy find.
And to the five respite men give each a tranquil mind.

Old Grainne in deep sorrow weeps and cries,
To abstain from every kind of crime that would our men condemn,
And with our patriotic men in peace join hand in hand.
And still repeat that holy prayer, God save old Ireland.

(Source: Broadsheet in the collection of the Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D., described as a contemporary ballad and dated December, 1882.)

NOTES
6. The Twiss brothers, John and George, were labouring men and active Moonlighters.
10. Limerick Chronicle, 11 Mar. 1863
14. Sean Spellissey, "Peter the Packer -- A Man for the Times" in Dal gCais, No. 7, 1984, pp121-130. (See Appendix ID)
15. John Twiss was convicted a number of times for poaching offences. He and George terrorised people because of their reputation as gunmen. John is reputed to have gone to the house of Robert Meredith, a substantial landowner in the Castletown area, where his appearance in the doorway was sufficient to terrify the landlord.