



**TIPPERARY HISTORICAL JOURNAL
1990**

© County Tipperary Historical Society

**www.tipperaryllibraries.ie/thc
society@tipperaryllibraries.ie**

ISSN 0791-0655

Kickham's panorama of rural Ireland: 1840-1870

by Godeleine Carpentier

Kickham the writer lives in the Irish memory mainly through a handful of ballads and his famous *Knocknagow*. The publication of the latter was preceded by that of six tales and another story, *Sally Cavanagh*, and followed by *For The Old Land* and *The Eagle of Garryroe*, which have not been favoured with the same popularity. All of them nevertheless provide the reader — and the social historian — with a vast accurate panorama of Irish rural society from the 1840s to the 1870s.

Kickham's panorama is interesting for two main reasons. First, the period he lived in was undergoing a slow but major process of transformation, that was not even completed in his lifetime. Whereas a feudal-type of society existed up to the Famine, the relative economic prosperity which prevailed in Ireland between 1850 and 1879 led to the modernisation of Irish society, a modernisation whose main feature was the gradual emergence of a Catholic rural middle class.

The traditional pre-Famine society, largely represented in *Knocknagow*, was based on a threefold distinction between the landowning aristocracy, the big farmers and — the most important group of all — the small tenants and labourers, i.e. the peasantry. Divisions were different in the post-Famine society of the 1860s, mainly pictured in *For The Old Land*. The landowning class was still the top class; but farmers, not labourers, were now the majority and were becoming more and more influential¹.

Besides, with the growing practice of subletting, the cleavage between strong and small farmers was becoming less tangible. In spite of the large variations in the size of their holdings and the landowners' will to consolidate their farms all were united on the eve of the Land War by a common interest centred round the defence of their rights as tenants.

The second major interest in Kickham's description lies in the fact that he was a committed writer. Indeed, his literary work, which has much in common with his articles in *The Irish People*, bears the mark of his ideological commitment. Not only does the narrator introduce personal comment — clearly intended as political propaganda — but the story itself, mostly based on authentic occurrences, often also fulfills the same function.

Besides, both of them reflect the paradoxical aspects of Kickham's way of dealing with contemporary problems in general, and with the land question in particular. These paradoxes have often been overlooked by his devotees and over-laudatory admirers, who have thus helped to propagate the image of a nationalist writer whose ideas were more in conformity with standard attitudes in nationalist circles than with the truth.

The usual description of Irish rural society based on a division into two opposing classes with clashing interests — landlords on the one hand and tenants on the other — is partly misleading. In fact, Irish rural society was a more complex reality. If one adopts the legal terminology, it can be described as basically constituted by landowners, tenants and labourers.

However, if one adopts a language fraught with emotional overtones, it can also be described in terms of landlords, farmers and peasants, much less clear-cut categories with quite fluctuating dividing lines. This is the type of language most frequently used by Kickham who, to make matters clearer, is often led to combine it with the legal terminology so as to give as precise a picture as possible of the changing society of his times.



In popular nationalist mythology, landlords have been conventionally depicted as harsh demanding tyrants, an inaccurate and misleading over-simplification now exposed by modern historians and sociologists. Kickham's range of portraits is more varied. He shows three types of landlords — good, evil and uninformed.

Although apparently this picture corresponds more to reality on the whole, it is not always convincing, because Kickham tends to overdo it. Grindem, with his tell-tale name in *Sally Cavanagh*, and Percy Perrington who, on a particularly stormy gale-day, "would as soon have thought of commiserating so many rough-coated, long-horned Irish cows, huddled under that old tree in the lawn as that little crowd of Irish tenant-farmers", are typical examples of evil landlords².

For all their blackness, however, they are not entirely to blame in Kickham's opinion. More than the landlords themselves, it is the law which enables them to act with impunity that he incriminates. "It is hard to blame the landlords when they see they have the law at their side", says Martin Dwyer, who revolts essentially against the undue political stranglehold of the landlords over the tenants, which Kickham denounces more vigorously than anywhere else in *For The Old Land*³.

All the landlords he portrays, however, are not "exterminators" — Father Hannigan's description in *Knocknagow*.⁴ Sir Garret Butler in *Knocknagow* is the archetypal absentee-landlord, a familiar figure in pre-Famine Ireland, who "leaves it to his agent", just sending him "whatever money he requires" and who does not really "care for his tenants or trouble his head about them"⁵. However, he is a simple kind-hearted benevolent man. When he realises that he has been the plaything of his unscrupulous agent, he decides to make inquiries into the way the latter has done away with leases on his estate⁶.

However, he soon relapses into his former apathy, only interrupted in a final unconvincing brief melodramatic scene, redolent of poetic justice and suggestive of Kickham's aristocratic conservatism. Patriarch-like, the old landlord hands his helpless agent over to justice finally acknowledging: "I have allowed myself to be deceived too long . . . I fear I have much to answer for, for all the wrong that has been done in my name"⁷.

Similarly unconvincing are Kickham's descriptions of "good landlords". Since he wanted to give a moralising dimension to his political lesson, he usually conjured them up to the front of the scene, only to have them counterbalance through their benevolence the cruel deeds of their bad predecessors.

Mr. Darcy, who in "Never Give Up" buys the encumbered estate on which James Maher has been a tenant, is the very picture of kindness and honesty. Besides, as he is resident on the estate, he is able to frustrate the plots hatched by his unscrupulous agent and even some of the more ambitious tenants, and finally grants long-term leases to the most vulnerable of them.

Captain Dawson in *Sally Cavanagh*, Robert Lloyd, the extravagant philanthropic landlord in *Knocknagow*, and above all Ambrose Armstrong in *For The Old Land*, a Quixotic righter of wrongs, all fall into this category. All are living embodiments of the conservative aristocratic ideal of Kickham, who believed in a paternalistic society in which Lords and Peasants would live in harmony, as of old! This romantic vision also forms the backbone of a ballad like "Eighty Years Ago".

In spite of their apparent power, landlords also experience difficulties — mainly financial ones — as is evidenced in Kickham's first tales, whose actions take place just after the Famine, a bane not only to the peasants but also to landlords! Obligated to pay substantial poor-rates and collecting hardly any rents, many landlords had fallen into debt or gone bankrupt altogether, and were forced to sell their heavily encumbered estates, as James Maher is in "Never Give Up"⁸.

The 1849 Encumbered Estates Act, which contained nothing to prevent the tenants from buying their holdings but afforded no special facilities to enable them to do so either, benefited neither

tenants nor landlords, whose property was often bought by one of their creditors. Looking, at the end of *Knocknagow*, at this act from a political rather than an economic standpoint, Kickham denounces it as a scheme of the British Government to exterminate the Irish landlords of the old stock.

"It does look a little hard that, after all their devotion to England, this law should have been introduced just when the value of landed property was at the lowest ebb. In fact it looks very like robbery.

"The Irish landlords were encouraged to exterminate the people", said Dr. O'Connor, "and when the work was done, many of themselves were exterminated. England cares just as little for them as for the people".

Myles O'Hea's landlord in "Eighty Years Ago" appears as a similar victim:

*Well, God be with him. He was forced
From home and lands to part,
But to think 'twas England robbed him,
'Twas that that broke his heart,
"Old friend", he said, and grasped my hand.
"I am loyal to my Queen,
But would such a law, at such a time,
Be made in College Green?"*¹⁰

Much different from these benevolent, but on the whole inefficient, landlords of the old stock praised by Kickham, were the new ones, mostly Irish Catholic *nouveaux riches*, who demanded exorbitant rates from their tenants: "Those new landlords are raising the rents to the last shilling the land will make. They look upon their purchase solely from a commercial point of view, and I fear many of them will prove harder masters than their predecessors"¹¹.

That these gombeen-men were mostly Irish was an embarrassing truth to Kickham, who considered them traitors to their land and race. In "Eighty Years Ago" he has his own peculiar way of solving this delicate problem of nationality. Under his pen the new landlord becomes a land-greedy Scotsman opposed to the old Irish landlord, whom he describes complacently if not realistically. By doing so he manages to transfer the blame from ambitious Irish people on to the few foreigners who took the opportunity offered by the law to buy land at a low price in Ireland.

During the period of Fenianism, difficulties still exist for landlords, though, as evidenced in *For The Old Land*, they were of a different nature. Thus, Ambrose Armstrong complains about the ever-increasing cost of living, and feels compelled to sell his property. He seizes the opportunity offered by the 'Bright Clauses' included in the 1870 Land Act, and sells to his tenants, who have been given facilities to buy their holdings.

From this successful example of land purchase, one should not, however, infer that such a practice became widespread in the latter part of the 19th century. On the contrary, the Bright Clauses were almost a complete failure¹².

— 2 —

Much of the misery that Kickham described was not inflicted by landlords at all, but by unscrupulous agents. These to him were the real "exterminators", "tyrants" or "murderers" Sam Somerfield, Isaac and Beresford Pender are the most significant examples of the breed. Sam Somerfield's portrait runs:

*He has several agencies . . . and a d-n bad agent he is. There is not a lease on any of the properties he is over. He pretends 'tis the landlords refuse to give leases; but 'tis well known 'tis himself puts 'em up to it . . . He's after turning more people out than any man in the county*¹³.



To achieve similar aims, Isaac Pender prefers the more “gentle methods” successfully used by Stubbleton in his attempts at clearing out his property:

... he let them run into arrears . . . and then 'twas easy to manage them. They gave up one by one. Then he commenced extensive drainage and improvements, and gave employment to all the small tenants on condition that they would give up possession . . . they could then remain as caretakers. Some of them were earning thirty shillings and two pounds a week for their horses. They were never so well off in their lives . . . But when the work was finished, they saw they were after giving up their land and . . . when they saw they should leave even the houses at a week's notice, they went to America . . . Stubbleton had his whole property cleared without as much as a paragraph in the newspapers about it. He divided it into large farms . . . and got a good rent that more than repaid him for what he lost¹⁴.

Instead of evicting his tenants, he also manages to have them “evict one other” by sowing discord among them so that they do not pull together. ‘Divide and rule’ was his motto. According to Kickham, however, this overbearing deceitful manner cannot completely conceal the state of constant fear they live in. As Hugh Kearney observes: “The dread of assassination is the only protection the people have against extermination in this part of Ireland”¹⁵.

His father’s agents, who live in perpetual dread of being assassinated by their revengeful tenants, physically betray their uneasiness. Isaac Pender “was nervous and fidgety, and seemed perpetually on the look-out for some threatened danger; to escape from which, judging from appearance, he would go through an auger-hole”, whereas Beresford always carries pistols “so as to defend himself”¹⁶.

Just as nerve-racking is their dread of being unmasked by their landlords, the much hoped-for Nemesis for all their victims. So, when the news is spread in Knocknagow that the Penders have counterfeited Sir Barrett’s signature and that the fraud has been uncovered, the tenants’ hopes know no bounds:

“This rumour created great excitement; and the few of old Isaac’s victims who still remained in the country indulged in wild hopes that the day of retribution had come. Among these, we need scarcely say, was Maurice Kearney, who hoped that if the agent were proved to be a knave, the landlord would not only give him back his possession of his farms, but compensate him for the injury he had suffered”¹⁷.

Although, strictly speaking, characters like Michael Maher, the ‘aristocratic farmer’ in “Never Give Up”, can be considered as tenants depending on a landlord, they are mostly treated as landlords. In an article published in the *Tipperary Leader*, Kickham exposes the indifference of these ‘gentlemen-farmers’ who in fact belong to the upper classes¹⁸.

The real link between the better-off farmers and the Protestant landed aristocracy is the group made up by big or strong farmers, representative of the upper middle class. Both Brian Purcell in *Sally Cavanagh* and Edward O’Neill in “Never Give Up” are former university students who now devote their time to the management of their farms. However, as tenants, they are in quite different predicaments. O’Neill is “utterly in the power of his landlord,” whereas Purcell is quite independent of his since he has got a lease renewable for ever¹⁹.

There is little difference between these strong farmers and the Catholic lower-middle-class farmers such as the Kearneys and Ned Brophy in *Knocknagow*, or Ned Cormack, described as ‘a snug farmer’ in *For The Old Land* ²⁰. Not only economically but also socially they strive to emulate their betters by adopting their ways of life — their norms of respectability.

Kickham’s few references to the practice of subletting, as far as these two groups were concerned, point to its substantial decline after the Famine. Indeed, in *Knocknagow* he suggests that in former times Maurice Kearney had had under-tenants, but that it is no longer the case²¹. Besides, the

deterioration of the economic condition in the first half of the 19th century also led to a decrease in the number of middlemen, whose sole aim in subletting was the search for profit.

Such a character is mentioned only once in the whole of Kickham's writings. This is Warren in "The Lease in Reversion": "Ballycloon was a farm of about two hundred acres. It was sublet to several tenants in lots varying from five to forty acres. The immediate landlord or middleman was a gentleman named Warren. He paid a rent of fifteen shillings an acre to the head landlord, and received thirty-five shillings from his tenants; so that Ballycloon was worth him two hundred pounds a year"²².

Whereas Kickham generally uses the word "farmer" when he wants to suggest respectability, he usually turns to the word "tenant" when he wants to convey the idea of the basic insecurity of their condition. Their economic situation depends largely on the type of lease they have been granted and on the size of their holdings; but Kickham takes care to show that, in the end, all are vulnerable.

The Kearneys in *Knocknagow* and the Dwyers in *For The Old Land* do not escape eviction but are subsequently saved by a helpful hand, while well-to-do tenants such as Annie O'Brien's mother or Tom Hogan in *Knocknagow* are tenants-at-will, the most vulnerable of all, and only swell the ranks of the already numerous rural poor.

In a few words, Kickham sums the inexorable sequence of evils that awaits them: "It is a short story . . . and unfortunately, a common one in Ireland. Bad crops, and the cattle disease first — the landlord — the poor house — death afterwards"²³.

In *Knocknagow*, he insists on the inescapability of such a fate for the Irish peasant:

. . . they were conceived and born under a notice-to-quit; it took the light out of their mother's smile, and ploughed furrows in their father's face while he was yet young; it nipped the budding pleasures of childhood as a frost will nip the spring flowers . . . it taught them to cringe, and fawn, and lie; and made them what they are now, as they stand there with hands uncovered while Mr. Henry Lowe and Mr. Beresford Pender ride through the gate of Wellington Lodge ²⁴.

Better off by comparison is the situation of the labourers, although there too discrepancies exist, as Kickham shows through his description of Mat Donovan's comely cottage and of Barney Broderick's rough lodgings²⁵. To Kickham these men of no property belong to the only social group with no share in 'the scramble for land', not driven by avaricious mercantile motives and not corrupted by the new values adopted by the middle-class farmers.

To Kickham they are the genuine repositories of ancestral values. Their primitive disinterested attachment to their village and the values it stands for is conveyed through Mat the Thrasher's immortal words when throwing the sledge "for the credit of the little village".

During the two decades before the Famine, tenant-farmers were faced with three major problems — the increase of rents, the renewal of leases and land redistribution, three themes recurring as a *leitmotiv* in Kickham's writings. The rent increase was often a consequence of improvements made by industrious tenants to their farms, ultimately to the sole benefit of their landlords. Ironically, Tom Hogan in *Knocknagow* sees in the successive rises in his rent a sign of security, as he thinks "landlords never rise the rent, when they're going to put a man out"²⁶. In the long run, however, his fate is the same as Mick Brien's; both are evicted and die in utter distress and misery.

Another severe blow to the tenants' security alluded to in many ballads — like 'Clearing', 'Awaking', 'A Lost Picture', 'Patrick Sheehan' — was the landlord's growing reluctance to renew leases, especially after the Famine. Although he does not state reasons for this practice, Hugh Kearney explains the new situation to Henry Lowe, the landlord's nephew:

Things have gone on smoothly enough up to this; but since the leases given by Sir Thomas have begun to drop, there is considerable uneasiness. My father will tell you that before now leases were renewed as a matter of course: but latterly there is a remarkable reluctance on the part of



landlords to give leases, and your uncle's tenants are uneasy lest he should follow the example set by others in this respect²⁷.

In "The Leases in Reversion" Kickham insists on its attendant tragic consequences, mainly eviction and emigration:

And how fares it with the families on Ballycloon? They are all beggared. and why? Because they lost all energy when they found they might be driven from their farms at any moment. Thinking each year would be their last they ceased improving and manuring, and commenced the system of dragging all they could out of the land. The young men and women fled to America. In a few years the soil was so improverished it could not make the rent. So these ten comfortable, industrious families were scattered and ruined. Ballycloon is Ireland in miniature²⁸.

Everywhere he denounces the injustice of a practice that victimises native Irish tenants only, as long-term leases and fair rents are granted to tenants of Scottish or English origin²⁹. To him, eviction and emigration are not economic necessities, but a tangible manifestation of the British will to exterminate the Irish race. His repetition of accusing words like "rob", "robbery", "murder", and "extermination", his indictment of British law clearly suggest that to him the land question is closely linked with the national question³⁰. To Kickham it is just one aspect of this fundamental one.

Unlike other nationalist propagandists, however, Kickham raises an interesting point. He admits that Irishmen of various social ranks could be permitted, encouraged or even forced by those alien and unjust laws to exploit one another. While landlords and agents were the worst offenders because they wielded the most power, Kickham also knew that tenant-farmers could prove just as ruthless in clearing labourers and smallholders from the countryside.

This opinion was totally at variance with the nationalist consensus of his time, according to which the traditional image of an alien landowning aristocracy exploiting native tenantry (in other words, the tyrant landlord opposing the victim tenant-farmer) was more congenial. It is well illustrated in *The Lease in Reversion* — which was quietly forgotten, probably because of its violation of nationalist taboos, until Comerford re-edited it in 1979³¹.

Mrs. Brennan's exertions to become one day the only tenant of Ballycloon lead to the ruin of all the other small tenants, who had lived decently on their farms up to then. Although more moderate in his efforts, Ned Cormack in *For The Old Land* betrays the same basic greed. Other similar land-jobbers or land-grabbers are also pictured by Kickham, who takes care to show that these can be found among snug and small tenant-farmers alike.

Mick Brien in *Knocknagow* is a case in point. The only limit to his land-greed was the fear that, according to the reprisals advocated by the Tenant Protection Societies, he might be ostracised or boycotted — although that word did not come into use before 1880 — if Tom Hogan, whose farm he coveted, was evicted and did not give it up of his own free will.

What were the reasons for such a "scramble for the possession of land", as Kickham describes the phenomenon in one of his articles in *The Irish People*?³² With the shift from tillage to pasture and the development of livestock economy encouraged by the Government after the Famine, holdings of less than 20 acres (the norm before the Famine) became insufficient for stock-farming, and many tenants were evicted so that their farms could be consolidated³³.

This evolution is violently condemned by Kickham both in his newspaper articles and in his novels, and comparisons between the two always prove illuminating. "Tis the big grass farms that's the ruination uv the country", was the explanation proffered to the dragoon in *Knocknagow*³⁴. This is but an incisive summing-up of Kickham's opinion already expressed in articles like 'Graziers' or 'Cattle before men'³⁵.

That such similarities can exist between Kickham's articles and his literary works confirm — if need be — that the latter were not simply written "to while away an idle hour", but were clearly

intended as political propaganda³⁶. Indeed in *The Nation*, a reviewer praised *Knocknagow* for its passionate and effective denunciation of the land question:

*All the literature of the Land Question with which the country was flooded for some years back — books, pamphlets, statistics, commissions and the rest — could never convey to the mind and the evils of insecurity of tenure with a tithe of the force the simple story of "The Homes of Tipperary" wilds . . . That it will have no small share in urging forward some effectual measure in alleviation of these evils we believe. That this would be the dearest wish of Mr. Kickham's heart no one needs to be told*³⁷.

Did Kickham, who since youth had been passionately concerned with and deeply involved in the land question, really suggest practical measures which could bring a solution to the agrarian problem? In his ballads as well as in his *Tales of Tipperary* he defends certain methods whose workings had proved efficient and rejects others, at variance with his own personal ideology if not with the general nationalist consensus. In his later works, his personal standpoint and the solutions he advocates are suggested in a less obtrusive manner through contradictory dialogues between characters or the very course of action taken by the protagonists of the story.

Kickham was aware that, as one of his fictional characters put it, thinking of all the injustices suffered by the tenants was "enough to make any man violent"³⁸. Nevertheless he was opposed to the use of terrorism, which to him was no way to solve the land question. He favoured the use of moral force and open and legal agitation, the methods chosen by the Tenant Protection Societies. Instead of the collectively organised agrarian crimes and outrages perpetrated by secret societies or the personal acts of revenge individually committed by grief - and hatred - driven victims, he stressed the importance of cunning, determination and solidarity.

An example of the use of cunning leading to a specific, though somewhat unpractical, action is given in "The Harvest Moon", a song composed in 1850 and directly inspired by a practice described as "the scramble for the crops" in *The Nation*³⁹. As landlords distraining for rent could not legally seize growing crops and could seize them only after harvesting had begun, the poet supported the idea of cutting the corn by moonlight when the landlord's hands would be tied by the law:

*The harvest moon is beaming now,
And its silvery light is streaming now,
Over hill and plain
Of waving grain
With the wealth of our island teeming now.
Then we'll to the fields away, my boy,
For should we till morning stay, my boy,
While sleeping in bed
The corn might shed!
So we'll cut it ere dawning of day, my boy!*⁴⁰.

To oppose determination to the landlord's will is, according to Kickham, another means that should be used by the tenants so as to obtain security, the keystone of their demands⁴¹. James Maher in "Never Give Up" is a living example of unflinching determination. He declares:

*I was robbed. I'll stick to that if the Pope o' Rome was to say agin it. Robbed — an' the man that robbed me is a robber; and the man that'll take my land is a bigger robber! Law indeed! If they made a law to cut my throat ought I to let 'em do it, and say it was all fair. An' what is cutting my throat to having my poor little children flung out on the world in poverty an' shame maybe*⁴².

Nevertheless, that determination does not prove entirely successful, and would have finally been of no avail had he not been supported by a generous helpful friend and the Tenant Protection Societies insisting on the importance of solidarity between tenants, an essential factor in thwarting



the plans of ruthless landlords. Kickham repeatedly praises their founders, the Callan curates, and (in the tale already alluded to) describes at length their means and aims⁴³.

Ostracising the land-greedy tenant is a theme which runs through much of his writing. It is vigorously illustrated in what he himself called “a rude contemporary ballad”, “The Rackrenter Brought to his Senses”, composed after spending an evening with the Callan curates⁴⁴.

*Come, tell me, honest farmer,
What means all this I see?
Has the heartless tyrant taken all?
But no, it cannot be.
Your eye is all too quiet,
Your cheek it is not pale;
And the good wife's brow, though troubled,
Tells not so black a tale.*

*Yet no cows are on the meadow,
No sheep upon the hill,
No corn in the haggard,
And the spade and plough are still.
The barn-door is double-locked;
And by the dwelling hearth,
Round which the workmen idly sit,
I see no sign of mirth.*

*I offered what the land was worth,
And honestly I'd pay;
Yet this he would not listen to,
But ordered me away,
And swore his bailiffs soon would leave
My fields and haggards bare,
Now let him come and keep his word —
He'll find but little there.*

*And when the grinding landlord came,
The bailiffs leading on,
Oh! how he raged and raved and swore,
To find the spoil was gone,
“Prepare”, he said, with vengeful scowl,
“Before the year is spent
I'll have a tenant who, like you,
Won't rob me of my rent.*

*But true men met together,
And full soon they did agree,
To brand him as a traitor slave,
Whoever he might be,
Who, with the robber landlord,
Would the plundered booty share;
So no honest man would touch it,
And no grasping 'Jobber' dare.*

*His honour then discovered
That his land a waste would stay —
And praiseach buidhe and thistles
But little rates would pay;
So he left his honest farmer
In peace at home to dwell;
And may he long enjoy it,
For he fought his battle well⁴⁵.*

To Kickham, the Tenant Protection Societies were a work of “justice and charity”. He favoured the form of open non-violent agitation they used. Yet, although he described their means and aims accurately, when assessing his account of the real causes that led to their creation in the light of the work of contemporary historians, one finds that it is somewhat biased.

Historically, this movement did not simply originate in a reaction caused by the misery and injustice inflicted upon the poorer tenants. It was also a reaction of the prosperous wheat — and barley — growers in Kilkenny and Tipperary when confronted with recurring slumps. Indeed, when market prices rose again in 1853, they gradually lost interest in the Tenant Right League.

Kickham's attitude to the Land League was quite different. Like O'Leary, he opposed Fenian involvement in the Land War and denounced the agrarian campaign, whose object was the abolition of landlordism and the establishment of peasant proprietorship. Kickham's denunciation of evil landlords and his sympathetic portraits of the distressed peasantry should not blind his readers to his conservative aristocratic viewpoint. He was himself a man of property and was never opposed to landlordism as such.

Faithful to the tradition established by Davis, who hoped to “unite every race, and creed, and class in the national cause and saw in fancy a free and happy Ireland, with an aristocracy living among

their tenantry"⁴⁶, Kickham hoped that one day the secular order would be re-established in Ireland, that Ireland's society would be again a society in which lords and peasants, protestants and catholics, would live side by side in harmony, bent on one common objective, the creation of an independent Irish nation.

This had been achieved in the 1770s and the 1780s by the Volunteers, whose action had led to the establishment of Grattan's Parliament, a golden age vividly recalled by Myles O'Hea in "Eighty Years Ago":

*I was a beardless stripling then,
But proud as any lord:
And well I might — in my right hand
I grasped a Freeman's sword;
And, though an humble peasant's son,
Proud squires and even peers,
Would greet me as a comrade —
We were the Volunteers!*⁴⁷

Kickham's regard for landlords, however, does not extend to the new type of landlords for whom the possession of land is but a matter of profit. It only concerns the landlords of the old stock, such as the Butlers of Ormond on whom the portraits of the benevolent landlords of *Knocknagow* or "Joe Lonergan's Trip to the Lower Regions" are based, or those who can instinctively establish the same kind of paternalistic relationship with their tenants. This attitude is summed up by Ambrose Armstrong when he declares to Martin Dwyer: "I have purchased that portion of the estate. I have the honour and glory of being a landed proprietor. You'll be my tenant, and I'll be your landlord"⁴⁸.

This somewhat utopian reversion to a feudal type of non-egalitarian paternalistic society appealed to Kickham who, more pre-occupied with the well-being of people than with abstract ideas, saw in it a means of preserving a human relationship between the social classes. Peasant proprietorship was to him no necessity. In *For The Old Land* he suggests that the possibility given by the Land Act for farmers to purchase their farms is but a makeshift arrangement, an acceptable if not ideal solution, only because there was mutual agreement between the two parties already living in harmony⁴⁹.

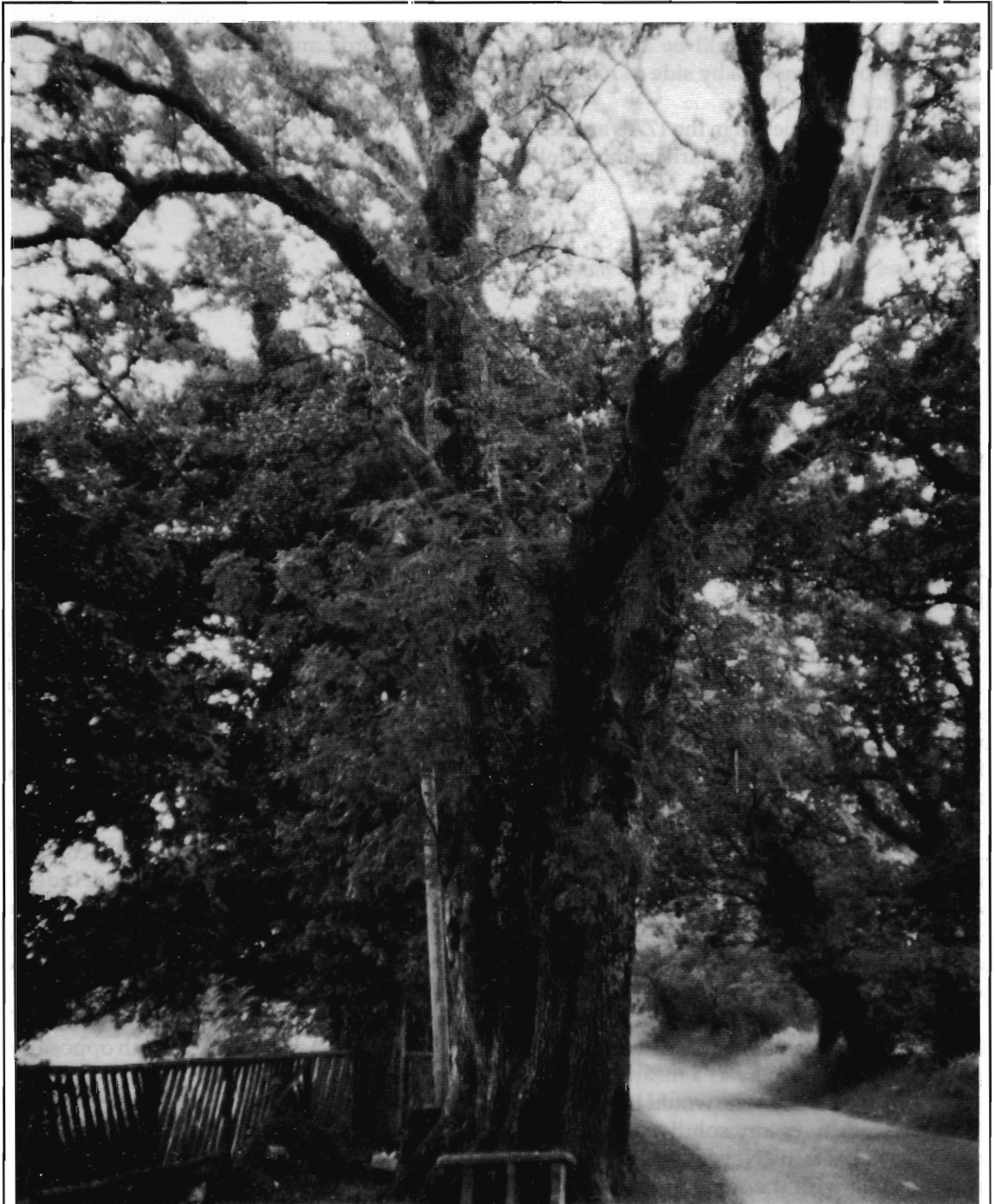
Kickham's picture of Irish rural society ends with the passing of the first Land Act. *For The Old Land*, which was written during the relatively calm and prosperous period that followed it, contains no hint of the impending and most effective land agitation that was to break out in Ireland. Indeed, one can imagine that, had Kickham had time to write a sequel to that novel, he would have gone on defending his views, radically opposed to Devoy's New Departure or to Michael Davitt, the founder of the Land League, who believed that the land crisis would be the starting-point of the social and political struggles of the second half of the 19th century.

Kickham would have gone on defending landlordism, brandishing the threat of "communism" if the Leaguers ever succeeded in abolishing it⁵⁰. He would have re-asserted his staunch opposition to terrorism and anarchy as a means of solving the land question.

Last — but not least — he would have insisted on the necessity of gaining national independence as a pre-requisite to any solution, as he held foreign rule — or the "British Providence" as he ironically called it in "Never Give Up"⁵¹ — responsible for all evils⁵². Kickham never viewed the land question with the same immediacy as Davitt or other agrarian reformers, but mostly as a human and political problem. Like Luby, he might have written:

*Special efforts to remove special grievances are at best palliatives . . . Let national independence
once be reached through manhood's road . . . the only way it can be reached, and all other blessings
will follow*⁵³.





Kickham's Tree, still standing, a mile outside Mullinahone on the road to Cloneen, where the writer is said to have planned some of his writings.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a complete description of 19th-century rural society, see: Paul Bew: *Land and the National Question in Ireland 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), and Samuel Clarke: *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1980), esp. Chaps. IV and VI.
2. *For The Old Land* (hereafter FOL), XX, 85.
3. *Ibid*, IV, 12
4. When talking about co. Tipperary, Fr. Hannigan says in *Knocknagow* (hereafter K): "The landlords here are not exterminators like some I could mention". (XI, 69).
5. *Ibid*, LX, 527.
6. *Ibid*, LX, 527.
7. *Ibid*, LXIV, 561.
8. *Never Give Up* (hereafter NGU), V, 64.
9. K, LXVII, 612 & 613.
10. *The Valley near Slievenamon* ed. James Maher (Kilkenny, 1942), p. 83 (hereafter VNS). In *The Irish Harp*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1863, p.40), this stanza is accompanied by a note from Kickham in which he recalls a similar authentic occurrence: "The late Captain —of— in the county Tipperary, whose property was sold in the Incumbered Estates Courts, as he was leaving his beautiful demesne for ever — surrounded by a crowd of sympathisers — wept bitterly; and grasping the hand of an Irish nationalist who was present, the old Cromwellian landlord exclaimed — "Ah, S—, if *we* joined O'Connell, and got the Repeal of the Union, *this* would not have happened". (See VNS, p.362).
11. K, LXVI, 601.
12. Cf. Samuel Clarke, op.cit, p.121.
13. K. XXVI, 169.
14. *Ibid*, XXXII, 290.
15. *Ibid*, XXXII, 222.
16. *Ibid*, XXXIX, 288.
17. *Ibid*, LXIII, 557.
18. "The Labouring Man", Vol. 1, No. 31 (25 August 1855).
19. *Sally Kavanagh* (hereafter SC), XIV, 109.
20. FOL, III, 10.
21. K, XIII, 761.
22. *The Lease in Reversion* (hereafter LR), in Comerford, 11.215.
23. *Annie O'Brien* (hereafter AOB), 110.
24. K, XXXIX, 294.
25. *Ibid*, LV, 474.
26. *Ibid*, XLIX, 303.
27. *Ibid*, XX,118 & 119.
28. LR, III, 219 & 220.
30. The eviction of the O'Briens is described as: "... an act of legalised robbery which could be perpetrated with impunity only in a land like Ireland — ruled over by the cold-blooded stranger". (AOB, IV, 107).
31. This is the only tale by Kickham to have appeared in *The Irish People* (hereafter IP), Vol. II, No. 1 (26 Nov. 1864).
32. Vol. 1, No. 5 (26 Dec. 1863, and seq.).
33. According to A. Perraud, the French priest who visited Ireland in 1862, this, together with the Famine, was the main cause of massive evictions in the 1850s. Cf. *Etudes sur l'Irlande contemporaine*, (Paris 1862), Vol. 1, p.258.
34. K, XXXVI, 260.
35. "Grazier", IP, Vol. 1, No. 36 (30 July 1864); "Cattle before men", IP, Vol. II, No. 40 (26 Aug. 1865).
36. NGU, XIII, 93.
37. Vol. XXXI, No. 29 (19 July 1873).



38. K, XLVIII, 363.
39. 20 Oct., 1849, et seq.
40. VNS, 115.
41. "Security is everything" (Cf. K, XXXVI, 268: LXVII, 613) is the phrase used by Kickham's characters when talking about the land question.
42. NGU, III, 55 & 56.
43. Ibid, IV, 58-62.
44. "Notes on Young Ireland with personal recollections", in the *Irishman*, Vol. XXIV, No. 16 (15 Oct. 1181).
45. VNS, 113 & 114.
46. Ibid, Vol. XXIV, No. 15 (8 Oct. 1181).
47. VNS, 82.
48. FOL, XXXIII, 169.
49. Ibid, XXXVI, 182 & 183.
50. Letter from Kickham to Thomas Crean, 23 Nov. 118, quoted in VNS, 298 & 299.
51. NGU, III, 56.
52. In his review of Allingham's *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland*, Kickham writes: "The frightful injustice and suffering which he so well describes are the natural results of foreign rule", IP, Vol. 1, No. 35 (23 July 1864).
53. Quoted in T. W. Moody: *The Fenian Movement* (Cork, 1968), p.105.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following editions of Kickham's works have been used:

For The Old Land — Dublin, M.H. Gill and Son, 1866;

Knocknagow — Dublin, M. H. Gill and Son, 1952;

Sally Cavanagh — Dublin, James Duffy and Co., 1948;

Tales of Tipperary — Dublin, Martin Lester, n.d., (1920) — "Never Give Up": "Annie O'Brien": "Joe Lonergan's Trip";

The Lease in Reversion in R. V. Comerford: Charles J. Kickham; *A Study in Irish Nationalism and Literature* (Dublin, 1979);

The Valley Near Slievenamon, ed. James Maher (Kilkenny, 1942).

The following have also been mentioned:

Paul Bew: *Land and the National Question in Ireland* (1858-1882). (Dublin, 1978);

Samuel Clarke: *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1980);

Joseph Lee: *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973);

T. W. Moody (ed.): *The Fenian Movement* (Cork, 1968);

Adolphe R. P. Perraud: *Etudes sur l'Irlande Contemporaine* (Paris, 1862).

