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THE LIFE AND POLITICS

OF

THOMAS SPRING RICE

1ST BARON MONTEAGLE OF BRANDON

1790-1866

BY

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By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen I was facilitated in access to the Melbourne Papers and the Cabinet Reports to the sovereign.

I would like to thank Baron Monteagle of Brandon for permission to use material from the Spring Rice Papers in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

Sources.

For this study of the life of Thomas Spring Rice, 1st Baron Monteagle of Brandon, (1790-1866) the chief source of material dealing with his political career is the Monteagle MSS, in The National Library of Ireland. A wider view of the political complexities of the time is gained from the papers of Viscount Melbourne, Earl Grey and George Canning, the three Prime Ministers who appointed Spring Rice to government positions of varying degrees of responsibility.

A more intimate and emotional picture emerges from the letters exchanged by Spring Rice and his second Charles. These are kept in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

A personal but less intimate note is struck by letters to and from various friends of Spring Rice. Many of these are to be found in the Additional MSS. and Houghton MSS. in Trinity College Library, Cambridge and in the Newport MSS., The Queen's University of Belfast.

Some difficulty was experienced in reading the handwriting in many of these letters. However, I hope that I have faithfully conveyed the information which they contain.

Parliamentary Reports are another very useful source of information on Spring Rice's main areas of

political interest. For example his involvement in the compilation of the reports on emigration in 1826 and 1848 demonstrate his lifelong belief in the effectiveness of emigration as a solution to Ireland's problems. His distrust of the Orange Order is shown in his interest in the Report on Civil Disorder 1835 and his attitudes to Irish poverty can be gleaned from the report on the State of the Poor in Ireland 1830.

The Freeman's Journal reported Spring Rice's contributions to debates in the House of Commons. However, when the paper became committed to Repeal its tone was always highly critical of him for he was a dedicated Unionist.

Hansard is invaluable for an official report of Spring Rice's speeches in the Commons. There is no critical comment here to distract from the fact that he was an eloquent and versatile speaker.

ABBREVIATIONS.

DNB. DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY.

FJ. THE FREEMAN'S JOURNAL.

NLI. THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND.

Introduction.

In the heart of Limerick city there is a peaceful and leafy public park. A very tall column dominates its beauty. Few people know the name of the man in whose honour this monument was raised. In fact, it was built to express the city's admiration for Thomas Spring Rice, 1st Baron Monteagle of Brandon, (1790-1866). (1)

Spring Rice was born on 8 February 1790, at 21 Mungret Street, Limerick. (2) He was returned as a Whig MP for the city in 1820 and went on to become Under Secretary of State for the Home Department 1827; Secretary to the Treasury 1830-1834; Colonial Secretary 1834 and Chancellor of the Exchequer 1835-1839. Baron Monteagle of Brandon was the title he chose when he was raised to the peerage in 1839. (3)

Thomas Babington Macaulay when writing to Spring Rice in 1835 indicated the level of talent this man possessed.

> I see no man among the Whigs so well qualified as yourself by talent for business and talent for debate combined to lead the House of Commons, or in other words, to rule the empire. (4)

In spite of this it would be safe to state that Spring Rice is now almost completely unknown. There is no biography dealing with his life and work. Only two articles have been written about him. The Dictionary of National Biography (5) published one which deals, briefly and superficially with his career and The North Munster Antiquarian Journal has published

'The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice' by Robert Herbert, which gives the background to his election as MP in 1820 and goes on to deal briefly with the achievements of his political life. (6)

In The Dictionary of Irish Biography(7) Thomas Spring Rice is not even mentioned and in A Dictionary of Irish History Since 1800 (8) he is described, incorrectly, as a Tory MP. The outline of his life given in this book is extremely short and unhelpful.

On the Irish side the reason for this neglect is not difficult to understand. Spring Rice was a landlord, a Protestant and a passionate supporter of the Union of Ireland with Britain. Therefore, he is outside the nationalist, separatist, anti-landlord traditions which have dominated the writing of Irish history since 1922.

The neglect he has suffered in Great Britain, arises, I believe, from the fact that he was not a member of one of its great noble families and he never became prime minister. The highest position he held was that of chancellor of the exchequer at a period of great economic difficulty and social unrest. It seems that he is consigned to oblivion because his policies did nothing to deal with the enormous problems of a disappearing gold reserve; an almost total stoppage of credit facilities from the banks and a consequent huge rise in unemployment.

Because of the almost total neglect of this interesting man I felt that it would be more useful to attempt to look at his life in general rather than take one particular aspect and look at it in exhaustive detail.

Chapter 1.

Thomas Spring Rice's Early Life and Entry into Politics.

1790-1820.

1.

Thomas Spring Rice was born on the 8 February, 1790 at 21 Mungret Street, Limerick. (1) This house in the city was not the only place of residence of the Spring Rice family for it owned land around the village of Shanagolden in County Limerick. The family residence in the country was Mount Trenchard which still stands on its high ground overlooking the Shannon river. It is now used as a school run by the Sisters of Mercy.

Mount Trenchard was named to honour the Trenchard family which came from Wiltshire in England and was granted land by Queen Elizabeth 1 when she was attempting to bring Ireland more completely under her control. At first the Trenchards lived at Corgrig Castle and then when times became more settled in the eighteenth century they moved three miles east and built their Georgian residence. By the mid-eighteenth century a male heir was lacking in the Trenchard family and so four thousand acres passed into the hands of Thomas Rice of Kerry, by purchase. (2)

This Thomas Rice was the paternal grandfather of Thomas Spring Rice and both his Spring and Rice ancestors can be definitely placed in Kerry in the early seventeenth century. Stephen Rice of Dingle was a member of Parliament for Kerry and he made a settlement of his estate by deed dated 31 March, 1619. His son James, who married as his second wife, Phyllis daughter of Edward Fanning of Limerick, died on 24 September, 1636. Spring Rice's grandfather, Thomas Rice, who purchased Mount Trenchard, was a direct

descendant of James and Phyllis according to the Genealogical Table of the Spring Rice family which is in the possession of the present Baron Monteagle. Thomas Rice was called to the Bar on 12 February, 1762 and conformed to the Anglican religion on 18 November, 1768. He married Mary, sister of Robert Fitzgerald the Knight of Kerry. Mary died intestate and her estate was administered to her husband on 2 March, 1793. Mary and Thomas had a son Stephen Edward who was born in 1760. He married Catherine daughter and sole heir of Thomas Spring of Ballycrispin, Co. Kerry on 10 August, 1785. (3)

The first member of the Spring family in Ireland came from Lavenham, Suffolk: he was Captain Thomas Spring and he settled at Killale, Co. Kerry in 1596 and married Annabella daughter of John Browne. The Thomas Spring who was Spring Rice's maternal grandfather was born in 1735 and his will was administered in 1794. He married Catherine, the daughter of the Venerable Edward Wight Rector of Rathronan and Archdeacon of Limerick. Their daughter Catherine was the sole heir and married, as already stated, Stephen Edward Rice in 1785. (4)

11

Thomas Spring Rice made it clear that his parents were not very wealthy when he stated: 'I succeeded to the fortune of a comfortable Irish country gentleman and no more'. (5) He elaborated further on this topic when he wrote that the estate which he inherited was subject to a mortgage of £20,000, and to 'considerable debts of my father and grandfather and to a charge of £10,000, Irish for my younger children.' (6)

It was decided to send him to Trinity College, Cambridge, in order that he might read for his BA. How or by whom he was

prepared for the university is unrecorded. He was admitted pensioner at Trinity on 26 May, 1809. However he never graduated and was awarded an honorary MA in 1833 when he was Secretary of the Treasury in Lord Grey's administration. (7)

According to his own recollections Spring Rice was ambitious for a career in the government service. In a long letter which he wrote to his son Charles, who worked in the Foreign Office, he gave many insights into his own personality and inclinations. (8)

> .....when I was much younger than
> you are I should have embraced with
> gratificated ambition in precicely the
> official career in which you are engaged.
> I lived much with a young foreign friend
> some 5 or 6 years older then myself.
> His diplomatic duty caught my attention
> I quite envied him. (9)

He went on to describe how he wrote imaginary dispatches and pretended that he was the British ambassador in St. Petersburg writing to the secretary of state in London. The foreign friend whom he does not name, helped him with his French and he helped the friend with his English.

Politics was not the only interest he had in his youth. As he admitted himself in the same letter, society had a great deal of charm for him but there were dangers for a young man in the very free and easy atmosphere of Regency social life. His own father had said to him on many occasions 'the greatest danger to any young man is <u>base society</u> I will guard my son against it by giving him access to <u>good</u>.'(10) Spring Rice went on to state that he had been in places where excesses were, at times, committed

but he never attached himself to people who were inclined, as he put it 'towards licentiousness or debauchery.' (11)

> Agreeable and cheerful intercourse
> with women well born & well bred saved
> me from all the pollution of the low
> & the unprincipled & I never fell into
> any of those habits which begin by
> lowering & by polluting & destroying. (12)

An early marriage, at the age of twenty-one also seemed to help Spring Rice to keep to the paths of virtue. On 11 July, 1811 he joined his life and fortune to that of Lady Theodosia Pery, second daughter of the first Earl of Limerick.

The Perys made their fortune during the reign of Henry V111 when an ancestor, Edmond Sexton was given the lands which had been owned by the religious orders in and around Limerick city. Sexton supported Henry's break with Rome and was richly rewarded with the possessions of the suppressed Orders, such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans. In the seventeenth century the Sextons intermarried with the Perys. Edmond Sexton Pery, the most famous member of the family, was born in 1719. He became Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. In September, 1785 Pery was made a peer as Lord Pery. However, he had no son therefore his heir was his brother who was the Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick. The Bishop's son, Edmond Henry Pery, supported the Union of the Kingdom of Ireland with that of Britain and as a reward he was created Earl of Limerick. (13) From about the year 1800 the Pery family ceased to live in Ireland. This fact is made clear in a letter from William Wickham, Chief Secretary of Ireland to Henry Addington, the Prime Minister, in which the state of Ireland was discussed. In the course of the letter Wickham wrote that

Lord Limerick never came to Ireland anymore. (14) However, the Earl kept a town house in Limerick: this still stands in Henry Street and was restored for use as offices in 1987.

At this time in Spring Rice's life, in his early twenties, it is possible to gather some idea of his political outlook from letters written to him by his friend William Empson. Empson was born in 1791 and graduated BA from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1812 and MA in 1815. He began contributing to the Edinburgh Review in 1823 and later in life he became the Review's editor. (15) The letters from Empson are full of the high spirits and the political and philosophical questioning usual among students. He appeared to have a great admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte; this was an attitude common among the followers of the Whig leader Charles James Fox.(16) In a letter dated 1814, Empson wrote of Bonaparte: 'What a fine Animal! Bonaparte! I have spelt the name wrong but u will forgive me, & his misfortune the x Emperor will be well off if he escapes with no worse insults.' (17) Empson was in Paris after the defeat of his hero at Waterloo and he described the city in the following manner:

> Paris is like a Garrison Town: Drums always going. The National Guard is most numerous & are regarded faithful. The Police is very strict, indeed most of Bonnie's measures are found necessary: they cannot cancel the greatest: the Magic of his name. (18)

It would seem logical to assume that Spring Rice shared some, if not all of Empson's enthusiastic beliefs concerning Napoleon for he was attached to Whig politics.

Spring Rice was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, on 6 May, 1817 but he was never called to the Bar. However, he was a local magistrate in County Limerick and in that capacity he was one of the principal actors in a drama of betrayal, murder and injustice.

Eily O'Connor, sometimes called the 'Colleen Bawn' was murdered by her lover whose name was Scanlan. Scanlan was a member of the County Limerick Ascendancy; therefore the warrant issued for his arrest was ignored. However, Spring Rice could not accept this mockery of the law and flagrant injustice. He arranged for Scanlan's arrest. In the trial which followed Scanlan was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. The significance of Spring Rice's action was clear to all. Justice was not to be confined to the Ascendancy: Catholic or Protestant, rich or poor was equal under the law. This message was important for him at this time for his interests had turned to politics. He arrested Scanlan in November, 1819. King George 111 died in 1820 therefore, it might seem unduly cynical to connect Spring Rice's passion for justice with an election to the House of Commons. But it is unusual for a person to decide to run for office on a whim. It is much more likely that the matter is considered for many months or even years before the decision is made.

1V

Spring Rice was chosen as a candidate in the 1820 general election by a loose grouping of Limerick men known as the Independent Merchants. These prosperous businessmen lived and transacted their trade in Newtown Pery. This was a new development in Limerick which grew up on land owned by Spring Rice's father-in-law, the Earl of Limerick. These merchants and the Earl were determined to keep this new part of the city out of the control

of the corrupt Corporation: hence the title of the Independent Merchants. (20)

Daniel O'Connell also supported Spring Rice in this election. He made this clear in a letter which he wrote at this time to his wife. 'Rice enters the field for the first time with hope of success even at the election itself. We give him a grand dinner on Monday next which will give a fillip to political feelings through the Country.' (21) Therefore, it seems logical to assume that Spring Rice was not seen as an extremely conservative or illiberal man.

O'Connell and Spring Rice did not have a smooth or happy relationship in the years to come. Stephen Edward de Vere, Spring Rice's nephew, summed up their attitude to each other when commenting on an entry prepared about his uncle for the Dictionary of National Biography in 1896.

> I well remember his [Spring Rice] indignant chafing when O'Connell came down to make a speech for him at a Limerick election. O'Connell thought he could have tied him to the tail.[O'Connell's political group] He failed and thenceforth he hated him - and yet our biographer says he was taken into the government on account of his influence with O'Connell. There was no love lost between them. Though a devoted Emancipationist and an unflinching advocate of religious freedom, your grandfather repudiated Repeal and hated O'Connell. Even when the Lichfield House combination existed between O'Connell and the Melbourne government, (and it did exist) your grandfather disliked it, and

> fought against it as far as an individual member of the government could do so. (22)

The letter from which the above extract is taken was addressed to the second Baron Monteagle of Brandon, Spring Rice's grandson.

Spring Rice's opponent at the 1820 election was the Honourable John Prendergast Vereker. (23) The Verekers first settled near Limerick during the reign of Queen Anne. They intermarried with the Smyths; this family was descended from a Protestant bishop of Limerick, who died in 1725. Both families were wealthy and powerful and dominated the Corporation of Limerick city. (24)

At two o'clock on 23 March, 1820 the election began. It was still in progress in the first week of April when the dishonesty of the proceedings was revealed by the fact that the Sheriff's records produced a very different result from those of Spring Rice. The Sheriff, who was supporting the Corporation, recorded 635 votes for Vereker and 457 for Spring Rice. However, Spring Rice's records showed that he had received 612 votes and Vereker had received 404 votes. (25) This took place fifty years before the Ballot Act and votes had to be declared in public.

When the result was finally declared in Vereker's favour, a speech of great interest was made by Mr. Howley, one of the Independent Merchants.

> But nine years ago there was not a spark of freedom amongst you, while there now burns forth a flame which has consumed the outworks of your corporate enemies and already threatens

them in their very citadel. In the year 1812, the first time you opposed the Corporation Candidate you were able to bring but 27 to the poll. In the year 1817, you again met your enemies with numbers increased to 268. In the year 1819, you had advanced in strength and 307 electors supported the cause of Independence; and on the present occasion although you had to contend with numerous obstructions in the registry of your freeholds, the Sheriffs, no very willing witnesses in your favour, had been obliged to attest, that notwithstanding the many freeholders whom they disfranchised for alleged informality in the affidavit of registry, 556 votes have polled for your candidate. (26)

Mr. Howley went on to promise his listeners that the conduct and the result of the election would not go unchallenged: an investigation by the House of Commons was being requested. He also vehemently castigated the non-resident freemen who enjoyed the privilege of voting in order to send men to the House of Commons.

But of what does the majority consist? Of a class of persons denominated non-resident freemen who have assumed rights that do not belong to them, to give strength to your oppressors. There are men known as Grant freemen - a species of live stock fed upon the estate of a Noble Lord; for purposes

> of political servility and Corporate aggrandizement. How can the Citizens of Limerick contain their honest indignation when they see these persons, like the locusts of Egypt, making periodical incursions at the return of every election to destroy the privileges of this ancient City? (27)

The result of the election was investigated; the Speaker of the House of Commons ordered that the election record books be brought to London for inspection in response to a petition presented by the Grand Jury of the city of Limerick. The Select Committee of the Commons which was given the task of looking into the matter found in favour of Spring Rice and in July, 1820 he was declared the rightful Member of Parliament for Limerick. (28)

Spring Rice was now launched upon a career that was to take him to a position of great power and influence.

Chapter 2.

The First Years in the House of Commons, 1820-1827.

1

Spring Rice's grandfather was an ambitious man; this was shown when he conformed to the Anglican religion in 1768. (1) If he had remained a Catholic he could not have practised as a barrister or bought land and held it securely.

> Inheritance rights were done away with as between Catholics; purchase and leasing rights were restricted; exclusion from professions and public life followed. (2)

The Act of Union of 1800 meant that the place for politically ambitious men was London; the centre of power and influence had moved from Ireland to Britain. This may explain why Spring Rice was sent by his father to read for his degree in Cambridge rather than Dublin.

From the point of view of advancing his political career, Spring Rice could be said to have married wisely. Lady Theodosia Pery was a daughter of the first Earl of Limerick and aristocratic connections were essential for the political advancement he desired. (3) This alliance with the Perys gave Spring Rice the chance of winning a seat in the British House of Commons. However, it also meant that he had to win the support of the 'more popular elements in the constituency'. (4) Between the bye-election of 1794 in Limerick city and the Union both the Smyths and the Perys tried to gain the support of the merchants of the town. Each won a seat in the general election of 1797. However, the Union exacerbated their differences for it reduced the representation of the city from two seats to one. This meant that there was now greater rivalry then ever but the Smyths won the seat until 1820.(5)

This enforced alliance with 'the more popular elements' in Limerick seemed suitable for Spring Rice's leanings towards the Whig party and their 'zeal for the cause of liberty, as they understood the term'. (6)

The Whig party of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century has been described by a modern historian of the period in the following manner:

> It was a group of families whose social cohesion, produced by close interrelationships and friendships, expressed a common commitment to ideals of constitutional government and belief in the rights of Parliament against the crown and executive. They came to see themselves as the guardians of the post-1688 constitutional settlement and the protectors of the liberty of the subject which that settlement had ensured. (7)

One of the major issues facing Spring Rice on his entry into the House of Commons in 1820 was the matter of Catholic Emancipation. In March, 1821, William Conyngham Plunket (9) introduced an Emancipation Bill which was the best ever proposed, according to The Freeman's Journal. (10) This point of view was not that of all Catholics. Daniel O'Connell warned the Catholic Association in 1824 'that the only newspaper upon which they could rely as entirely devoted to their interests was The Herald.' (11) The Bill set out to remove the bar to the eligibility of Catholics to all offices, except those of lord lieutenant and lord chancellor, by repealing the qualification oaths which were repugnant to a Catholic's conscience.

However, at the same time Plunket introduced the Securities Bill. The purpose of this Bill was twofold. It attempted to ensure that all Catholic bishops would be men who were approved of by the government and that all instructions, recommendations etc., from the Vatican were handed over, for inspection, to a specified government authority.

The full and correct title of the Securities Bill was A Bill To Regulate the Intercourse Between Persons in Holy Orders, Professing the Roman Catholic Religion, With the See of Rome. (12) Many meetings were held around Ireland so that Catholics could protest against the provisions of the Bill. One such meeting was held in St. Michael's Church, Limerick and a resolution was passed which stated that the meeting viewed with alarm and dismay the fact that the ministers of the Crown were to be given power to select all future deans and bishops of the Catholic Church in Ireland. (13)

These events lead to heated exchanges in the House of Commons and to a long speech by Spring Rice. Sir George Hill stated that the Securities Bill was absurd and that he had received ample proof that the Catholic clergy and laity were against it. They called it The Slavery and Insult Bill. (14) Captain Standish O'Grady, MP for Co. Limerick, replied that these were not the opinions of the gentry of Limerick and 'it was all the doings of a Mr. O'Connell'.(15) He went on to assure the House that 'these violent resolutions were imported into Limerick and were not the natural growth of the County'.(16)

Spring Rice stated that he could assure the House 'that a considerable portion of the opposition given to the measure arose from a blunder in the Bill for in the beginning when the Bill was

first printed there was, in the margin, the punishment of transportation annexed for the refusal for complying with the provisions of the Bill. It was not then to be wondered at that objections should be made to it'. (17) In his speech it would seem that Spring Rice wished to conciliate all sides and all shades of opinion.

> If every Catholic in Limerick had signed these resolutions it would not in the least have influenced the vote he should give. They should go on boldly and form their own conclusions: they were assembled to legislate to consolidate the strength of the Empire and not to enter into a negotiation with the Catholics - hear hear -. At the same time he must confess that he considered these securities wholly unnecessary for the conduct of the Catholics had been anything but such as should have demanded them. (18)

The above speech gives a good example of Spring Rice's political adroitness. When he delivered it in 1821 he was very new to politics, yet he was subtle enough to play to both Catholic opinion and to the strong anti-Catholic feeling among many members of the Commons.

In the early 1820s Spring Rice's attitude to Catholic Emancipation was in the process of formation. He made this clear in a speech he delivered to a local gathering on his return for Limerick in the 1826 election. When he first entered Parliament, he said, he was unpledged on the question of emancipation but when

he gave the matter deep consideration he came to the conclusion 'that as honest men, as Irishmen, as Protestants, as lovers of Justice they were bound to set their fellow citizens free'. (19) If one leaves aside the political rhetoric the true reason for his support of emancipation becomes clear; he was quickly becoming a most important figure in the Whig party. This was shown when in 1827 he was given the position of under-secretary to the Home Department. Support for emancipation was an essential part of the Whig party's policy. In the early part of the nineteenth century the Whigs were determined not to take office unless they were allowed to bring forward a Bill which would grant emancipation. (20)

However, no matter how clever Spring Rice was in delivering an ambiguious speech on the Securities Bill in the House of Commons, his attitude did not please Daniel O'Connell, who was putting almost all of his energies into achieving Catholic Emancipation.

> Young Rice cannot well escape imputation which I should be sorry to countenance. But the Catholic Clergy in Limerick told me early that he would take the precise part he did. The truth is, some people imagine that we think as little about our religion as they naturally do. (21)

On Thursday, 12 April, 1823, William Conyngham Plunket, the Attorney General rose to speak in the House of Commons on the Catholic Question. Sir Francis Burdett, Messrs. Hobhouse, Creevey, Grey, Bennett, Lord Sefton and other members, amounting in all to fifteen, left the House in protest because the Cabinet was not sponsoring the emancipation measure. Mr. Dominick Browne, Member

for Mayo, reported that during Mr. Plunket's speech the coffee room and the committee rooms were full of members: even those who remained in the Chamber showed little interest in the contents of the speech. After a debate of two and three-quarter hours, Lord Cranborne, an opponent of Catholic claims, moved that the question be put off for six months. In order to forestall this Browne moved the adjournment of the House, which was carried; this allowed the question to be taken up again whenever Mr. Plunket desired. (22) Spring Rice wrote to O'Connell in order to express his disappointment at these events.

> We are for the present checked in our onward course but I do not in any respect feel discouraged. Disapproving as I must do the secession of Burdett, etc., it worked well for us, for we should not have had so good a division as we might have expected; and as it is that calamity was averted. All I am confident will yet be well with prudence. The quieter we are the better. A false move would now play the Orangemen's game. (23)

However, O'Connell did not agree with the advice to remain quiet for in May of that year he founded the new Catholic Association, the aim of which was not only to win political rights for Catholics but to forward their interests in all situations. (24) As MacDonagh has written of this famous man: 'The background to the formation of the Association was almost two decades of near-fruitless exertion and manoeuvring by O'Connell.'(25) By 1808 he had become one of the leaders

of the Catholic movement and he encouraged it to petition and agitate for Catholic rights. The movement was divided by class conflict, attitudes to the Securities Bill and as MacDonagh says 'the tactical choice of ingratiating itself by passivity or creating formidable pressure by agitation. By 1820 it was practically at a standstill.' (26) In 1823 O'Connell was in no mood to heed Spring Rice's advice to be prudent. This disagreement on the correct tactics to be pursued to achieve emancipation was another cause of friction between the two men. The previous reason for distrust had been their difference of opinion in relation to the Securities Bill. The Orangemen were delighted by the setback suffered by the movement for emancipation and this attitude on their part was, in fact, one of the chief reasons for the setting up of the Catholic Association. (27) Therefore, O'Connell was in no mood to be quiet or prudent in order to please the Orangemen.

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During these early years in the House of Commons, Catholic Emancipation was not Spring Rice's only political interest. In March, 1821, he spoke about the usefulness of education among the lower classes. An Act passed during the reign of Henry V111 required that the clergyman of a parish should run a school for the poor. In spite of this, as Spring Rice pointed out, of the one thousand one hundred and twenty-five Protestant benefices in Ireland only five hundred and forty-nine had schools in the parish. (28) Later in the same year, during a discussion on the Irish estimates, Charles Grant, the Chief Secretary for Ireland proposed the sum of £20,000, for the Protestant Charter Schools, which were founded for the purpose of proselytism, but he admitted that in

this they had failed. Spring Rice felt that the fact that public money was spent on the upkeep of these schools was an offence to Catholics. (29)

The publication of the Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry in the Courts of Justice in Ireland, gave Spring Rice another opportunity to fight for reform, not only in matters relating directly to Catholics, but in areas which were of interest to members of all religions for according to this Report the Lord Chief Baron, the Right Honourable Standish O'Grady, imposed fees for his own enrichment. He did this by altering the fee from Irish to English currency. Answering the charge in a letter to Gregory, the Under-Secretary for Ireland, O'Grady maintained that he did nothing that was not justifiable. (30)

Like Spring Rice,O'Grady was also from Limerick. He was born on 20 January, 1767 and was appointed attorney general and privy councillor in 1803 and in 1806 he became chief baron of the Exchequer. This was an old judicial court now merged in the King's Bench Division of the Supreme Court of Judicature. (31)

In 1823 the Report of the Select Committee which was set up to investigate the matter was presented to the Commons. George Canning Foreign Secretary and Leader of the Commons, made the point that because Spring Rice's charges of deliberate corruption against O'Grady were not dismissed by the Committee, he could not now just abandon the matter and hope that it would be taken up by the Government. There were only two ways open to Spring Rice to proceed: either by using an address of the House or by impeachment. The Government, Canning said did not feel itself called on to take any action in the matter. (32)

In a letter to Canning, Spring Rice set out some of his thoughts.

> It would seem an act of injustice to postpone the discussion of a question, which the party charged, himself invited me to bring to final issue. Under these circumstances I cannot but think that I must persevere both in bringing the whole case forward and in asking for a vote on Friday next. Allow me to press upon your attention that the case has already been before the public for two years - that the points on which my resolutions are founded are few in number, and not in themselves very complex, and that the house is therefore to the full as competent to affirm or to negative the charges as it is ever likely to be. (33)

However, when the matter came up for discussion later that week, it was postponed, with Spring Rice making the comment that if such charges had been made against an English judge, these delays would not be tolerated. (34) In July 1823, the House resolved that it did not consider that the alteration from Irish to English currency could be ascribed to an improper motive; and so the matter was concluded. (35)

All of this demonstrates very clearly the situation which the Whig party had to deal with in the 1820s.

> The cry against the 'influence of the Crown' summed up in a phrase the

> resentment felt by men excluded from office rightfully theirs, and it provided an explanation of how it came about that both Parliament and administration were apparently unresponsive to national interests. To remedy the national ills it was necessary not only to reduce Crown and ministerial influence over Parliament but also to place authority in the hands of trustworthy Whigs. (36)

The reaction of the House of Commons and the Administration in the person of George Canning to what was clearly grave misconduct, demonstrates the lack of interest people in positions of power had in the concerns of the great mass of the population. The fact that Spring Rice took up the O'Grady issue shows him to have been very much a Whig politician of the time. Clearly corruption and misconduct were indulged in by O'Grady but his ministerial friends in the Tory party protected him from the fury of the opposition in the Commons.

The matter did not end in the House of Commons in July, 1823, as may be seen from the report carried by The Freeman's Journal.

> A party of Peace Officers and assistants were sent yesterday morning from College-street Police Office to the neighbourhood of Balls-bridge (Dublin) to prevent idle and disorderly persons from setting dogs to fight hunting badgers as has been for some time the practice. The attention of the Peace Officers however, were attracted from the scene to another of a more serious nature, which also

required their interference. A party of Gentlemen had just arrived in one of the adjacent fields to adjust an affair of honour. One of the Officers instantly took into custody the seconds (Mr. Franks and the Baron de Robeck); the seconds were found with pistols - their hands just on the point of handing them to their friends namely Thomas Spring Rice Esq., and Waller O'Grady Esq., The two latter gentlemen not being known to the Peace Officers and not being pointed out as the principals effected their escape. (37)

Waller O'Grady was a barrister and a younger son of Chief Baron O'Grady. Spring Rice had issued the challenge to O'Grady because during a quarrel arising out of the investigations into the conduct of the Chief Baron, young O'Grady had insulted Spring Rice's father-in-law, the Earl of Limerick. (38)

An amusing account of the events surrounding the incident was given in a letter written by James Corry, Secretary to the Linen Board, Dublin, to the Knight of Kerry. He described Spring Rice's conduct at a dinner party held on the night before the duel was scheduled to take place.

That same day (Saturday) Mrs. Corry and I dined with Tom Goold to meet Rice. Franks and Barrington also dined there. I never saw a man so disengaged in my life on the eve of such an affair. He was the light & life of the evending; and by the bye he so completely won the

> hearts of Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Corry and Mrs. Goold, that I consulted with the Sergeant (Goold), in his hearing, as to which of the three husbands should call him out. (39)

Corry went on to write that when the duel was broken up by the police Spring Rice was hunted by them all over Dublin.

> Sunday and yesterday, poor Rice was hunted everywhere. He was on the roof of the houses, was locked up in a press for an hour, went in disguise as a servant - in short, the freaks of Tom and Gerry were nothing to his. (40)

Spring Rice himself had not expected so amusing an end to the matter. He had written letters of tender farewell to his wife and children. 'You must prepare yourself under the protection of God for a severe affliction, but that God will support you & for his grace as your support I earnestly pray.' (41) This was part of the letter which he wrote to his wife. To his children he directed a somewhat melodramatic message. , 'This will be given you when your father who loved you is taken to another world. Even at the moment he is preparing for that event he wishes to leave you a memorial of his affection.' (42)

During his first seven years in the Commons as a member of the Whig opposition to Lord Liverpool's Tory Government, Spring Rice seemed to champion reform, especially in matters relating to Ireland. Many examples of this are to be found in his speeches of the period.

In July, 1822, Henry Goulburn, Chief Secretary for Ireland, moved in the House of Commons, that £9,230, be granted for additional glebe houses and churches for the Anglican clergy in Ireland. Goulburn has been described as an 'ultra-tory' (43) by a distinguished historian of the period. He was appointed to the Irish post in December, 1821. Spring Rice spoke against the motion saying that since 1801, half a million pounds had been spent on churches and houses for the Church of Ireland and he failed to see the point in building Anglican churches in areas of Ireland which had only a Catholic population. (44)

In an attempt to regulate the payment of tithes a Commutation Bill was brought before the House of Commons by Henry Goulburn in 1824. Tithe was a form of taxation which was particularly disliked in Ireland because it was paid to the clergy of a church that the majority of the people regarded as heretical and alien. J. C. Beckett has the following comment to make on the issue of tithes in his history of modern Ireland:

> In theory, tithe was a permanent charge upon land, which should have been taken into account in the assessment of an equitable rent; in practice, most Irish landlords exacted the utmost that the land would bear, and, so far as the tenant was concerned, tithe was an unjust additional burden. (45)

Spring Rice was critical of many clauses in the Bill. For example he objected to giving magistrates the power to decide on the amount of tithe to be paid by the peasantry. He knew, he said, frequent instances of corrupt magistrates having their tithes remitted in return for deciding in favour of the clergyman and against the

parishioners. (46) In fact he objected to the underlying principle of the Bill because it strengthened the hands of the Anglican clergy and gave no corresponding advantage to the landlords. (47)

In March, 1825, leave was sought to bring in a Bill for regulating co-partnerships in Ireland and it sparked off much hostile criticism of the Bank of Ireland. (48) This criticism has been summed up in the following manner by Barrow in his discussion of the Irish banking system. 'Up to 1845 the Bank of Ireland, part central bank, part commercial, continued to dominate the Irish banking scene and the issue of the monopoly to possess the public mind.' (49) Sir Henry Parnell (50) agreed with the criticism which was heaped on the Bank of Ireland and recalled that there had been great distress in the south of Ireland some years previously; the Bank, with ease, could have prevented this but simply did not bother to help. Spring Rice said that the Bank gave loans to encourage the trade of Dublin and of nowhere else. In order to change this situation he introduced a Bill to set up Provincial Banks in Ireland. It was hoped that they would amend this monopoly of the Bank of Ireland. (51) The fact that he was given the responsibility of introducing and guiding a Bill through the Commons demonstrates Spring Rice's growing importance to the Whigs, especially when it is remembered that he was, at this time, a member of the House for only five years.

Henry Goulburn, the Chief Secretary, sought leave to bring in a Bill to continue and amend the Yeomanry Act, in February, 1823. During the debate Spring Rice said that the Orange processions and anniversaries ought to be forbidden; if they could not be prevented he hoped that the Bill would contain enactments to prevent people

in such processions and celebrations from carrying arms. (52) In March of that same year during discussions arising from the vote of £19,384, for the support of the militia, Spring Rice said that he was restricted by other considerations besides those of policy from uttering any rash reproaches against either the Yeomanry or the Orange bodies of Ireland. He was as strongly opposed as any man could be to the principles upon which these societies were founded, but he knew that they comprised among their members some of the best and most honourable men in the country. (53)

These speeches are another good example of Spring Rice's desire to support his Whig principles while at the same time keeping on reasonable terms with members of the Tory party and many of the rich and influential of both Ireland and England. The yeomanry was the cavalry corp of the militia and according to Spring Rice, of the 30,000, members of the corp 20,000 were in the province of Ulster and it was therefore logical to assume that the vast majority of the members of this body were Orangemen. (54)

A speech Spring Rice made on the Irish Insurrection Act, in May, 1823, gives further proof of his desire and ability to alienate as few people as possible when he made a speech or cast his vote. He always had one eye on his constituency in Limerick and the other on the lords of the Whig party who looked at issues from the perspective created by distance and a different culture. Spring Rice contended that the only policy which could give permanent relief to Ireland would be that which would afford a large employment to the poor and facilitate the means of emigration. It was by such methods and not by insurrection acts and by large military establishments that the mischiefs of Ireland were to be

remedied. The diminished means of Ireland rendered her population unable to discharge the burdens imposed upon it. He stated that local taxation was a great grievance. While there was no actual disturbance in Ireland, however, he would give a reluctant vote for the Insurrection Act, that the disaffected might not be encouraged and the magistrates dismayed. (55)

A select committee on emigration was set up in 1826. Spring Rice was a member of this committee and he also gave evidence to it. (56) The committee concluded that there were extensive districts in Ireland, England and Scotland where the population was, as the committee called it 'redundant'. In other words there were many able-bodied labourers; far more than the employment outlets needed. (57)

In England a parochial rate supported these unemployed labourers but in Ireland there was no such rate and so a considerable section of the population depended on precarious charity. There were in the British colonies of Canada, the Cape of Good Hope, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, vast tracts of unused land which was of the very best quality and capable of supporting any proportion of the redundant population of Great Britain. (58)

When giving evidence to the Committee, Spring Rice said that emigration should be encouraged and he believed that people would not only be willing and anxious to emigrate but that the landlords would be both willing and anxious to contribute towards the cost of sending people overseas. (59) Therefore, it can be seen that from his earliest days in politics Spring Rice saw emigration as the main solution to the problems of unemployment and poverty. Also he was a man of his times for he did not give a moment's consideration to

native populations of the colonies: these lands were empty as far as he was concerned.

IV

No matter how busy he was with national issues, Spring Rice did not neglect what is now called constituency work. For example, on 13 September, 1824, he forwarded, from his house at 26 Baker Street, London, a request to George Canning for assistance. Bartholomew Woods, who lived in Limerick city, had an only child named James. He had been in the army and the civil service but he had died in Sierra Leone leaving his parents without any means of support in their old age. However, Canning held out no hope of help for the old people.

> You know, as well as I do, that no provision is made by the Publick for the surviving relations of its civil servants: and it would be particularly inconvenient to set such a precedent in respect to Persons employed on the Coast of Africa, as the risk of life in that part of the world is fully taken into account in the comparatively larger amount of salaries and earliness and scale of retirement assigned to the service. (60)

V

A large and elegant dinner took place at Morrison's Hotel, Dublin, in April, 1824. It was given by the Royal Irish Assurance Company, in order to celebrate its success and one of

the toasts on that occasion was:

> Thomas Spring Rice, whose exertions to promote the welfare and prosperity of his native country must make his name and memory ever dear to Irishmen - three times three. (61)

After seven busy and eventful years in the House of Commons events were so shaping themselves in 1827 that they would take him further along the road to political power and influence.

Chapter 3.

Under-Secretary for the Home Department, 1827.

On 17 February, 1827, Lord Liverpool, the Tory Prime Minister had a stroke while at breakfast. The incident was described by a politician of the period in the following manner:

> Poor Lord Liverpool! I saw him on the Friday morning and I never saw him in higher force - or in a more comfortable state. He had been very ill some two months before - but he had been to Bath since, and thought himself (and his friends thought him so) entirely recovered. In fact I suppose he had filled himself too much at Bath - and was too well - and so came the stroke of apoplexy, which laid him without sense on the floor of his room while at breakfast. (1)

The Government was already divided on the issues of the Corn Laws, Catholic Emancipation and Canning's foreign policy. As an historian of the early nineteenth century has written: 'There seemed no possible candidate for the office of prime minister who could hold the two wings of the Tory party together as Liverpool had succeeded in doing.' (2)

Peel, who was thirty, was considered too inexperienced; Wellington was believed to have disqualified himself by accepting the post of commander-in-chief of the army. It was thought that George Canning, Foreign Secretary in Lord Liverpool's Government would be the man who would win eventually. (3)

Liverpool's stroke had placed the Catholic issue at the centre

of the power struggle for the post of prime minister. Peel tried to win by playing to the anti-Catholic feeling in the Commons. Canning tried the opposite tactic. However, it was soon clear that neither Peel nor Wellington could form a completely anti-Catholic Ministry. Francis Burdett's motion in favour of the Catholic claims was defeated on 5 March in the House of Commons. This weakened Canning's hand in dealing with King George IV, for he could not now form a pro-Catholic Administration. (4)

George IV did not favour Catholic Emancipation to say the least! He had written: ....'the emancipation of the Catholics [is] a measure entirely opposite to my own conscientious feelings . . . [which] have been strengthened, if I may use the expression, by the pure and exalted spirit of my ever revered father'.(5) However, he was extremely attached to Canning. When advised to form a government of men known to share his own views on the Catholic question, the King replied that he could not part with the former Foreign Secretary. (6)

It was clear that Canning would not be able to persuade Wellington and the Tories to join him in government: and it was also clear, as Bentley has written, 'that he had little chance of taking the Whigs en bloc'. (7) The section of the Whig party which followed Lord Lansdowne met on or about the 20 February 1827 and discussed the prevailing political situation. It was decided that if Canning was appointed prime minister it would be the duty of those at the meeting to support him, either in or out of office, even though he might not be in a position to carry the Catholic question. (8)

Spring Rice belonged to that section of the Whig party which

followed Lord Lansdowne. (9) This is made clear in a letter written by William Huskisson, who had been president of the Board of Trade in Lord Liverpool's administration, to Canning on 25 February 1827.

> I heard from various quarters in the course of yesterday, that during the last year there has been much discussion and division of opinion at Lansdowne House whether the Catholic question ought not to be put off for the present. The differences among themselves took place before the postponement from Thursday; and they still continue. Burdett, I am told, is decidedly for going on, Spring Rice and others are of the same opinion. But MacDonald, and I believe Lord Lansdowne himself, are for delay. (10)

On 14 April Canning informed Lord Lansdowne, through a Whig friend, that he wished to obtain the support and co-operation of the Whigs and five days later negotiations for an alliance were formally opened. (11) Agreement was reached and the Cabinet posts were assigned. Huskisson remained at the Board of Trade and Lord Dudley became Foreign Secretary. Sturges Bourne was persuaded by Canning to become Secretary of State at the Home Department for two months. The Duke of Portland was given the office of Lord Privy Seal while Lord Carlisle entered the Cabinet as First Commissioner of Woods and Forests. Howard de Walden and Lord Clanricarde, Canning's son-in-law, retained the foreign under-secretaryships which they had had since 1824 and 1826 respectively. (12)

Lord Lansdowne was not prepared to accept the post of secretary

of state at the Home Department for it would, he felt, compel him, before the end of the year to assume responsibility for the appointment of a 'Protestant' lord lieutenant of Ireland. On 9 May negotiations were resumed 'and although the problem of the Irish Government remained, Lansdowne "for the sake of the completion of the arrangement in the House of Commons" agreed to enter the Cabinet at once without portfolio.' (13) In July, after Parliament was prorogued, Lord Lansdowne became the Secretary of State at the Home Department with Spring Rice as his Under-Secretary. (14)

Marquis Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, writing to Spring Rice thanked him for the information he had passed on about the political developments in London. He wrote: 'I am truly sensible of your kind attention in forwarding to me the earliest intelligence of Lord Lansdowne's permanent establishment in the Home Department.' (15) He went on to state that he was glad that a recent action of his in appointing assistant barristers, who were Catholics, met with the approval of the Home Office, for such actions 'are not only just but politic and calculated to preserve that tranquility of Ireland as far as may be practicable, until the great question can be settled.' (16)

Daniel O'Connell gave his full support to the Canning Administration. As MacDonagh has written in his recent biography of O'Connell 'Down to Canning's death on 8 August, 1827, O'Connell never wavered in supporting the new administration.' (17) He clearly hoped that the new Government would improve the political situation in Ireland. This is indicated in a letter which he wrote to Spring Rice on 25 June 1827. 'I have been writing to the Knight of Kerry and to others on the facility of non-orangeing Ireland.' (18) He went on state that a good beginning in this matter could be made with Dublin

Corporation. William Lamb, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, who later became prime minister as Viscount Melbourne, should, he felt, use his patronage to have his own nominees appointed to various bodies such as the Paving Board. The thought of getting a place on that Board would induce half the Orangemen of the Corporation to do as they were told by the Canning Ministry for: 'They have no principle - not the least. Give them a practical hint on the subject of their interest and a high mettled pack never went off more merrily on a drag than they will.' (19) O'Connell also thought that concessions to the Catholics coming with the agreement of the Protestants would do a lot of good in Ireland. (20)

It has been shown that by 1826 Spring Rice was dedicated to Catholic Emancipation; he was the close political ally of Lord Lansdowne and he took political office under Canning. It can also be seen that he was a man of no little ability. Being the son-in-law of an earl was not a disadvantage in political circles. However he was not long in the House of Commons but in spite of this after only seven years learning the necessary skills he had become a vital member of Lansdowne's circle of power. Spring Rice was trusted so much by the great Whig lord that he was made Under-Secretary for State in an extremely important department.

A letter from E. D. Davenport (21) during the summer of 1827 gives an idea of the status of Spring Rice's new position.

> I should have written sooner to express my great pleasure at the very satisfactory arrangement which in fact makes you the home minister in the House of Commons (at least in all cases

where a prompt division is required)
and which joins you in office with a
man so everyway worthy as Lord Lansdowne. (22)

From this letter it is evident that social distress and hunger were not confined to Ireland and that Spring Rice was considered, by friendly political opinion to be a man of some compassion.

I do sincerely believe that no greater
boon could be conferred upon the half starved
people of this & yr native country, than
the placing over them men who have hearts
to feel for their condition & spirit
& talents. (23)

Davenport also had confidence in Spring Rice's ability to handle the House of Commons for he wrote: 'You will have little trouble in parliament; men must feel disposed to confide in you'. (24)

11

Canning was confronted by extremely difficult tasks. He could not allow the question of Catholic Emancipation to arise while Parliament sat because all of the Tory party and the King himself were opposed to the issue. (25) He could only hope that, in time, the King would change his mind. He must also avoid the matter of Parliamentary reform which was 'unpalatable both to Canning who had consistently opposed it and to his old Tory remnant who would plainly walk out if provoked.' (26) However, these issues did not worry him for long; in July the Duke of Devonshire invited the new Prime Minister to Chiswick for a change of air in order to improve his failing health. (27) But Canning's health did not improve:

.....on 29 July he told the King that

> he did not know what was the matter with him; he felt 'ill all over'. The next week he died in the room where Fox had died twenty-one years before. 'This may be hard upon me,' he murmured towards the end, 'but it is harder upon the King.'(28)

O'Connell was also very upset by the death of Canning. He felt that by some ill-fortune, as soon as a man became important to Ireland, he suffered some fatal accident. (29) Spring Rice wrote to O'Connell telling him that the political situation would not permit the setting up of an anti-Catholic administration and he fully expected the Marquis of Lansdowne to become prime minister. (30) However, this expectation was unfounded. As an historian of the period has written: 'The King would have no Whig for prime minister; nor would he have Peel and Wellington since he disliked the former and was afraid of the latter. He turned inevitably, to Goderich.' (31) Lord Goderich was Secretary of State for War and Leader of the House of Lords in the Canning Administration. Again the King insisted that Parliamentary reform and the Catholic question were not to be dealt with. (32) In order to have a majority of Tories in the Cabinet the King wanted William Sturges-Bourne to replace Lord Lansdowne at the Home Office. Sturges-Bourne was the First Commissioner of Woods and Forests under Canning. However, he declined both the Home Office and the chancellorship of the Exchequer. (33) The King then insisted that Charles Herries, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, should become chancellor.

Spring Rice wrote a long letter to his sister Mary, who had married Sir Aubrey de Vere of Curragh Chase, Co. Limerick, about

the recent changes in the Cabinet. 'I shall give you the history of the entire proceedings' he wrote, 'which you will not however, allow to go beyond Aubrey, returning me this letter when you have read it.'(34) He went on to state that Lord Goderich suggested to the King that Charles Herries should be chancellor of the Exchequer and the King gave his full approval to the suggestion. However, Herries declined the offer so Lord Goderich did not inform his colleagues of the suggestion he had made. The situation remained this way until Herries attended at Windsor Castle to be sworn in as a privy counsellor. Lord Goderich then gave him a letter from the King, written before his refusal and urging him to take the Exchequer. (35) When Herries read this letter he changed his mind and accepted the position. This produced uproar. The Tory papers declared that Herries was totally opposed to Canning's principles and that the Whigs hated him so much that they could not accept him as a colleague without degradation. They also suggested that the King wanted Herries because he was a commissioner for supervising the reconstruction of Windsor Castle and having him in the Exchequer would ensure the supply of money for the endless and extremely expensive building projects so beloved by George 1V. (36)

The Tories, of course, took the position that they did in order to add to the problems of Goderich's pro-Catholic administration. Spring Rice felt that the Whig objection to Herries's appointment rested on a 'Doctor Fell proposition' (37) and that the feeling in the country would be very much against them if they persisted in objecting to his inclusion in the Government. He did not think that the issue was one on which to break up the Administration and, as he wrote, 'throwing power inevitably into the hands of Peel.' (38) The King wrote to Lord Lansdowne asking him to go

down to Windsor to discuss the whole matter. Spring Rice summed up his feelings in a manner which demonstrated just how important he thought the outcome would be: 'He [Lansdowne] is gone and I am now waiting the result of that interview which will be final and which will decide the fate of greater interests than were often risked on a single throw'. (39) In the face of the King's determination and provoked by an attack on his personal integrity in the Whig newspapers, Herries reluctantly decided that he had no choice but to go to Windsor to accept the seals. (40)

111

However, while all of these problems were being sorted out Spring Rice continued with his day-to-day work in the Home Office. He wrote to William Lamb, Chief Secretary for Ireland and his topic was 'the Irish periodical press and its connection with the Government'. (41) It was an important matter, as the purpose of the connection was to create or direct 'the small portion of public opinion existing in Ireland'.(42) The Government paid for the printing and publication of proclamations. The business of printing the proclamations went to certain favoured editors and the profit thus made was enough to support their newspapers. They did not have to worry about looking for advertising or about the size of the circulation. (43) The Hibernian Journal was one such newspaper. This paper had no circulation and a rather violent brand of anti-Catholic politics. (44) Charles Grant, when he had been chief secretary for Ireland, withdrew government patronage and in the following week the Journal ceased to exist. By paying very large sums ostensibly for the printing of proclamations, the Government ensured a pro-London press in Ireland.(45) Spring Rice's summing-up of the state of the Irish newspaper

industry at that time was very accurate. One historian of the Irish press has written the following:

> The Dublin Evening Post and the Hibernian Journal both of which had shown some sympathy with the United Irishmen, had been scared into abject timidity; and the only substantial new paper, The Correspondent which appeared in 1806, was set up by the government and maintained by government subsidies. The majority of Irish newspapers were in receipt of state support at the time, either direct grants or government advertisements, which made owners the more careful to avoid giving the Castle offence. (46)

Spring Rice was most anxious to alter this state of affairs; he felt that it degraded the press and did not help the Government. He wrote:

> The whole has produced the degradation of the Irish press without in any degree contributing to the power of the Government and the accomplishment of both these mischevious consequences is produced at a very considerable expense to the Country.(47)

The Government was dedicated to retrenchment and Spring Rice considered that this might be an area 'in which economy and sound policy run together'. (48)

The strained relations which existed between Spring Rice and O'Connell is illustrated by an incident which occurred in the early winter of 1827. O'Connell wrote a letter to Spring Rice

which was full of exasperation. He was a Catholic barrister, therefore, he could not be promoted to silk. In a complaint which he had voiced repeatedly he wrote: 'I am every day made to feel more and more the injustice which is done to me and my clients by the promotion of my juniors to the inner bar'. (49) He included in the letter a line which was to lead to misunderstanding and bitterness between the two men. 'I have a notion of appealing on this subject to the Chancellor by letter'.(50) In reply Spring Rice apologized for the delay in answering the letter but stated that he was out of town for a four day holiday.

> I need not tell you that nobody regrets more sincerely than I do the disqualifications imposed by law on the grounds of religious belief, but I confess I should most strongly deprecate any public appeal to the Lord Chancellor as being in itself a course so unusual as to have a tendency rather to impede than to further your object. (51)

Spring Rice then wrote to the Lord Chancellor telling him of the letter from O'Connell 'in which he intimated to me an intention of appealing to your Ld., respecting his work at the bar'. (52) He felt that it was a good idea to warn the Lord Chancellor of a possible letter from O'Connell.

O'Connell wrote a scorching reply to Spring Rice, in which he declared that he had been completely misunderstood. He did not intend to make a public appeal to the Lord Chancellor; he intended nothing but a private application. This method was, he wrote, 'the usual course in England and which was suggested to me as such

by Mr. Blake, the Chief Remembrancer'.(53) He went on to accuse Lord Goderich's Administration of hypocrisy:

> .....the change of administration has not reached this country for any useful purpose. Our enemies are at all events, sincere, and they deserve respect on that account. (54)

Spring Rice was hurt by this latter implication, especially as he was working to help O'Connell and as he himself stated: 'was actively, zealously and I hope usefully employed in advancing your object'.(55)

There can be little doubt that Spring Rice was very interested in improving life for Catholics; he was committed to emancipation, the liberalization of the press in Ireland and the opening up of career opportunities. However, it seems that he was only looking at these issues from the distance and comfort of London. O'Connell's frustration was very understandable and should have been very obvious to Spring Rice but he seemed to lack the sympathy which was necessary.

IV

On 8 January 1828, Lord Goderich went to Windsor to tell the King that his Government was collapsing.(56) A problem had arisen because Herries, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was deeply offended that Lord Goderich and William Huskisson, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had agreed to the nomination of Lord Althorp as chairman of the Finance Committee of the House of Commons without consulting him. He threatened to resign if the nomination were confirmed and Huskisson threatened to resign if it were not.

Lord Goderich felt that he could not continue in office. (57) He broke down and wept when explaining his dilemna to the King. 'The King offered him his pocket handkerchief and soon afterwards sent for the Duke of Wellington.' (58)

Lord Goderich and his Cabinet were not held in very high esteem. 'Exclusion from such a ministry hardly entailed dishonour and the most embarrassed politicians of these months were those who had become associated with it.'(59) This is the recent assessment of a modern historian. Huskisson made his own feelings plain when writing at the time. 'Never surely', he wrote to a friend after the regime finally crumbled, 'was there a man at the head of affairs so weak, undecided, and utterly helpless!'(60)

Spring Rice wrote to O'Connell for the last time from his office in Whitehall, on 15 January 1828. He stated his determination not to take office in any Tory administration which might be formed. 'A Tory and exclusive government cannot certainly claim any sympathy from me; should such a monster be formed as I consider it most probable.'(61) However, the Duke of Wellington did not form such an administration for he knew that it could not survive.

Chapter 4.

Catholic Emancipation and the Proposed Appointment in India, 1828-1830.

By 20 January 1828, the Duke of Wellington had assembled his Cabinet. Robert Peel, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Henry Goulburn at the Exchequer and Charles Herries were opposed to Catholic Emancipation. However, three Canningite pro-Catholics also took places. These were Lord Palmerston, Charles Grant and William Huskisson. There were also four pro-Catholic peers; Lyndhurst, Dudley, Aberdeen and Ellenborough. In all, the Cabinet consisted of thirteen members; seven were pro-emancipation and six were anti-emancipation. (1)

Spring Rice's father-in-law, the Earl of Limerick, was very disappointed at the change of government. He wrote to the former under-secretary that: 'the certainty of your resignation announced this day heartily grieved me'. (2) However, the reason for this grief would not appear to be the fact that an anti-Catholic prime minister was now in power but rather the loss of money and influence suffered by his family for he took a prominent part in debates on Ireland in the House of Lords and always opposed any concession to the Irish Catholics. (3) The Earl approved of Spring Rice's conduct in offering his resignation and following Lord Lansdowne out of office. However, he had some harsh things to say about some of the members of the new Cabinet. 'If ever a man was thrust into greatness' he wrote 'it is Mr. Goulburn. That he should occupy a place so long filled by Pitt is monstrous'. (4) In another letter written two days later Lord Limerick commented on the difficulties caused by people of different views being in the same cabinet. He was referring to the contrary attitudes held by Robert Peel and William Huskisson but he did not

think this would cause them to leave office; as he wrote: 'I do not think they will throw up the game now in their hands'. (5) Lord Eldon, who had been lord chancellor in Lord Liverpool's Ministry was given no cabinet post by Wellington and this decision was a very great surprise to Lord Limerick. 'The conduct of the Party to Ld. Eldon I own surprises me. They ought to have paid him the Compliment of asking him to take the Presidentship of the Council'. (6)

Sir Henry Parnell (7) was very concerned when he heard that Lord Lansdowne had declined to take a place in the new administration. 'It would, I feel' he wrote 'have been a great sacrifice on his part; but I think the public interest required it of him'. (8) Parnell saw no difference between an alliance with Canning and one with the Duke of Wellington. All feelings of personal consideration should be set aside and the most should be made of a state of things which, he agreed, was both annoying and distressing. 'I have no reliance' he stated 'on the common opinion that this new government will not be able to establish itself'. (9) Because the new administration could and would establish itself without any coalition with Lord Lansdowne, public opinion would side with the King and the Ministry and against Lansdowne, thus impeding the progress of emancipation. (10) However, Wellington's government was set up without either Lansdowne or Spring Rice.

During the course of 1828 Wellington lost four Canningites from his government; these were Huskisson, Grant, Palmerston and Dudley. (11) They disagreed with the Prime Minister's policy on foreign affairs and the Corn Laws. He decided to replace Grant at the Board of Trade by Vesey Fitzgerald, who sat for the Irish constituency of County Clare. (12) On his elevation to the office Fitzgerald was

required by statute to submit himself for re-election. When O'Connell fought and won that by-election in July 1828, as Bentley has put it 'the government faced the grave prospect of losing its Irish seats to Catholics who were debarred by its Anglican oath from sitting in parliament'.(13) The victory of O'Connell demonstrated to Catholics the strength they now possessed. It was the result of excellent political organization and clerical power.(14)

Edward Stanley, who later became the Earl of Derby and prime minister wrote a long letter to Spring Rice in which he discussed the problem which now faced the Government for it was believed by Wellington himself that 'civil war was the only alternative to Emancipation'.(15) Peel, he wrote 'was disgusted at his prospects & the Duke of Wellington was worn down'.(16) Peel intended to resign from the Cabinet as soon as an Emancipation Bill was prepared for passage through Parliament. Stanley also felt that 'O'Connell is making a fool of himself & playing a bad game' (17) for he threatened to present himself at Westminister and thunder at the doors of the House of Commons in order to gain admittance in the coming session. (18) He did concede that O'Connell must try to take his seat in the Commons and he went on to say that 'I hear rumours of meeting in November,[Parliament] & do not think them very unlikely'.(19) However, Parliament was not recalled during the autumn and winter of 1828.

During the summer of that year Wellington and Peel spent much time secretly drafting possible solutions to the Catholic question which were not helped when on 12 August Peel's brother-in-law George Dawson MP made a frightful blunder at a public dinner for Orangemen in Derry. The celebration was to commemorate the victory of William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne in 1690. Dawson

chose this occasion to recommend that Catholic Emancipation be granted. The result was a panic among Northern Protestants, for they, as well as many other people, believed that the content of the speech was suggested by Wellington and Peel. In fact, this was not true. Henry Brougham (20) writing to Spring Rice felt that there was no point in the Government hotly denying any involvement with Dawson in planning the speech. 'Welln [Wellington] is committed by it' he wrote 'and we have a right to complain should nothing be done - Indeed it is quite certain they must do something and the question is what?'(21)

Ireland was in a very troubled state after the Clare election. Sir Henry Parnell saw some benefit in this. 'If' he wrote 'the present state of things is not sufficient to induce Ministers to assemble Parliament & settle the question, it only shows that it ought still to get worse in order to bring them to their senses'.(22) However, he felt that the Catholics would not rebel in 1828, 'but if another session passes away' he continued 'without emancipation I feel certain that there will be a simultaneous rising & that there will be no resisting it with anything short of an army of 100,000 men'.(23) He also felt that the people were slipping out from under the influence of the Catholic Association and of their priests 'and when they have accomplished it, Governments will discover what means they have thrown away of settling the Country'.(24)

The main stumbling-block to the introduction of an Emancipation Bill was the King. (25) When he learned that the oath of supremacy was to be modified he refused all co-operation with the Government. However, when Wellington resigned in January 1828, there was nobody to replace him. The King was forced to invite him to return and so the success of his Bill was assured. (26)

11

Although Spring Rice and the Whigs had no direct concern with the introduction of the Emancipation Bill it can be seen from his letters to and from his Whig colleagues that the matter was one in which they were still extremely interested. However, Spring Rice was at this time also very interested in a possible change in the direction of his own career. Lord William Bentick, the second son of the third Duke of Portland (27) had been appointed governor of India and it was proposed that Spring Rice would join him as his secretary. His father, Stephen Edward Rice, was very much in favour of his son accepting the offer. He felt that it would give Thomas scope to benefit mankind. He wrote to his son that: 'I think you are likely to do more actual good than in any other [position] which you have the liklihood of being placed'.(28) Another benefit not to be overlooked, he felt, was that it would lessen the sting of being ejected from office. It was planned that his wife and children would remain with his father at Mount Trenchard. Here Stephen Edward admitted he had attempted 'the accomplishment of a considerable landed property' (29) but had not succeeded as he would have wished because of the long illness of Thomas's sister, Catherine Ann and the divided life he lived. Exactly what he meant by 'the divided life' he did not explain.

On 10 February 1828, the Earl of Limerick wrote to Spring Rice expressing great encouragement for the proposed appointment in India. He saw it as a golden means of improving finances and as a ladder upon which to mount to higher things.

> In addition you <u>will be removed</u> at once
> from the entanglements of Party, which
> considering your talents & Acquirements

I consider a very embarrassment &
further you will be enabled to shape
hereafter an independent course which
I have little doubt will lead you to
high office & emolument'. (30)

However, the Earl was not so impressed when he gave the matter fuller consideration. He felt that Thomas had already distinguished himself in the House of Commons and that if he continued to work at it he could reach 'much higher situations'.(31) Changes of government would occur and so present him with chances of advancement which he clearly could not avail of if he were in India for four years. In order to illustrate his point Lord Limerick referred to the unstable nature of the Wellington Administration. 'Huskisson's situation' he wrote ' is not a pleasant one & I should not be surprised at his resignation. His speech at Liverpool was, to say the least of it, highly indiscreet'.(32) After his re-election for Liverpool, Huskisson had declared that respect for the political principles of Canning was guaranteed by his presence in the Cabinet. The Tories were very angry and the Duke of Wellington denied that there was any such guarantee.

Maria Edgeworth, the novelist, was the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord and she had become friendly with Spring Rice and his family while visiting London.(33) She wrote to him asking whether he was going to India or not and even though she felt that such a question was an impertinence on her part, she excused herself by asking if he would rather have a cold well-bred friend or a warm-hearted, ill-bred friend and she urged him not to go to India for, in her opinion, Ireland needed him more. (34)

Others besides Maria Edgeworth were anxious that Spring Rice

should not go to India. In a letter to his father in April 1828, he had the following to write:

> My stay in England has been considered of such value to the interests of Ireland that could have been looked for even of your parental partiality. (35)

He went on to make it clear that Lord Lansdowne was one of the prime movers of the financial scheme thought up in order to help him to stay in England until he inherited Mount Trenchard, for he wrote about 'the warm and generous interest of Ld. Ln. in particular'. (36) The Indian adventure was abandoned and Spring Rice set his mind, once again, to domestic issues.

It can be seen from the reaction of Lord Lansdowne and Maria Edgeworth that Spring Rice was considered a very important politician in the Whig party. England was full of ambitious, young and aristocratic men only too anxious for a seat in the House of Commons or a position of power and influence in the government. In spite of this, one of the most important Whig magnates did all in his power to keep Spring Rice at home and therefore in a position to take up government appointments of prestige when the Whigs would once more take office. This must indicate that he was a man of unusual talent for political business because it must also be remembered that he was not of noble blood and the Whigs considered such things very important. As Beales has observed:

> They [the Whigs] were rigid defenders of property rights, and much more inclined than the Tories to justify aristocratic patronage in the public service. (37)

Chapter 5.

Secretary of the Treasury, 1830-32.

In early 1830 Spring Rice continued his work for the further liberalization of the law in relation to Catholics. He presented a petition from the Catholics of Galway city in March of that year in which they requested that the political discrimination under which they suffered should be removed by Parliament. By a Charter of King George 1, only Protestants could be freemen of the city, and therefore have a parliamentary vote and the 1829 Emancipation Act had not changed the situation. Spring Rice gave notice that he would move for leave to bring in a Bill to alter this situation. (1)

He also acted in union with O'Connell in relation to the Vestry Act, which had been passed in 1827. The vestry had the power to assess the inhabitants, within its area, for any amount of money in order to pursue specific objectives. The 1827 Act excluded all Catholics from the meetings concerned with the building, repair and enlargement of Protestant churches, yet it gave the vestries the power to levy a rate upon all of the inhabitants of the parish, regardless of religion. Up to the passing of the 1827 Act, Catholics were not excluded from meetings and could vote on the necessity of repairing or enlarging but not the building of Protestant churches. In April 1830, O'Connell looked for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the 1827 Act and Spring Rice supported this move. (2)

However, such examples of harmony were to become rare indeed in the years ahead. One of the main reasons for the enmity which existed between these two men was the fundamentally different attitude which they had on the subject of the repeal of the Union.

As Foster has written 'By 'Repeal' O'Connell probably meant, first, a recognition of the illegitimacy of the Union, and then negotiation of an alternative mechanism of government'.(3) This point of view was completely unacceptable to the vast majority of Protestants in Ireland. To them the Union represented peace and stability especially after the bloody events of 1798. The more closely Ireland could be bound to Britain the better. (4)

Spring Rice was firmly committed to the Union and when Joseph Hume, a radical member of the Commons put forward a motion supporting the idea of discontinuing the lord lieutenancy because it encouraged private influence and interests and defeated the main purpose of the Union, he enthusiastically supported him. Nothing, Spring Rice felt, could be more injurious to Ireland then the system of constantly changing government which was brought about by the replacement of the lord lieutenant and chief secretary every few years. A man was chosen as chief secretary, in his opinion, if his outlook and policy were in sharp contrast to those of his predecessor. O'Connell naturally disagreed. He felt that to abolish the Viceregal Court would lead to an increase in the number of landlords who spent the money from their Irish estates in England and spent little or no time in Ireland. Also, he felt that having a nobleman as the lord lieutenant would give the government greater influence over the various factions in the country. (5)

The bitterness between the two men deepened because of Spring Rice's actions in the House of Commons in connection with the Doneraile Conspiracy. This was the apparent plot by a group in the village of Doneraile, Co. Cork, to murder the local landlord. On 23 October 1829, four were sentenced to death and

three days later four others were put on trial. At this stage in the matter O'Connell was asked to appear for the defence and he so clearly revealed the contradictory nature of the State's evidence that the case was dismissed. (6) An editorial in the Freeman's Journal of 15 May 1830, deplored the fact that Spring Rice neither supported nor rejected O'Connell's motion in the House of Commons concerning the affair.

> We will en passant put a question to the electors of the city [Limerick] as to the conduct of Mr. Rice upon the Doneraile affair. Why was it he quitted the House before the division? Was the motion of Mr. O'Connell an improper one? If so, an independent man would fearlessly oppose it. Was it a good one calculated to benefit the public by leading to an improvement in criminal jurisprudence? If so an honest representative of a most patriotic city, would manfully support it. (7)

Spring Rice did not vote on the motion in the Commons because, like any good politician, he did not wish to commit himself on a sensitive issue. 'Both [Tory and Whig] were oligarchic and aristocratic; and though sensitive to public opinion both were opposed to demagogy'.(8) Gash's observation sums up Spring Rice's attitude to O'Connell and much of what happened in Ireland. He did not wish to condemn British jurisprudence publically and play along with O'Connell: however, neither did he wan to condone grave injustices. Therefore, absence from the House seemed the logical solution.

In June 1830 Spring Rice's animosity towards O'Connell himself and the slightest suggestion of Catholic dominance which would be the logical outcome of Repeal, can be seen in his changed attitude to the vestry issue. As already indicated O'Connell sought leave to bring in a Bill to repeal the law enabling vestries to assess rates on both Catholics and Protestants for the enlarging and rebuilding of churches and chapels; the motion was defeated by one hundred and forty-one votes to seventeen. According to another editorial comment in the Freeman's Journal Spring Rice opposed O'Connell's motion because he objected to giving the Catholics the same power in the vestries as Protestants. In the future, there might be no danger in such a move, but he felt it would not be advisable at the present. (9) Why Spring Rice moved from his position of support for O'Connell on this issue is unclear. It may however, indicate the dawning of a more conservative attitude due to O'Connell's public attitude to Repeal.

11

Early in the morning of Saturday 26 June 1830, King George 1V died and so a general election had to be called. The results were not overwhelmingly favourable to the Whigs. As Davis has commented: 'many of the successful candidates could not be labelled with any confidence. But the experts felt little doubt that the Duke's majority had disappeared or would do so very shortly'.(10) However, the Duke of Wellington's Government might have survived 'by taking in the Canningites and introducing a moderate measure of reform'.(11) Huskisson, the leader of the Canningites was killed in a railway accident and William Lamb, now Lord Melbourne who succeeded him, had committed himself to Lord Grey. Therefore, the fall of the Tory Government was inevitable. (12)

The second Earl Grey made his first speech as Prime Minister on 22 November 1830. He said he had been allowed to indicate 'that he had the King's [William 1V] approval to introduce a Reform Bill'.(13) The question of reforming the electoral basis of Parliament was a matter of great importance in Great Britain. Various proposals had been put forward during the previous sixty years. (14) The new Whig Ministry therefore, in Gash's words 'did not so much create as merely recognize the situation which confronted them'. (15)

> From the start this argument of necessity was consistently upheld. 'The perilous question is that of Parliamentary Reform', wrote the prime minister to Sir Herbert Taylor the king's secretary, in January, 1831 'and as I approach it, the more I feel all its difficulty. With the universal feeling that prevails on this subject, it is impossible to avoid doing something; and not to do enough to satisfy public expectation (I mean the satisfaction of the rational public) would be worse than to do nothing'.(16)

The Ministry which Lord Grey assembled was in the words of Davis 'politically speaking composed of the most incongruous elements - Lansdowne Whigs, Canningites, Tory deserters and semi-Radicals'.(17) Spring Rice was appointed to the position of Secretary to the Treasury; it is further proof of the regard in which he was held as a man of efficiency and hard work but he also had reservations about Reform. As an eminent historian of the period has stated: 'None of the Canningites and few of the Lansdowne Whigs felt the slightest enthusiasm for the one measure which they were all pledged to support'. (18)

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Having accepted government office Spring Rice had to return to his constituency and seek re-election. This presented the Freeman's Journal with an opportunity for an attack of extreme vehemence. It declared that now the electors of Limerick had another opportunity of ridding themselves of 'the most truckling politician Ireland sent to Parliament'. (19) It went on to say that the present state of the vestry laws was due to 'his wily management' (20) because in the last session of Parliament his motion on the issue defeated that of O'Connell. Probably one reason why the newspaper attacked Spring Rice on all possible occasions was the fact that the new owner, Patrick Lavelle was committed to the cause of Repeal. (21) Lavelle's enthusiasm for Repeal even caused him to turn on O'Connell when he shelved the issue for a time in 1833.

> .....two years later O'Connell could assert that Lavelle had 'always availed himself of any turn-up to assail me', the occasion for the complaint being that Lavelle's enthusiasm for repeal had outlasted O'Connell's, the Freeman continuing to argue with some justice that if repeal had been desirable in 1831 it was more desirable in 1833, after the passage of the Coercion Act. (22)

However, Spring Rice was returned to the House of Commons and so took up his duties at the Treasury. He wrote to Lord Grey in January 1831 setting out the state of the excise receipts, which he felt were 'on the whole satisfactory'.(23) He also assured the Prime Minister that the run on the Provincial Bank was now over 'but no bank other than a great company of many persons would have borne such a drain not arising from merchantile but political

causes'. (24) According to Spring Rice, O'Connell was at the bottom of this business. 'It may be interesting to your Lordship to see how the Provincial Bank of Ireland has stood the shock of Mr. O'Connell's wickedness'. (25) O'Connell regarded both the Bank of Ireland and the Provincial Bank as bulwarks of the Angli-Irish establishment and no friends to nationalists. He believed that these banks had denied his followers both capital and credit. As MacDonagh has written in his biography of O'Connell: 'He therefore had no scruples about making them (together with local Munster savings banks), the targets of 'runs for gold' in 1830, 1831 and 1833, in order to bring pressure on governments in various crises.'(26) Great tension existed between the Government of Earl Grey and O'Connell. As McCaffrey observes: 'In fact the Whig Government that took office in 1830 demonstrated more diligence in curtailing Irish agitation than the preceding Wellington-Peel administration'.(27)

In March 1831 while speaking on a proposed new Vestry Bill Spring Rice said that the Bill would transfer the burden of vestry rates from the poor to the rich. (28) Once more an editorial comment from the Freeman's Journal made it clear that it did not agree with his conclusions.

> One word about the 'honest' assertions of the Union member for Limerick. The sixth last clause provides that 'tenants at will, or tenants from year to year 'may set off any sums levied under the act as a receipt for so much of their rent; and the fifth last clause provides 'that land let in future at a rack rent are to be devised free of rates'. Has not the landlord the power

> of adding to the rent in all such cases the probable amount of the rates? (29)

It seems obvious that the conclusions of the Journal were correct and that this Vestry Bill offered little real relief to Catholics. The report of what was called the Rice Poor Law Committee (30) was equally disappointing to the editor of this newspaper.

> The report recommends 19 cures for the thousand evils of Ireland - and equally true it is, that Parliament is this moment engaged in bodying some of them into the shape and form of laws. But will Mr. Stanley [Chief Secretary for Ireland] venture to say that these matters have any natural connection with poor laws. (31)

It had been fully expected that this Committee, the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland (1830) would recommend the introduction of a poor law for Ireland (32) in however limited a fashion.

> Mr. Spring Rice has not reported as yet from the poor law committee. A rate for the maintenance of the aged and infirm will be recommended and that is all. What a piece of humbug this! Mr. Rice would feed the sick and aged, but the young and healthy he will suffer to die in the ditches or first make them sick and infirm and then relieve them. What a legislator this is! But why need I wonder? Is he not working for place and his noble father-in-law, the worst landlord in Ireland. (33)

However, even this curtailed poor law was not granted and the following warning was given by the Committee:

> It is impossible to overestimate the importance of a correct judgment on this subject; involving as it does, if decided affirmatively, an entire change in the domestic economy of upwards of eight million people. A false step may here be of such fatal consequences that it greatly behoves the legislature to proceed cautiously to investigate closely, and to weigh accurately before any final decision is made. (34)

Spring Rice as the chairman of the Committee clearly had a great influence on its decisions and recommendations. The Committee insisted on the necessity for emigration and recommended that facilities should be given by the Government to people who wanted to emigrate, especially to America. (35) This belief in emigration as the solution to Ireland's poverty was one of Spring Rice's most consistently held ideas. It was demonstrated during the Famine of the 1840s when he did all in his power to persuade many of his own tenants to go to Australia. (36)

111

However, in Britain the Reform issue was the most important and disturbing question on everyone's mind. O'Connell hoped that a reformed House of Commons might be favourable to Repeal and so despite his dislike of the Whigs he and the thirty Repealers who had been returned at the general election of 1830, supported Lord Grey's Government, on the question of Reform. (37) In fact O'Connell worked very hard on this matter and deserved much

credit for the success of the 1832 Bill. (38) Britain was in turmoil until the Bill was passed into law. Pressure rose to a peak after the 1830 election. When Lord Grey's Reform Bill was rejected by the House of Lords well-organized 'Political Unions' held monster rallies in the cities. Rioters attacked the houses of anti-Reform peers. However, in April 1832 the Lords gave way and passed the Reform Bill by nine votes.(39) The Reform Act preserved the principle that it was property rather than people which Parliament represented. (40) Scotland's electorate went up from 4,579 to 64,447 but that of Ireland increased by only 21 per cent. Large English towns such as Manchester, Bradford and Birmingham got representation for the first time. However, the average size of an English borough electorate remained under 900. These boroughs returned 324 of the total 658 MPs. The 349 electors of Buckingham still returned as many MPs as the 4,172 electors of Leeds. (41) As Thompson has stated when discussing the Reform Act: 'The discrepancy between the exaggerated hopes and the lofty aspirations of those who backed the Bill and the realities of the Act's achievement betokened future instalments of reform: and that is perhaps the chief importance of the Act.' (42)

1V

Spring Rice saw clearly by 1832 that because of O'Connell's influence and the merciless criticism of the Freeman's Journal he would have a very difficult job in being re-elected for Limerick city. Therefore, he looked about for a seat in Britain and even in this respect the Journal took delight in vituperative criticism.

> The gentleman is canvassing the city of Cambridge. Mr. Rice was discovered by the people of Limerick to be one of

> the most worthless, one of the most unprincipled, one of the meanest, and most contemptible tricksters that even misrepresented an Irish constituency or betrayed his country. (43)

Nevertheless, the borough of Cambridge returned Spring Rice to the House of Commons in the first election held under the reformed franchise in December 1832.

During the debate on the Irish Reform Bill an incident occurred which demonstrated the relationship which existed between O'Connell and Spring Rice in the summer of 1832. A Mr. Shaw complained of the injustice done, in the Bill, to the Irish freeman. In the English Reform Act the rights of the freeman were preserved in perpetuity, but in the Irish Bill these rights ended with the man's death. He thought that the purpose of this was to destroy Protestantism in Ireland. Stanley, Chief Secretary for Ireland, said that the difference arose because in England the right had never been abused. Unimportant Protestants were elevated by gaining the status of freemen while respectable Catholics of importance had always been excluded from the privilege.

O'Connell agreed, not with Stanley but with Shaw. He believed that the freemen in Ireland should have the privilege in perpetuity; the device was simply an attempt to play Catholic off against Protestant. His desire, he said, was to unite all Irishmen together.

In reply Spring Rice declared that he had never heard so extraordinary a speech and he was certain that if the part of the Bill under discussion was the reverse of what was proposed O'Connell

would oppose that with equal vehemence and at least show more consistency.

O'Connell sprang up to defend himself and he claimed that he had been slandered, for he had never changed his side of the House. The Freeman's Journal described the scene in the following manner:

> He [O'Connell] wished him [Spring Rice] joy of his new friends and before he had made up his mind to advocate the destruction of the rights of the freemen of Ireland he had shown a judicious foresight by having Cambridge in his rear. He from his heart wished Cambridge joy of its bargain. Rice answered in a great passion and at the close of every sentence thumped the table with a very vehement gesture. (44)

Spring Rice's frustration and anger seem very understandable for the question of the freemen had been put into the Bill to afford some improvement to the situation of Catholics in Ireland. Yet contrary to logical expectations O'Connell attacked it. The Government and Spring Rice could be pardoned for their surprise.

The Irish returns under the Reform Act were significant. O'Connell had now almost forty supporters. In Bentley's words: 'It could not be long before that strength, dovetailed as it was into radical strength generally, made itself felt'. (45) However, O'Connell had been disappointed by the results of Parliamentary reform in relation to Ireland. His demand for the return of the forty-shilling freehold franchise was ignored and the total representation of Ireland was increased by only five members,

instead of the twenty that he had claimed in view of the great rise in population. (46)

The reason why Ireland was not given what O'Connell wanted is not difficult to understand. As Gash has written: 'Alone of the three reform bills, the Irish bill seemed to affect the actual unity and security of the United Kingdom'. (47) On the political side it was felt that the proposed changes would strengthen the forces of Irish nationalism and so lead to the repeal of the Union, and on the religious side it was felt that the changes would destroy the Protestant Ascendancy and the Protestant Church in Ireland. (48)

Chapter 6.

Spring Rice and the Reformed Parliament, 1833-34.

Spring Rice was the only Irishman in the Government of Earl Grey in 1830. He was an ambitious, hard-working, efficient politician. These facts combined to give him great influence in deciding upon the programme of legislation to be followed in relation to Ireland. This was a widely accepted belief: 'It is idle to conceal the fact that Spring Rice is the legislator for Ireland. Stanley is the mere executive piece of nothingness'.(1) Thus commented the Freeman's Journal. Also, because he came from Ireland he knew more about the country than anyone else in the Ministry. This was a great advantage. Hoppen makes this plain in one of his articles on Irish history.

> O'Connell's claim that ministers 'were working without sufficient knowledge of the state of things in Ireland' was to be fully borne out by events. Nor was this unusual at a time when British politicians knew so little of Irish affairs that even a former chief secretary could insist that two towns in Kerry over forty miles apart were 'adjoining' and when corrected, go on blandly to inform the House that 'at all events, the two places were in the same county'.(2)

Clearly, Spring Rice was in much too exposed a position to survive O'Connell's extreme displeasure. The two men held totally opposite views on the Union. In spite of the fact that the Whigs had a secret committee for Irish elections and gave grants to Irish candidates through the London based Loyal and Patriotic

Fund Committee he could not hope to be re-elected for Limerick. (3) When writing to O'Connell on 19 July 1832, Patrick Fitzpatrick his political manager, reported the following:

> .....a good authority assured me yesterday that no man will be returned by the county [Dublin] that refuses the pledge of Repeal. The same is averred of the city of Limerick with the addition that the "Representative Aspirant" must exhibit your introductory letter. (4)

11

Political life in Cambridge was not all smooth sailing however. From a Tory publication called Toby in Cambridge and from various election posters something of the flavour of the English elections come through.(5) Toby had told the townspeople of Cambridge of the Government's intention to increase 'House Duties' (6) but directions had been issued by the Treasury that the rates were not to be increased until the election was completed 'in order to secure the return of Mr. Spring Rice'. (7) Toby went on to propose a conundrum to its readers.

> Why was Toby before the late Town election like a good Cough-Mixture? Because he made the Cambridge people expect - a - rate (expectorate) (8)

Spring Rice's election posters could also hit hard. His opponent was Sir Edward Sugden, who had been solicitor-general for England in 1829-30.

> Sir Edward Sugden vehemently opposed the Act under which you claim your elective

rights. He did his utmost to uphold and perpetuate the iniquitous borough system, and had he succeeded, you would not yet have been rescued from the grip of the contemptible tools of the Duke of Rutland, who so long usurped your privileges. In 1825 he was IN FAVOUR of Catholic Emancipation; in 1826 he declared himself OPPOSED to it; and in 1829 he TURNED AGAIN and supported the Catholic Relief Bill. Each of these changes was made for interested purposes.

AN ANTI REFORMER, AN APOSTATE,
AND A BOROUGH JOBBER. (9)

This was how Spring Rice's election poster summed up Sir Edward.

An anti-Spring Rice poster played cleverly on his name.

A SPECULATOR in Rice having just imported a cargo of that article from Ireland, and finding that the supply is unexpectedly much greater than the demand, begs to offer it at very reduced prices. It will be found of the first SPRING growth, and altho' the flavour is somewhat unpalatable in the Town, the Importer hopes that on trial the taste may be soon formed to it. (10)

Toby in Cambridge followed Spring Rice's career after his re-election to the House of Commons.

> Parliamentary Politeness - We learn from "our familiar" in St. Stephens that a few nights since Spring Rice was a little sprung. His particularly chivalrous attack upon old Cobbett (who now regularly speaks three times a night on the stamp duties) partook much more of the character of Sancho on his Dapple, than of the Knight of La Mancha on his Rozinate. It was too bad of the House to laugh at the little man in the way they did. On our consciences the Hon. Members ought to have more consideration! Who knows whether it may not be their turn to-morrow? (11)

111

The Treasury, to which Spring Rice was re-appointed on his return to the House of Commons by the borough of Cambridge in 1832, gave him opportunities for varied and demanding work, such as helping with the building of the National Gallery. He wrote the following to the Prime Minister: 'I attended his Majesty yesterday with the planned models of the National Gallery. The King was very much pleased and signed the plan as approved of'.(12) The work also required a lot of tact because it involved him in the maintenance and allocation of apartments in the royal palaces. For example, the Duchess of Kent, mother of the future Queen Victoria, had asked to have extra rooms made ready for her in Kensington Palace. There were pictures stored in the rooms but she did not see why they could not be moved and stated her feelings in an authoritative fashion. 'It will be a matter of personal

inconvenience to their Royal Highnesses' she wrote through her adviser, Sir John Conroy, 'if these rooms are not ready for them on their return to the palace'. (13) Spring Rice forwarded this letter to the Prime Minister, and he commented on the indiscreet attitude of Sir John, the writer. Conroy was an Irish soldier of great ambition, who had been in the service of the Duke of Kent and was most anxious to forward the power and influence of the Duchess.(14) Spring Rice did admit to the Prime Minister that there seemed to be some 'departmental frustration' (15) which was working to prevent the matter being settled. In his reply to Sir John he assured him that there had been no neglect or inattention on the part of the Treasury.

> But until the rooms at Kensington Palace can be delivered over to the proper department of the Woods and Forests, which has not yet been done it is impossible for me to do more. I have written twice on the subject & am informed in reply that it is impossible to remove the pictures at present. (16)

Spring Rice required all of his patience and tact when dealing with Lord Howick, the Prime Minister's son who later became the third Earl Grey. Howick was Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies and he wrote to Spring Rice in connection with colonial estimates for 1832. One place in particular that was causing headaches was Newfoundland. (17) This colony had been given a constitution under which the Treasury of the United Kingdom no longer had control over the disposal of the taxes which were collected there. Lord Howick wrote to Spring Rice expressing his concerns about the financing of this colony.

> Now even if the newly constituted assembly should be willing to provide for all of these objects which have hitherto been paid for out of the revenue which has been placed at their disposal it could not be in their power to do so because a very considerable proportion of this revenue has already been appropriated by the authority of Parliament to certain expenses which have heretofore been defrayed by the estimates. Here then is the difficulty, we are quite sure there will be a deficiency somewhere but until we hear (which cannot be for 2 or 3 months) what has happened in the first sitting of the Assembly it is quite impossible to tell which services will be left unprovided for. (18)

Howich's solution for this problem was for the Colonial Office to write to Spring Rice at the Treasury asking that Parliament should grant the same amount as in previous years until a more satisfactory arrangement could be worked out. 'I am going off to Northumberland tomorrow' wrote Howick, 'but if you approve of the proposal I have now made you can send a line to Lord Goderich [Secretary of State for the Colonies] who will direct an official letter to be prepared without delay'. (19)

Spring Rice's answer did not please Lord Howick who began his next letter in a very rude and abrupt manner. 'You do not understand the Newfoundland case; 'he fumed, 'we certainly shall not want less than £13,000'. (20) He went on to explain that the

total expenditure of Newfoundland was about £29,000, of which £13,000, had been provided out of the estimates and the other £16,000, had been paid out of the produce of the customs duties levied in the island. Because of the new constitutional arrangement part of the expenses usually provided by the estimates were now charged to the local taxes; therefore more money was needed, not less. (21)

Another letter from Lord Howick, written in January 1833 shows the influence Spring Rice had attained with his appointment to the Treasury. At this time his decisions in relation to the granting or withholding of money had a huge effect on the life of the colonies. In fact it can be seen from the following extract that his decisions could override those taken in the Colonial Department by Goderich and Howick.

> Lord Goderich has determined to carry further the system of consolidation with respect to the W. Indian Govt., which has already, with respect to Antigua and its dependencies, been approved by the Treasury and I wish you would therefore, send me back my letter of Dec. 14th of the estimate for the salaries of Governors formerly paid out of the 4½ per cents, that it may be altered accordingly. Our scheme would be much more complete if you would allow us, in consideration of a saving of nearly £20,000, a year to the Colonies to make an increase in the total amount of Home Salaries of £1,200. I think as this sum is wanted for Barbados, one of the poorest of our Colonies

and also one of those charged with the
4½ per cent duty you ought not to object to
the arrangement. (22)

It can be seen that by the early 1830s Spring Rice's influence was very powerful in relation to government policy for Ireland and also the impact that he had on the colonies of the Empire was growing considerably because his position at the Treasury meant that he held the purse strings.

1V

At the end of 1833, Spring Rice and Lord Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, wrote a long pamphlet on what they saw as the achievements of the Reform Ministry. This Ministry, they wrote, had two enemies: the Tories and the Radicals. The Tories believed that too much had been done and the Radicals believed that not enough had been attempted. (23)

The state of Ireland was the first question brought before the Reformed Parliament, in fact, it was in the words of the pamphlet: 'the most prominent subject of the session'. (24) The pamphlet went on to claim that measures were adopted to 'remove the collision between tenantry and the clergy as to tithes', (25) by charging the money due as tithes to the landlord.

This of course, did not solve the tithe question, as Spring Rice and Brougham suggested. As MacDonagh has written: 'Not only did it leave tithes intact; it also in effect involved landlords (including O'Connell himself) in their collection.'(26) Spring Rice supported the imposition of tithes and their collection under the

protection of the law; he showed this clearly in a letter which he wrote to Earl Grey in September 1832, from Mount Trenchard.

> You must necessarily receive so many accounts from Ireland which are painful & disheartening that I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of communicating to your Lordship one occurrence of a very different character. Of opinion I should not venture to state much, both from mistrust of my own judgement & knowledge of my sanguine disposition. But this fact which I can communicate speaks for itself.
>
> This district has been generally tranquil but within the last few days a resistance to Tythe [sic] took place in the neighbourhood of Glin. On one Townland the people refused any payment & drove off the agents of the Clergyman who endeavoured to effect a seizure. Upon receiving information to the effect the Knight of Glin, a neighbouring magistrate, took out a detachment of military & distrained one cow. The moment this Seizure was effected the whole tythe was paid, & perfect tranquility was produced. (27)

The writers of the pamphlet went on to discuss the lawless state of Ireland at this time.

> Read Lord Althorp's [Chancellor of the Exchequer] catalogue of one year's crimes for Leinster -murders and attempts to murder, 163-robberies, 387-burglaries, 182-burnings, 194-houghing cattle,

> 70-other wilful and malicious injuries to property, 407-serious assaults, 744-illegal notices, 913. (28)

In order to deal with this situation the Government introduced the Irish Coercion Bill.

> Ministers did not disguise from themselves or the House, that the Coercion Bill was an infringement of the Constitution. They put it forward expressly as an infringement, but as a necessary infringement. It was thus referred to by Lord Grey, in his speech on the Irish Church Reform Bill, when he said, "I feel more strongly in reference to the immediate question of Ireland, in consequence of the necessity, -the unfortunate necessity,- under which we found ourselves at the beginning of this Session, of proposing a law which, as we did not conceal from ourselves or from the public was a measure of extreme severity, a departure from the spirit of the Constitution, only to be justified in a case of extremity.(29)

It was claimed that this measure was a success and in proof it was shown that only one county, Kilkenny, was proclaimed in 1833, and as a result crime fell dramatically. 'The outrages in that county in the year 1833, were, Jan.,196-Feb., 178-March, 144-April, 47-May, 15. (30)

While O'Connell was outraged at the Coercion Act (31) he was

very much in favour of the Irish Church Bill which proposed the abolition of church rates, or as it was called in Ireland, vestry cess, and the suppression of ten out of twenty-two bishoprics. (32)

Another most important issue dealt with by the Reform Ministry was that of slavery in the West Indies. The Whigs had been interested in the subject of the slave trade for some time. Charles James Fox and Lord Grey were responsible for the 1807 Act which had the trade abolished but the Party was not committed to the abolition of slavery itself. It was felt that there should be no interference in the internal affairs of colonies which possessed representative institutions. (33) Therefore, the Whigs gave no pledges about slavery at the general election of 1830. (34) However, the issue was forced in the following manner.

> The Anti-Slavery Society, which represented an overwhelming body of opinion in the churches and the chapels forced the subject forward by putting up Fowell Buxton to move for total abolition when the fate of the first Reform Bill was hanging in the balance and a general election seemed imminent. Althorp dextrously compromised with the Society by offering preferential treatment to the sugar of those colonies which ameliorated the condition of their slaves. (35)

During the general election of November 1832, Buxton threatened to bring the slavery issue before the House of Commons and in response to this ministers agreed to open negotiations. However, King William 1V objected to abolition and so the question ran into

more difficulties. Buxton gave another ultimatum and Lord Grey decided to press ahead to solve the problem. (36) The three members of the Government who were principally concerned in planning for the abolition of slavery were: Stanley, who had become Secretary for War and the Colonies, Viscount Althorp, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty. (37)

> Althorp took Abolition in hand without any special knowledge of the difficulties by which it was beset, and Lord Howick, who had been active in the earlier stages of the ministerial discussion, confessed in Parliament that so late as 1830, he had believed that no real need existed for Parliamentary interference with the rights of the slave owners. (38)

Therefore, it can be seen that abolishing the slave trade was something that was forced upon Lord Grey's Government; it did not lead the country along the path of reform. Spring Rice and Lord Brougham admit as much in their pamphlet. 'That it [the abolition of slavery] would-that it must, be brought under the consideration of the Reformed Parliament, in their first Session, no one could doubt, who had noted the zeal of its promoters, and the hold which it had evidently taken upon the public mind.'(39) However, they go on to praise the wisdom and the bravery of their own Government in handling the situation.

> Unappalled, therefore, by the magnitude of the difficulties, increased, as those difficulties were, by the excitement under which the subject must be brought forward, and the exorbitant

> demands of the West Indians and the Abolitionists, Ministers boldly and wisely determined to grapple with the question; and in the name of his colleagues, Lord Althorp promised that it should be done. (40)

Slavery was to cease in the British colonies on 1 August 1834. Compensation amounting to £20,000,000, was paid to the slave owners. However, the slaves were not completely free; they were apprenticed to their old masters for six years. During that time they had to work a forty-five hour week in return for board and lodging.(41)

The Brougham/Spring Rice pamphlet continued by setting out the policy of the Ministry in financial matters.

> To carry retrenchment into our public establishments, so far as can possibly be done without impairing their efficiency; and to apply the surplus revenue, whether arising from increased consumption, or diminished expenditure, to the relief of those branches of industry on which taxation most severely and injuriously presses, are the principles of financial policy professed by the present Government. (42)

The authors claimed that these objectives were achieved.

In his work on this publication Spring Rice showed himself both interested in and adept at political propaganda. It would seem that he saw the necessity of this kind of work when the

electorate was increased with the Reform Act. He was not alone in this for both the Tory and Whig parties saw the advantages in spending money on publicity. For example, Sir Henry Hardinge, who was to serve as secretary of the War Department in Peel's 1841 administration, reported from London on the eve of the 1837 general election: 'We have raised here £2400 for Dublin City and £3300 for Westminister - the Candidates and their Committees must do the rest.'(43)

The publication contained grandiose language and extravagant claims; these are common devices in political propaganda. An example is to be found in the section of the pamphlet dealing with trade which proves the political motivation of the authors.

> During no Session of any preceding Parliament have the interests of Commerce received greater attention, or have measures more important to the Manufacturing and Trading Population of the Country been submitted to its consideration. It is with pleasure, too, that we find the Reformed House of Commons adopting and even extending the enlightened principles of Commercial policy, which for some years have prevailed in our Legislature. (44)

V

The year 1833 came to a triumphant close for Spring Rice. In order to honour his achievements, his constituents at Cambridge

gave a grand dinner in the Hoop Hotel. George Pryme, who also represented the town, shared the limelight with him. Preparations had been made for 230 people but at least 100 more wished to attend in order to honour the two MPs. (45)

Chapter 7.

The Repeal Motion, 1834.

O'Connell introduced a Repeal motion in the House of Commons during the 1834 session. According to one historian this was an action taken against his better judgement.(1) Spring Rice was chosen by the Government to make the major speech against the motion. When he entered the House of Commons at a quarter to six on 23 April 1834, in order to deliver his address, he was received with loud cheers. (2) His selection for such an important task was an indication of his powers as a public speaker. While there was not the slightest possibility of O'Connell's motion being passed it was politically important that the best available arguments be made against the motion by an Irishman who was devoted to the Union. In this devotion Spring Rice was not unique for another Irishman, Edmund Burke, also a Whig, had said in 1796 that: 'Ireland cannot be separated one moment from England without losing every source of her present prosperity and even every hope for the future'. (3)

MacDonagh does not paint a very enthusiastic picture of O'Connell's speech on this occasion.

> O'Connell's speech introducing his motion for a select committee to inquire into the effects of the Act of Union reads flatly. The 'case' he stated was exclusively legal and utilitarian. For five hours he trawled through Irish history since 1246 for evidence that Ireland had been constitutionally wronged and economically sacrificed by her more powerful neighbour.
>
> The fact that he was interrupted only once-and that after his first few sentences-probably tells

its own story. 'O'Connell', one sympathetic listener noted, 'was encouraged by the cheers of the Irish voices alone, and as far as any symptoms of the perception of his argument by any of the English members present was concerned, his orations might as well have been bestowed upon the inmates of a deaf and dumb asylum. (4)

MacDonagh also comments on the nature of Repeal in his book States of Mind.

> I think, that O'Connell did not intend it as a specific proposition on demand. It was rather, in lawyer's language, an invitation to treat, an attempt to elicit a proposition from the British government. This is confirmed by O'Connell's repeated provision of an alternative which stopped short of formal separation of any sort. (5)

In his reply to O'Connell's motion Spring Rice made a speech which also lasted for over five hours. (6) During his address he treated the issue of Repeal with extreme seriousness; there is no indication that he considered it 'an invitation to treat'.

> I assert that if any single individual proposes to this House the dismemberment of the British empire, and proposes thus to deprive the State of its force and its dignity, it behoves the Legislature as a matter of duty and of necessity, to express its most decided opinion, recorded in the most authoritative manner, on so unjustifable

and so fatal a proposal. When the question is not only raised here, but is used for the purpose of inflammatory agitation in another part of the empire, we should abandon all our most sacred duties, if we did not take the most decided, the most distinct, the most unequivocal, and the most solemn means of conveying to the world our opinion upon such a proposition. (7)

When reading Spring Rice's speech against O'Connell's motion two things become very obvious. One is the depth and sincerity of his devotion to the Union and the other is the fact that he was a speaker of great force, clarity and conviction. His appeals were not made only to the emotions of his audience, as in the previous quotation, for he challenged O'Connell on many of his factual statements also.

I fearlessly assert, that of all Parliaments that ever existed, the Anti-union Parliament was the most corrupt and the most subservient. I do not say, that the people of Ireland were responsible for these corruptions, or even that the individual Members themselves were those who were the most culpable. They were the victims of seduction and temptation, rendered inevitable by the existence of the separate Legislatures; but that I should have heard it asserted by the learned Mover that the Irish Parliament "did not receive Court

favours" is one of the most extraordinary events in this extraordinary debate. (8)

The following quotation from Spring Rice's speech sums up his belief in the unity shared by Ireland and Britain because of the Union.

> I deny that Ireland is a province of Great Britain. Is Scotland a province? Is England a province? Is Wales a province? We all are parts of the United Empire, and I as much belong to England and have as much a right to all the privileges of an Englishman as the proudest Howard who walks the earth; and in like manner the Howard belongs to Ireland as fully as if born there. (9)

It is clear from this that Spring Rice saw Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales as one political unit. As his speech progressed he elaborated on his reasons for considering this unit as essential for the present and future well-being of Ireland, in particular. It was his firmly held belief that if Ireland was given a Parliament in Dublin the Northern Protestant would not accept its jurisdiction and violence would be the result. In this he understood the mind of the Northern Protestant; the history of Ireland in the past one hundred and fifty years has proved the truth of what he said.

> Sir, constitutional liberty I am ready to worship; but I reject the idol of democratic liberty which the honourable and learned Gentleman would place upon our alters. We are told truly in the last words of

> Grattan that "the people of his country should not look to a democratic government; they are not fit for it". I do not wish to speak in disparagement of my own countrymen; but from what you see the violence of Irish parties to be, will you surrender Ireland to the tender mercies - must I use the word? - of a domestic Legislature? Would you surrender the people of that country to the tender mercies of contending faction? Do you not know, that there would be inevitably such a conflict and collision of opinion as must produce a sanguinary civil war - a war of extermination? Do the honourable Gentlemen who support Repeal think that because they possess a certain physical force in certain districts of Ireland that they could compel the sturdy spirit of the North to submit without a struggle? (10)

Spring Rice could see that being a part of the United Kingdom gave Protestants a feeling of security; they did not trust the Catholic majority to use power with impartiality.

The lack of Protestant support for Repeal also hinged on economic reasons and the nature of Protestant national identity. Historians generally agree that Protestants failed to support the Repeal movement. The reasons put forward to account for this attitude include the effect of economic prosperity on Northern Protestants, the development among Protestants of a British rather than an Irish identity and the fear of Catholic control in an independent Irish

parliament. (11)

It would seem that there was little opposition to the Union on economic grounds and as an eminent historian has written: 'attitudes in favour of it or against it were determined by political rather than economic considerations'. (12) In fact Spring Rice put forward an endless list of economic statistics to prove that the Union was of great benefit to Ireland. (13) The historian of economics, L. M. Cullen, would seem to support this point of view.

> Moreover, the collapse of the economy in the 1820s can in no way be attributed to the Union of 1800. It was due more to the impact on the Irish economy at large of a sharp recession in England than to any other factor. Furthermore, only in the textile industry were there long-term adverse consequences. The rapid decline in the cotton and woollen industries reflected long-term weaknesses that were evident for some time in both industries and it is doubtful whether protection could have insulated the Irish industries from long-term decline. (14)

It can be seen that Spring Rice's support for the Union on economic grounds was a logical and rational support. At the same time he did not deny that there was great hardship in Ireland.

> I am not denying distress when I deny that Irish distress originated with the Union. Alas, Sir, that distress existed long before, as can easily be proved. (15)

In his speech opposing O'Connell's motion Spring Rice demonstrated many facets of his political skill and gave a very clear statement

of his political beliefs.

Chapter 8.

Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, June-November, 1834.

As was expected O'Connell's motion was defeated. However this freed him to turn his mind to other very important political issues and to attempt to gain advantages for Ireland: in the words of MacDonagh: by deploying 'a hopeful strategy'. (1) The essence of the strategy was to exploit the disagreements in the Whig Cabinet on the issue of Irish tithes.

The Irish Church Bill brought this matter to a head (2) Stanley and Sir James Graham refused to support the Appropriation Clause of the Bill, which they denounced as 'spoillation'.(3) To them it was essential that the Church of Ireland should retain its revenues, otherwise it might be undermined and with it British control in Ireland. Stanley and Graham resigned and were followed out of office by the Duke of Richmond and the Earl of Ripon. 'Their places were filled by the Marquis of Conyngham (Postmaster General) the Earl of Carlisle (Privy Seal) Lord Auckland (First Lord of the Admiralty) and Mr. Spring Rice (Colonial Secretary): but the general opinion was that the Cabinet in its new form could not last and six weeks later Lord Grey resigned, Lord Melbourne succeeding to premiership.' (4)

Spring Rice was now in the Cabinet and his acceptance of office demonstrated his point of view on the issue of appropriation. He agreed with Russell and Althorp. They regarded the revenues of the Church of Ireland as money which could be used to gain some relief from Irish pressures in the House of Commons. They also believed that the Church was an indefensible anomaly. However, these views did not win for Spring Rice kind treatment by the

Freeman's Journal. When he was appointed as Secretary for State he had to return to Cambridge and seek re-election and the Journal took advantage of the event to launch a blistering attack upon the man who had spoken so eloquently against Repeal in the House of Commons.

> Confidence in the Whigs we have none, they have been such political traitors that we should be regarded ourselves almost as base as they, did we, for a single moment, rely upon their most solemn assurances. When Spring Rice presented himself before at Cambridge he won by 169. Spring Rice has never been a favourite of ours - we detected the hollowness of the man long before he led the vote against the cause of Repeal in the House of Commons and out of hatred or contempt for his own country, or more probably to flatter Ministers for the sake of preferment, renounced the title of Irishman for that of West Briton. (5)

On this occasion when he presented himself for re-election at Cambridge Spring Rice's majority was reduced to twenty-nine. (6) This, of course, presented the Journal with a wonderful opportunity to impress its readers with his unpopularity for his opponent was Sir Edward Sugden whom he had defeated by one hundred and sixty-nine votes in the previous contest. (7)

One of Spring Rice's speeches during this campaign gives further insight into his political beliefs. He was joining the Administration because it was the Administration of Earl Grey, which passed the Reform Bill. (8) The principles of the

Government were 'peace, retrenchment, reform and economy'.(9) It had reduced taxes by £4,500,000, and was always attentive to the interests of the poor man. (10) The Dissenters in the United Kingdom suffered many injustices and while he was committed to righting these wrongs he was determined that the Church of England would not suffer. However, he continued, he was of the opinion that the excesses of the Church of Ireland must be dealt with; 'he would never consent to rob and oppress the Catholics of Ireland for the purpose of enriching the Church establishment'. (11) Finally, he declared himself 'a staunch constitutional friend of reform' (12) who had voted in favour of the Reform Bill in 1832.

While allowing for the fact that this was an election speech and therefore lacking in any subtlety, it did show that he believed in retrenchment in government finances and he felt that Dissenters as well as Catholics should be treated with greater justice.

Spring Rice had had a long, hard struggle in order to attain the very important position he now held. In 1843 he wrote a letter to his son Charles, in which he told him of the sacrifices he made. 'At the age of 39 [1829] with a wife, eight children, a position to maintain as a member of parliament with heavy expense consistent with it, my income was but £800 a year.' (13) He continued by giving great praise to his wife, who died in 1839.

> I never could have succeeded but for the heroic self-sacrifice and unremitting industry of your beloved mother. We both <u>worked</u> for our children and if you look back to your early life you will

find many examples, not only on this, but on every other subject for your instruction and imitation. Many a time dear Charles did I refuse myself a dinner or refreshment after heavy work because I did not think I could afford it. No indulgence or luxury was allowed to ourselves, no advantage was refused to our children. (14)

Lady Theodosia Pery, who married Spring Rice in 1811, suffered from ill-health all her life. Maria Edgeworth has left a very detailed description of both the wife and family of Spring Rice with whom she breakfasted in 1822.

His wife - his Lady I should say, is the daughter of Lord Limerick, the Lady Theodosia Rice. She is a crumpetee in figure - more like the idea I formed of Julietta, the deformed yet pleasing heroine of Mr. Parnell's able, silly novel. Lady Theodosia is not taller than I am and has a decided hump but her countenance, though it bears the characteristic look of a deformed person, has none of that odious look of pretension or false gaiety which is too often seen in the faces of those whom nature has disgraced. Lady Theodosia has a most humble yet placid resigned and amiable, I had almost said, winning countenance. I may indeed quite say winning - for she has won and kept the heart of one of the most distinguished men in the British parliament. He treats her with a mixture of respect and affection which is quite touching.

> She has 4 or 5 pretty curly haired children such as you or Sir Joshua Reynolds would paint. She presided at the luxurious breakfast provided for us, helped us all without seeming to do anything and then breakfasted on her own invalid breakfast as she called it, a glass of Seltzer-water and milk. (15)

It can be seen from Spring Rice's letter to his son Charles that from a financial point of view, his life was not very easy until 1830, when a government appointment gave him a handsome salary. Also from a marital standpoint his life cannot have been very easy because of his wife's constant ill-health. It also seems that she was not very beautiful or physically attractive and this would confirm one in the belief that an ambitious man, as Spring Rice was, saw the advantages in joining himself to a rich and politically well established family.

As soon as he took over as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Spring Rice was involved in the problem posed by Canada. It was governed under the Quebec Act of 1774, which left the French their ancient laws and land tenure and Pitt's Canada Act of 1791, under which the two provinces of upper (English) and lower (French) Canada were ruled separately. In each province there was a council, nominated by the governor, which was in no way responsible to the elected assembly. When the Whigs took office in 1830, the Canadians hoped for constitutional changes and the English, who were now settling in

lower as well as upper Canada, also hoped to see English laws and customs promoted at the expense of French ones. All they received from Grey's Government was Ripon's Act of 1831, which turned over crown revenues of £38,000, to the colonists, out of which they were expected to vote a civil list. (16)

On Sunday, 22 June 1834 a conference was held at the Colonial Office, Downing Street, between Spring Rice, and J. A. Roebuck Radical MP for Bath (17) both of whom represented British interests, and D. E. Vigen and A. N. Morin, who were both from Canada. (18) Spring Rice requested that the conversation should be kept completely confidential.(19) He said that he had just become a member of the Committee on Canada in the House of Commons, but as yet he knew little about the Colony. The Committee, he explained, wanted to confine its report to the question as to whether or not the recommendations of the 1828 Canada Committee had been executed. However, it was inclined to believe that misconceptions, on both sides, had prevented their implementation. (20)

Spring Rice went on to say that he had entered office with a firm desire to inquire after the truth and to be just to all without distinction. At the meeting the Canadians wanted to speak in French and Spring Rice allowed them to do so but he answered them in English. This action would seem to be a symbol of the Government's attitude to lower Canada, in particular. It would like the entire province to be English in politics and culture but it had to show tolerance for French sensibilities in order to satisfy the Radical members of Parliament. (21)

The Canadian representative wanted the Governor recalled and

looked for the sanctioning of many Bills, which had been passed by the Legislature but which were blocked from becoming law. Spring Rice showed his political adroitness by saying that he could not give any decisions on the points under discussion for he needed more time to consider such important matters. He went on to assure the meeting that the conduct of the Government would be conciliatory and equitable. He further assured them that all Bills, which were not dealing with constitutional matters, would be looked at immediately and sanctioned by the Privy Council, of which he himself was a member. (22) This meeting shows Spring Rice's negotiating skills. His excuse for not doing what the Canadians wanted was very plausible and conciliatory. At the same time he seemed to be generous when he promised to have all Bills which were not of a constitutional nature passed by the Privy Council.

On 29 June Spring Rice forwarded a dispatch to the Governor of Canada, Lord Aylmer, (23) with the instruction that it was to be kept confidential until the report of the Committee on the Affairs of Canada was made public.

> From the discussions which have already taken place, I feel confident that an opinion will be expressed that there has existed, on the part of this office, the most earnest desire to carry into execution the suggestions of the former Committee: that the endeavours of the Gov. to that end have been unremitting and guided by a desire, in all cases, to promote the interests of the Colony. (24)

It can be clearly seen that the conduct of the affairs of Canada was not looked at with any desire to correct faults in the administration. The purpose of the Committee seemed to be to furnish the Government with lavish praise for its handling of the Colony in the recent past. As Secretary of State, Spring Rice was largely responsible for the conclusions of the Committee: therefore, it can be seen that he was not prepared to introduce new forms of administration which would help to solve the problems of the colonists. He was not prepared to be radical or innovative in dealing with Canada and so the problem was left to smoulder on.

The Montreal Vindicator was extremely critical of the Secretary of State.

> No individual in Mr. Rice's position ever sought more fully to take advantage of the authority which his high position gave him. We trust that whatever the fate of England it will not often be exposed to the evil of having such men as Mr. Rice - so totally deficient in all honourable principles - in important places in its Ministry. No man could have tended to destroy confidence in British integrity more effectively than many of the individuals whom fortuitous circumstances have placed in power during the last four years. (25)

The charge of acting in a dishonourable manner would seem to have some foundation for Spring Rice had stated at the conference of 22 June that the Committee on Canadian Affairs was of the opinion that misconceptions on both sides had prevented the execution of

the decisions of the 1828 Committee. However, the dispatches which he sent to Lord Aylmer indicated that the Colonial Office was totally blameless in the misunderstanding which arose between the Colony and the Government of the United Kingdom.

IV

It was O'Connell's belief that 'the reconstituted ministry would at least allow the Irish Coercion Act, due shortly for renewal, to lapse.' (26) Therefore, he was extremely angry when he learned from Lord Althorp's statement in the Commons on 16 June that it was about to be renewed. 'At once, he told Fitzpatrick to announce to Ireland that his Repeal speech was being prepared for publication, as the first shot in a new campaign.'(27) The threat was taken very seriously. That section of the Cabinet anxious to conciliate O'Connell was prepared to go to any lengths to prevent his being driven into hostility again. After negotiations with other ministers Littleton with Althorp's approval met O'Connell privately and left him with the impression that the ban on public meetings was be dropped. Lord Grey objected to this and O'Connell felt betrayed. He therefore revealed his conversation with Littleton to the House of Commons. This precipitated another cabinet crisis which ended in Grey's resignation. Melbourne succeeded him as prime minister. (28) This change in the leadership of the Whig party did not affect Spring Rice's position in the Cabinet and he retained his position as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies.

The happiness and prosperity of Britain's colonies depended very much upon the Secretary of State. He had to deal with the

constitutional issues presented by these overseas possessions and the day to day problems posed by economic questions, both great and small. An example of this can be seen in his dealings with Lord Nugent, who was the Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, which Britain held at this time. In his dispatches Spring Rice accused Lord Nugent of cutting and carving the Constitution, without the permission of the London Government. (29) It can be seen from Lord Nugent's reply that the Secretary of State has written a very stinging, even vicious letter, thus proving that he could be authoritative and determined, when the necessity arose.

> I perceive, as well as from my own experience as from that of my predecessors, that the first dispatch of a new Sec. of State for the Colonies to a Ld. H. Commissioner generally contains a good rap over the knuckles on some subject of real or supposed misconduct, on the same principle probably as that on which some gamekeepers recommend flogging a pointer well on his first day's breaking to make him know who is master. (30)

On 1 August 1834 all slaves in British colonies were granted their freedom. However, there were difficulties. Sir George Hill, the Governor of Trinidad, spent the month of July travelling to almost every estate on the island in order to understand the difficulties presented by this new situation. In a long letter to Spring Rice he wrote that the negroes rejected the apprenticeship concept, whereby they had to work for their former master for six

years. Even though they were to be paid for the work, they felt cheated by this arrangement and they saw it as postponing, for six years, the freedom granted to them by the King of Great Britain. Sir George went on to claim that agents, whose names he did not give, were going about stirring up the blacks and assuring them that if they simply refused to work after 1 August and abstained from all violent actions, full freedom would be granted immediately.(31) Because of this encouragement the negroes in Trinidad refused to work for their former masters and marched to the capital, where their appearance caused much alarm. Sir George refused to proclaim martial law and instead called out the militia. However, they were not equipped for a long march into the countryside in order to keep the peace and a magistrate was required to direct them at all times but it was not always possible to find one to march with the soldiers. Therefore, Sir George set his hopes for peace on a steam vessel which he requisitioned from the navy. Spring Rice seemed to approve of the Governor's actions for he offered no criticism and passed on the King's praise for the measures taken in Trinidad. In reply Sir George wrote that he found the praise 'to be a strengthening cordial both to the mind and to the body'. (32)

Overseeing this important work was a very taxing responsibility for the Secretary of State. He had to do all in his power to keep the powerful white population as contented as possible with the policies of the Government. His attitude was firm yet conciliatory and this is shown in a letter which he wrote to the Marquis of Sligo, who was the Governor of Jamaica. Mr. Burge, a West Indian agent was publically very critical of the Government's treatment of Jamaica, in particular.

Mr. Burge is pleased to say that there has been an alteration in the tone and sentiments of the Government towards Jamaica that could hardly have been believed probable, that up to the period of arrival of the Colonial Abolition Act, there was visible much anxiety and apprehension respecting the reception of the measure; But that from the time of receiving the Jamaica Act, so perfectly in unison with the views of the Government and so little expected by Ministers, the previous disposition and intentions of the Government to afford relief to the Island became less strong and at length have, in a great measure ceased.

A more unfounded statement and a more unjust inference were never before combined as must be within your Lordship's knowledge from my Dispatches and those of my predecessors. And yet without the slightest warrant or authority this most injurious statement is put forth in official correspondence; and His Majesty's subjects in Jamaica are taught to believe that the readiness and cordiality with which they have acted on the spirit of His Majesty's wishes and those of the British legislature have diminished the disposition of the Government to view their representations with favour and regard.

> So dangerous a lesson was never before read and your Lordship and the legislature of Jamaica will, I trust, believe that it rests upon no foundation beyond the erroneous speculation of Mr. Burge himself. (33)

The abolition of slavery had been forced upon an unwilling white population in the West Indies and the discontent smouldered on until the middle of the century. (34) Spring Rice seems to have been efficient in implementing the laws passed by the British Parliament but he was unable or unwilling to deal with the ambitions and fears of the colonists.

This inability or unwillingness is demonstrated in relation to the ongoing problem of Canada. Other members of the Whig party seemed to know more about the situation in this colony than the Secretary of State. Henry Labouchere was one such person. (35) In a long letter to Spring Rice in which he discussed the problems of Canada, he demonstrated the fact that he had studied the situation in some depth.

> It would be an unprofitable and unpleasant task to dwell upon the series of errors and procrastinations which brought things to the pass in which you have found them. At the same time I must say that no later than at the close of Lord Ripon's administration [1833] I believe the state of the Colony to have been such as to offer a firm chance of terminating the differences which have so long existed between the Assembly and the Home Government. (36)

In Labouchere's opinion the reason for this hopeful state was that

'a moderate liberal and constitutional party headed by men of talent and character was fast gaining strength in the Assembly and still moreso in the Colony'. (37) Unfortunately, Lord Ripon's successor, as secretary of state for the Colonies was Edward Stanley [1833-June 1834] '...

> The tone of his dispatches to Canada, his speeches in the House of Commons - The Amendment of the Repeal of the Revenue Bill - the appointment of a Committee - have I fear greatly tended to aggravate the difficulties which clearly existed. (38)

In order to change this dangerous situation Labouchere felt that it was necessary for the Government to 'take a comprehensive view of the whole subject. In the case of Lower Canada it is undoubtedly true that the circumstances of the jealousy existing between the French and English races in her population complicates and perplexes every other question.' (39) However, he also felt that the present difficulties 'had been in a great measure produced by the irritiating and invidious policy which was too long pursued by the Government towards them'. (40) If an impartial system was introduced the two races could live peacefully together, as they did in the American state of Louisiana. It was also Labouchere's opinion that the revenues of the province should be at the disposal of the Canadian Assembly and that the Crown lands should be managed fairly. (41)

Spring Rice was not left without advice on the problems of Canada for apart from Labouchere's long letter he received a memorandum on the issues involved. It is possible that this

memorandum was prepared by Sir James Stephens of the Colonial Service for Labouchere mentioned him in his letter as being a man of sound knowledge and informed opinions. According to the submission the administration of justice in Canada was inefficient and very expensive. Those entrusted with public money were not publically accountable and the management of Crown lands was wasteful. The trade of the province was limited by hundreds of regulations imposed by the British legislature and there were no structures within which local government could operate. (42)

It seems that Spring Rice did little or nothing to solve any of these problems for trouble erupted in the province in 1837 and again in 1839. (43) The reason why he did not make any real attempt to sort out Canada's problems was the fact that the Government of which he was a member was basically a very conservative body. Lord John Russell, who was one of the most influential members of the Whig party and a firm advocate of the 1832 Reform Act, held extremely reactionary views on this issue. It is therefore logical to assume that the majority of the members of the Cabinet shared his point of view. Russell's biographer, John Prest, has summed up his attitude to Canada in following manner:

> His approach to Canada was that it was another problem like Ireland, the burden of debt, the bad poor laws, and the composition of the house of lords, which the Whigs had inherited from Pitt and from the fifty years of Tory rule. But Canadian affairs brought out in him an unusually doctrinaire constitutionalism, unrelieved by the fine sentiments with

> which he approached the problems of Ireland. If the cry for responsible government came from lower Canada, he dismissed it as a request by the French for leave to oppress the British - the assembly in lower Canada was using 'the weapons of Hampden, in support of the principles of Wentworth'. If the demand came from upper Canada, he met it by the argument that responsible government was incompatible with the relations between a colony and the mother country. (44)

Another important reason why Spring Rice did not attempt to solve these problems was the fact that colonial affairs were not high on the list of priorities of any government during the 1830s and 1840s. (45) An historian studying this period has the following to say about foreign and colonial affairs at this time.

> For governments and their parliamentary supporters in the 1830s and 1840s the critical areas of policy lay, it is true, in neither foreign nor colonial affairs. They were rather concerned with the exponential growth of government itself; with the fundamental tension between town and land which had made itself felt since 1815; and with the millstone of Ireland. (46)

Therefore, the Government was not willing to give its valuable time and thought to what it considered to be a minor problem.

Unrest in the West Indies and Canada did not cause the Government too much worry especially when England itself was once more disturbed by 'Captain Swing' unrest provoked by the New Poor Law. The rioting was ineffective yet it was 'touching and impressive in its desperate intensity' (47) according to two historians writing on these events.

However, Spring Rice's days at the Colonial Office drew to an end in November 1834. Lord Althorp, who was Leader in the House of Commons, went to the House of Lords on the death of his father Earl Spencer. The King refused to accept Russell as the new Leader in the Commons. He dismissed the Government and called upon the Tories to form the next administration under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel. (48)

Chapter 9.

Spring Rice's bid for the Speakership of the House of Commons and his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. 1835.

Sir Robert Peel had to travel from Italy in order to accept the King's commission. On arriving home he decided that he could not work with the House of Commons which had been elected in 1833. There was a dissolution followed by a general election at the beginning of 1835. (1) Graham in his article on the Lichfield House compact summed up the result of that election in the following manner: 'The main features of that election were a decline of the whigs, a resurgence of the tories and an advance in radical strength.'(2) However, the conclusive result would emerge when the House of Commons met and voted.

Before the Commons re-assembled the Whigs took a decision that was to have major implications for them. This decision was, again in Graham's words, 'taken in an unpremediated and almost accidential manner.' (3) Manners-Sutton, the Speaker of the Commons, had taken part in the discussions of the Tories during November 1834. Therefore, the Whigs considered putting forward a candidate to replace him because of his partiality. The question then arose as to who would be the Whig candidate. Spring Rice desired the appointment and Melbourne, Lansdowne, Spencer and Russell were inclined to support him. (4) Abercromby had been considered but had declined the offer. However, these discussions soon became public knowledge with the result that it was difficult for the Whigs to back away from the position into which they had placed themselves. Graham has the following comment on this situation.

> It became a matter of prestige and a trial of strength with the tories, particularly

since an opposition majority was now a possibility. It was now more important to find a candidate who would be successful. It soon became evident that the opposition would not unite behind Spring Rice, but would unite behind Abercromby, and he was prevailed upon to become the candidate. When the whigs were committed thus far, attention was focused on the task of canvassing support for Abercromby, and so, step by step, the whigs appeared to be drawn towards an aggressive policy in the new parliament. (5)

Lord Melbourne was reluctant to lead an attack on the Tory Ministry because it would necessitate serious complications, such as a clash with the House of Lords and a closer relationship with O'Connell and the Radicals. Earl Grey was of the same mind as was Lord Auckland while Lord Lansdowne had a very subtle attitude to the problem. He realised 'that some contact was inevitable, and therefore qualified his opposition by holding that there was a broad line of demarcation between necessary communication and intimate concert which must be observed.'(6)

The key question was whether or not the Whigs would pay the price of partial dependence on O'Connell in order to regain office. According to MacDonagh the central figure in this decision was Lord John Russell. 'Ultimately, Russell was prepared to pay the price; his own reward would be leadership of the House of Commons and a decisive role in cabinet.'(7)

This background formed the context in which Spring Rice made his bid for the Speakership of the Commons. It coloured all of the correspondence to him from the various leaders of the Whigs and had a great influence on his political career for it forced him into the Exchequer at a time of enormous economic crisis in the history of industrial Britain.

Lord Howick, on learning that Spring Rice wanted the position of Speaker wrote him a long letter in which he asked him not to put himself forward. The reasons which he gave for making this request were very revealing. They showed that some members at least of the Whig party considered Spring Rice to be one of their rightful leaders. Howick belittled the influence of the Radicals in the following statement: 'The only thing which can make the radicals really formidable would be the abandonment of the active share they ought to take in public affairs of yourself and of those few remaining persons who can lead the constitutional Whigs.'(8) He went on to say that many Whigs shared Spring Rice's political ideas and 'do not wish to go either faster or further than yourself.'(9) This referred to his disapproval of the secret ballot, the new code of household suffrage and triennial parliaments. (10) In his disapproval of the secret ballot Spring Rice was not alone for Russell shared his point of view.

> First, he shared the common feeling that it was a 'bad, secret, shabby way of voting'. Secondly he used the argument that M.P.s cast their votes in public - so therefore should the voters who returned them. Thirdly he took the line that those who did not have votes ought to be able to influence those who did, and that to concede

> the ballot would shut the masses out of politics altogether, and drive them into an irresistible demand for an extension of the suffrage. Deeper than any argument,,however, Lord John feared the ballot as the beginning of an attack upon his order and its property. (11)

The Whig party had been weakened by the removal of Lord Althorp to the House of Lords and the fact that Stanley and Graham held opinions on the appropriation of Church of Ireland funds with which neither Howick nor Spring Rice could agree. This meant that the work of the party would fall more heavily on thos who remained. Therefore, Howick's conclusion was 'we really cannot afford to lose you [Spring Rice] from our front ranks in debate.'(12)

In a long letter to the former Lord Althorp, who had become Earl Spencer, dated 13 January 1835, Spring Rice gave much information on his reasons for wanting to be elected Speaker. Strangely enough the first person to turn his thoughts to the position was Lord Liverpool, who'wrote him a letter in 1826, which stated that if a vacancy occurred, which seemed probable, he would propose Spring Rice for the Chair. 'On this I took no step beyond reading the paragraph in the letter to Ld. Lansdowne, with whom I was then travelling in Ireland.'(13) In 1832, the Chair was again vacant but the Whigs were committed to supporting Littleton and so Spring Rice remained silent. 'But when you called to offer me the Colonial Office' he wrote 'I stated to you frankly what I have now repeated.'(14)

Spring Rice stated his reasons for seeking the Speakership. The most important reason was that it would leave him time for his

family 'and during the vacation for my own pursuits as an Irish country gentleman.'(15) He also felt that the coming session of Parliament would make his political life even more difficult for him for he could not support the reforms and constitutional changes 'to which many of our friends have pledged themselves'.(16) Therefore, he believed that he would be considered by some to be 'one of those calculating temporisers who are justly despised.'(17)

In reply Earl Spencer informed him that as Abercromby was now out of the running for the position he felt that there was nobody with so great a claim on the whole party as himself. However, he expressed surprise that a man of Spring Rice's attainments should lower himself to the office of Speaker, 'standing as high as you do at the present time.'(18)

The letters from Lord Howick and Lord Althorp make one thing very clear: Spring Rice was considered to be a man of great ability who had achieved much. However, as a relatively young man of forty-five it seemed that he could go on to achieve more. If he wanted to, in fact, it was possible that he could one day lead the Whig party for in the words of Thomas B. Macaulay there was no man in the party so well qualified by talent for business and talent for debate to lead the House of Commons. (19)

When writing to Lord Melbourne on 20 January 1835, Spring Rice seemed very sure that he would be elected Speaker. 'I therefore, find within my reach the object I have for years felt most anxious to attain.' (20) The letter also contained sentiments and attitudes which would indicate a parting of the ways between Melbourne and Spring Rice: '.....there is not any community of action that can exist between members of the two Houses that equals

the effect of the jumbling and rubbing of our less starched and solemn assembly. Besides when at the H. O.[Home Office] in 1827 I rather apprehended that I bored you pretty considerably, as the Americans say, and there are few to whom a bore can be less tolerable than to yourself.' (21) It is also made clear by Spring Rice that Melbourne shared his reservations about constitutional changes. 'I feel very sensibly your expression of general concurrence in my political opinion and your approval of my conduct in the House of Commons.' (22)

The extent of Spring Rice's influence is again demonstrated by a letter from Lord John Russell, dated 21 January 1835.

> Ld. Lansdowne looks upon you as the member of the House of Commons most capable from power and inclination of representing his opinions and he doubts whether it be possible to construct the administration on principles similar to the last, if you cannot form a part of this arrangement. My own feelings are not any different. (23)

The obvious strength of Spring Rice within the Whig party would lead to the conclusion that its leaders had no desire whatever to lose him, especially at a time when their numbers were so reduced that a return to power necessitated a deal with the Radicals and O'Connell. Therefore, it does not seem improbable that his loss of the Speakership owed much to the planning of his own party.

It had been suggested that the Radicals would not vote for Spring Rice in the Speakership contest. (24) However their reasons now seem vague. His political outlook was shared by almost all of the leaders of the Whigs, such as Lord Grey,

Lord Melbourne, and Lord John Russell. If the Radicals had agreed to work with the Whigs why should they take such exception to Spring Rice's views? It had also been suggested that O'Connell would not vote for him in the Speakership contest but the following letter would seem to contradict such a belief.

> Mr. Kerin Reporter has the honour to communicate that Mr. O'Connell had publically avowed "that he would cheerfully and willingly vote for Mr. Rice were he proposed for the position of Speaker" thereby giving "the lie" to the English papers which tell lies as fast as a horse can trot.(25)

The letter, which was dated 13 February 1835, also contained the following piece of information: 'He [O'Connell] spoke the above in presence of his Constituents deliberately on Tuesday last.'(26)

A letter from Russell dated 3 February 1835 again indicated that the Whig party considered the loss of Spring Rice as a very damaging event. 'I would not like to promise for another occasion'[the position of Speaker] wrote Russell, 'but this I may say, that I think your position in the Chair at present would have to a great degree separated Ld. Lansdowne from the party.....' (27) Russell also wrote to Spring Rice on the following day 4 February. He set out in this letter the history of the contest for the Chair, from his own point of view.

> Although I wrote to you yesterday, I think it may be as well to write what has taken place respecting the Speakership, as I am not sure that there is not lurking in your mind some impression which ought not to

exist.

> I spoke to Abercromby on the subject with Melbourne's consent some days after we were dismissed. At that time I had never heard,any more than Lord Grey,of your wish to be Speaker. Abercromby neither consented nor refused - some time after Melbourne got the word that Abercromby positively declined. Upon this I wrote confidentially to you and to Palmerston and to no one else. You communicated my letter to Lord Spencer and Lord Grey and informed me of your wish for the Chair. I wrote privately to dissuade you from it, on grounds which seemed to Lord Melbourne and myself of great public importance but finding you persisted in your wish and that Melbourne and Althorp did not dissuade you I wrote to appraise you of my support. (28)

Russell went on to tell Spring Rice that Abercromby accepted the nomination for the Chair on 29 January 1835. If, as seems possible, the Whig leaders had decided not to lose Spring Rice from the Cabinet, they had to deal with his feelings of disappointment and perhaps betrayal. It appears that they gambled upon his loyalty to the Whigs and his own political self-interest. This seems to be indicated in the last paragraph of Russell's letter.

> Many have assured me that they think Abercromby has a better chance than anyone else.
>
> C. Wood [Charles Wood, Chancellor of the

> Exchequer 1846-52] gives that opinion decidedly. But if not on the Speakership, what other question is there in which you should feel any estrangement from us. I say all this because I feel that if you would not assist us in comment and debate I shall be obliged to call our friends together a fortnight after parliament meets and desire each man to find his own leader as he best can. (29)

Spring Rice's ambition was of a limited nature. He wanted political office but not the rough and tumble that went with life at the highest levels of power. His ability for responsible political office was attested to by many of his colleagues, as has already been demonstrated. Many of his contemporaries believed that the leadership of the Whigs and therefore the office of prime minister were his if he actively sought the power. A quotation from The Morning Post 1 February 1835, indicated that this thought was in the minds of many politicians.

> Had it been decided to set aside Mr. Spring Rice's claim to the Chair, the Right Hon. Gentleman assuredly (and we think with some reason) might have aspired to the post of leader of an opposition and perhaps might have been satisfied to fall back upon this, albeit (Heaven knows) no very great honour as that opposition is now constituted. But to be jockeyed out of both Speakership and Leadership - and that by Lord John Russell! (30)

Henry Warburton, the Radical MP acted as an intermediary between Lord John Russell and O'Connell. In this capacity he sent O'Connell invitations from Russell to attend the meeting on 18 February at which policy for the coming session would be explained. O'Connell accepted the invitations and wrote to Russell that he could count on the sixty-two Irish MPs who were under his [O'Connell's] influence. He supported Russell in each of the seven defeats which he inflicted on Peel in the Commons between 17 February and 7 May 1835. (31) This partnership of Whigs, Radicals and O'Connellites contributed to the development of Britain's political parties. This is the opinion of Evans in his book on Britain's political development. 'Some historians have seen this compact as the true origin of the Liberal party since it implied a definite widening of the landowning Whig party base. Whig landowners, however, remained firmly in charge of all major positions. (32)

Peel's Ministry finally fell on the issue of the appropriation of Church of Ireland property.

> Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues have not yet retired but the vote of the House of Commons on Friday morning has reduced the existence of his Government to a mere question of days. The House is pledged not only to the principle of appropriation of Church property in Ireland but also to the necessity of speedily bringing that principle into useful action; and Sir Robert has

> emphatically declared that nothing can induce him to adopt that principle or to be in any manner a party to its application. (33)

Finally Lord Melbourne was called upon to form a new ministry on 11 April and he announced that all of the posts were filled on 18 April. (34) Spring Rice was offered and accepted the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Again he had to return to Cambridge and seek re-election and on this occasion he was returned unopposed. In his speech of acceptance he made it clear where he stood on the issue of the appropriation of Church property. Russell had proposed the following motion in the House of Commons: 'That any surplus which may remain after fully providing for the spiritual instruction of the members of the Established Church in Ireland ought to be applied locally to the general education of all classes of Christians.'(35) Spring Rice told his constituents at Cambridge that he voted for this motion.

> .....not as having any view or tendency to overthrow the Protestant Church in Ireland - he supported it not with any view of leaving the Protestants without adequate means of religious instruction but he did then and now consider that clergy without flocks and parsons without congregations were scandals which endangered the existence of the Protestant establishment. (36)

However, Spring Rice had not found it easy to accept the Chancellorship. In a letter to Lord Melbourne, he gave his reasons for agreeing to accept a position in the Cabinet.

> You are right in concluding that what you

ask is as you describe it, a very great
and very painful sacrifice of feeling to me.
But it shall be made. Under all the
difficulties of our present situation I
should be unwilling that you or any one
else could imagine that I was capable
of aggravating your embarrassment for
any object personal to myself. (37)

His acceptance of office would not solve all of Melbourne's problems; difficult political questions had to be faced.

Decisions will be called for from me which
a minister newly appointed might have postponed.
These decisions will lead to awkard questions
with both political friends as well as with
political opponents. The Bank of Ireland
and England, Joint Stock Banks, the postage
question are examples. These and all other
similar propositions will be discussed too
with that season of personal hostility with
which the Radicals know me. (38)

The tone of this letter was rather depressed; it was full of self-sacrifice and self-pity. Clearly Spring Rice did not want the position he was given and he seemed to be full of fear of the rough political times ahead. Nowhere is there any hint of triumph or delight in realized ambition.

111

Many of the problems facing the new Government were of a social and economic nature as has been seen from the above letter to Lord Melbourne. Many members of the Government believed in

new approaches to solve these problems. Evans has the following comment to make on the new attitues to political problems held by some members of Melbourne's Ministry.

> The Whig government of Lord Grey needed no reminding that its assumption of office and the passing of the Reform Act for which it is best remembered owed much to the social and economic crisis of 1829-32. While it would be grandiose to suggest that the Whigs evolved a 'social policy' to meet it, the conjunction of short-term slump and the recognition of the magnitude of Britain's industrial transformation necessitated a more wide-ranging approach to social problems. It was important that a Whig, rather than a Tory party faced this challenge. When all allowances have been made for the fragility of party allegiance after 1827 it remained true that such prominent Whigs as Brougham, Althorp, Russell, Lansdowne and Spring Rice had assimilated the new political economy now so firmly entrenched in Scotland and were, in consequence, receptive to more thoroughgoing ideas of social change. (39)

One of the main areas of social change was the 1834 Poor Law Report which concluded 'that the old Poor Law was the primary cause of poverty'. (40) The Poor Law Commission's solution was to reduce poor rate expenditure by making application for relief by able-bodied males a far less attractive alternative than hitherto.

It recommended the creation of separate workhouses for the aged and infirm, for children, for able-bodied females and able-bodied males,in groups of parishes, or Unions united for this purpose. Their recommendation on the termination of relief outside the workhouse for the fit was quite unequivocal: 'All relief whatever to able-bodied persons or to their families, otherwise than in well-regulated workhouses...shall be declared unlawful and shall cease.'(41) The Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, was based on these recommendations and passed through the House of Commons and House of Lords without too much trouble. (42)

The introduction of some form of poor relief for Ireland was also considered very necessary in order to abolish the system of the extensive sub-division of farms and their replacement by a system of capitalist agriculture. As one historian has written: 'It was felt that the Irish peasants clung to their potato patches as the only guarantee against destitution while the lack of a poor relief system deterred landlords from eviction.'(43) In a long speech delivered in the House of Commons in July 1835, Spring Rice set out his ideas on a Poor Law for Ireland. Those who wanted these laws, he said, oould not even agree upon a definition of what exactly were Poor Laws.

> Now because he [Spring Rice] resisted the general principle, he was supposed, by the Honourable Member for Stroud [Poulett Scrope] to be indifferent to the well-being and good of Ireland. What was the definition in the present Bill of the classes of poor deserving and requiring relief? It enumerated the helpless poor, paupers above the age of sixty, orphans under the age of fourteen, the maimed

> the diseased, the idiot, the lunatic, the blind, and the deaf and dumb. With respect to the maimed, the diseased, the idiot, the lunatic, the blind, and the deaf and dumb he was prepared to go the full length of providing to any extent that could be required for the relief of all such persons. Tax his property, tax the rental of the country to any extent they pleased; so far from remonstrating against such a proceeding there was no individual in the House who would be more disposed to act upon the principle to the fullest extent than he was himself. Take another great element in the improvement of the social condition of a people - he meant the education of the young. There was no extent of taxation to which the landed property of Ireland could be subjected with this in view to which he as a landed proprietor himself was prepared to draw the line. (44)

This speech would indicate that Spring Rice was a Utilitarian reformer and a follower of Jeremy Bentham. A recent book on early industrial Britain contains the following assessment which would seem to lead to this conclusion:

> Othordox economists like Ricardo had mounted a supremely efficient demolition job on the Poor Laws, but their logic drove them into the politically unacceptable corner of complete abolition. The Benthamites, broadly in favour of laissez-faire but less wary of some

> State initiatives presented a more elegant solution. The Poor Law could be radically remodelled; its pernicious effects would be eliminated while those genuinely incapable of of providing for themselves, the aged, the infirm and the orphan, would still receive necessary support. (45)

Spring Rice's first budget which he presented in August 1835 provided a surplus of £450,000. John Hume, a Radical MP, was very critical of the fact that the tax on newspapers had not been removed. In reply the Chancellor stated that the taxes on newspapers, advertisements and paper would amount to £1,353,000, in the coming year. Therefore, it was impossible to remove these taxes when he had only £450,000, to cover the possible loss. (46) However, the taxes on newspapers had a much deeper significance than the amount of money going to the Treasury. The Reform Act of 1832 had stimulated and expanded the art of political journalism; as one historian expressed it 'reform called for benediction from Whigs and radicals and concerted attack from the Tory opposition. To this extent political literati were pulled into the centre of high-political discussion rather than permitted merely to bark around its edges. Newspaper editors enjoyed a similar promotion when politicians divined the need to communicate with publics they took to be dangerously enlarged.'(47) Politicians now saw the newspaper as a source of great influence as well as a source of taxes. It was necessary to keep this power under control for generally the papers of the working-class avoided the official mail and thus the government's stamp duty. These publications enjoyed great influence through their denunciation of all that the Reform Act

left undone. (48) Clearly a radical, working-class press which could be distributed even more cheaply if government taxes of all kinds were removed was not something that the aristocratic Whigs would see as desirable.

...

The question of the newspaper stamp continued to trouble the Cabinet. Lord Howick, the Secretary at War, sent a memorandum to Spring Rice on the issue in which he proposed a solution to the problem which the Stamp Office had set out. According to this Office it was impossible to prevent the publication and sale of unstamped newspapers. It had been established that one of these publications had a circulation of 40,000, 'being about five times that of The Times.' (49) Howick was of the opinion that something must be done about this problem. He therfore decided to support the motion, proposed by Lytton Bulwer MP, for the repeal of this tax on newspapers 'unless some means be found of effectually collecting it.' (50) In reply Spring Rice informed Howick that he had forwarded the memorandum to Lord Melbourne but he himself could not accept the conclusions put forward. His reasons were the same as he had given during the Budget Debate: 'remember that I should be unpardonable were I to create a deficiency' (51) he wrote, and he went on to remind Howick that as a Cabinet they must all act together if the government of the country was to be carried on. Spring Rice's answer to Howick demonstrated two of his basic political beliefs. The government must balance its finances and the cabinet must act in concert on all major issues of policy.

IV

In 1835 the Municipal Reform Act set up borough councils elected by the ratepayers. These councils were to work through

paid officials. They had power to make by-laws and exercise control over the police, municipal property and the collection of rates. As Thompson has put it in his history of nineteenth century England: 'These changes, too marked the extension of Whig and business interests into a realm hitherto often dominated Tory and Anglican interests.'(52) The electorate of the new municipal councils included all householders who had occupied the property for three years and had paid the poor rate. This electorate was normally narrower than the parliamentary electorate created by the Reform Act of 1832 and narrower than that for the election of the Poor Law Guardians. However, the electorate included most of the wealthier merchants and industrialists of the large towns. Again in Thompson's words 'The reforms substituted for the old corporations with exclusive interests and tendencies an organization of local residents for the purpose of satisfying their common needs.' (53) The Irish Municipal Corporations Bill passed the House of Commons in 17 August 1835, without a division because the Tories knew that the House of Lords would defeat it. O'Connell had been very pleased by the introduction of the Bill in the House of Commons for it placed the Irish municipalities under the control of the middle and artizan classes. (54) Spring Rice's view on this matter was pragmatic: 'we were bound by English Bill analogies...If we depopularized the Irish Bill by a measure of less extensive reform than was conceded to [England] and Scotland we gave an immediate countenance to the cry of Repeal.'(55) The Repealers had civil strength in Ireland because of the 1832 Reform Act therefore, all that could be done now, in Spring Rice's opinion was to try 'to amalgamate them with English interests.'(56) He felt that the greatest danger in Ireland would arise from any struggle for property but 'the very Repealers are loud for

protection against Agrarian disturbance & our Peace Preservation Bill had passed without a division.' he wrote to Sir John Newport. (57) Spring Rice's comments in this letter to Newport(58) reveal how deeply he understood Irish issues. The Land War of the 1870s and 1880s prove his point about the importance of property. The ownership of land was the major political issue during those years while Repeal, as such, was dead. However, it was replaced by the Home Rule movement.

On 9 September 1835 The Freeman's Journal, in an editorial comment, was extremely critical of the achievements of the current session of Parliament.

> Five distinct measures of reform the friends of the people proposed in Parliament and not one has passed into a law. Here is a list of the losses of Ireland and the triumph of the public enemy. There has been lost Lord Morpeth's Church Bill, Mr. Perrin's Corporation Bill, the Constabulary Bill, the Registration Bill, and the Dublin Police Bill. (59)

V

Spring Rice had one constant personal worry during much of his political life. His wife's health was very poor. His correspondence is full of references to the various towns in which she took up residence in order to improve her condition. He stayed at Hastings during part of the Winter of 1835. 'I swear by this place for its climate and for the measureless improvement it has made in Lady Theodosia' (60) he wrote to Earl Grey. When

writing to Sir John Newport during August of the same year he again discussed his wife's health.

> At present Ld.T. is at Richmond where Lansdowne has lent me his Villa till Parliament is over. I hope then to go over to Ireland till November. If I can I shall then take a house near Ealing or Acton for 5 or 6 months as Theodosia cannot venture on a London winter. (61)

These references clearly demonstrate the fact that he had a very sincere concern for his wife's health. He may have married her for practical political reasons but his treatment of her always seemed both kind and considerate.

Chapter 10.

The Penny Stamp, Joint Stock Banks and the Orange Order, 1836.

The taxation of newspapers was an issue which dragged on from 1835 into the following year. There was also a uniquely Irish dimension to the problem because the amount paid in tax was different in both countries. The Freeman's Journal was quick to seize on this.

> It will be seen that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has determined at a meeting of the ministerial members of Parliament to reduce the English newspaper duty from 4d to 1d on each sheet and our private correspondent states that it is intended to fix the same amount of duty on Irish newspapers.
>
> In Ireland the duty is, at present, 1d 3/4 [one penny, three farthings] per sheet. If the duty be fixed at a penny there will be a lower per centage reduction in Ireland. (1)

However, this argument had no influence on Spring Rice. In fact he saw that if the tax on newspapers was the same in Ireland and Britain it would be a further little step along the road of complete union between the two islands. The Journal was as scathing as ever about Spring Rice's desire for full assimilation of the two islands.

> The following is an extract from one of our private letters, dated London, Good Friday. "It is said he [Spring Rice] is fixed in his determination to abide by the principle of assimilation and that he has made up his

> mind to resign in the event of the other members of the administration interfering with his pet project."
>
> Rice's resignation would be hailed with delight by every honest man in Ireland. We confess, however, we doubt the magnanimity which such a resolve would imply. He is scarcely the man to sacrifice £6,000, a year with the high, and to him unexpected honour of a distinguished place in the Cabinet, for the sake of preserving a few thousand pounds for the British nation. (2)

The Newspaper Stamp Duty Bill proposed to reduce the tax on all paper to a 1d a sheet. However, this was accompanied by a clause regulating the size of the sheet to 41 inches in length by 26 inches in breath. (3)

The Irish members of Parliament pressed for a reduction in the cost of handling their newspapers but Spring Rice would not agree.

> Spring Rice said last night that as the Irish papers passed through the post-office as the English did they had no right to be forwarded at a cheaper rate. He forgets that the Irish papers have hitherto passed through the post-office at a cheaper rate than the English and all that is now demanded of him is the preservation of the same proportion of taxation, or cost, if he likes it better. He forgets that the

> Irish mails are forwarded at little more than half the expense of the English and that a mail bag will be conveyed a mile in Ireland for a shill, which would cost 1/6 or 2/- in England. (4)

The argument against the penny stamp, as it was called, rested in Ireland, on the differences between Ireland and England, in other words it was a Union issue. However, in England the arguments against the stamp were based upon a very different reason. This reason is clearly demonstrated in a pamphlet published at the time.

> There is but one cry heard throughout the country. It is the cry of the working classes. For what? Is it, as heretofore, a clamour against the rights of property? Against the employers of labour? Against the rich as supposed to have an interest hostile to that of the poor? No-it is the cry of the ignorant man awakening to a sense of his own deficiencies; it is the cry of the artisan claiming to understand the laws which he is called upon to obey; of the spirit of liberty, for the dearest of all her rights, that of a free press;- and it is refused; refused after the question has agitated the country for six years; refused after a thousand persons have suffered imprisonment for engaging honestly, however indiscreetly in the struggle; refused by a member of the Society for the diffusion of Useful Knowledge. [Spring Rice] (5)

This is very rousing prose. The creation of a fully literate society was considered to be extremely important by the dominant philosophies of the age. According to Harrison in his book on early Victorian Britain 'Evangelicalism and utilitarianism put a premium on a minimum of literary facility.' (6) An illiterate man could be a good Christian, but it would help greatly if he could read the Scriptures. Harrison in his book states the following:

> Even more did the utilitarians require a literary basis for society. A rational appeal could doubtless be comprehended by an intelligent though unlettered artisan, but the process of communication was all but defeated without the medium of the written word. So well was this understood by Henry Brougham and his radical-Whig followers that they were justly dubbed by John Henry Newman (the leader of the Oxford movement) 'the knowledge school'. Their monuments were the mechanics' institutes and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. (7)

When looked at in this context it can be understood why Spring Rice's penny stamp aroused such hostile feelings. He himself was a member of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; therefore, it is logical to assume that he felt some sympathy with those who desired to spread literacy. However, he had no intention of financing this movement out of Treasury funds; balancing the books was all-important. As has been seen the Government had decided to reduce the amount charged in tax. It would appear that this idea came from Spring Rice himself. His

interest in spreading useful knowledge would seem to indicate that he had something in common with Utilitarians and his desire to keep some tax on the newspapers, in order to balance the budget indicates that he was not whole-heartedly a laissez-faire economist. (8)

11

In early May 1836 Spring Rice introduced his budget for the year in the House of Commons. The total income estimated for 1836-37, was £46,980,000. The expenditure, exclusive of the charge for the West India grant was £45,205,807, thus leaving a surplus of £1,774,193. The West India grant was money given by the Government as compensation to the slave owners when the slaves were emancipated in 1834. The sum of £1,107,863, was needed for this grant, thus reducing the surplus to £662,330. On 10 October 1836, the Chancellor said that he intended to reduce the duty on first class paper from 3d to 1½d per pound and to abolish the duty on stained paper. This would cause a loss of £125,000, to the Exchequer. (9)

Spring Rice went on to discuss the problems of the newspaper stamp duty. He felt that by reducing the cost of the stamp to 1d he would help to put down the trade in unstamped newspapers. This reduction, he hoped, would defeat combinations designed to circumvent the law; it would stop public prosecution for evasion of the stamp duty which brought both the law and the Government into contempt and it would aid honest traders against the unlawful competition of unscrupluous rivals. (10) These reasons indicate that Spring Rice was a very practical and logical politician; he was not going to maintain a position on the taxes which could not

be maintained without loss of prestige and support.

He also tried to please the Irish newspaper proprietors by reducing the rate of the advertisement duty on Irish newspapers, in order to give the proprietors something to set off against the cost of the stamp, which for them meant an increase in the price of delivery. (11) It seems logical that Spring Rice was put under pressure to make these changes by O'Connell and his Radical supporters. However, it was claimed that the reduction of the advertisement duty would do little to help Irish newspapers because most of them had no advertisements. (12)

'It is well I am here, as I fear a very formidable banking crisis is impending which if it commences can scarcely fail to extend across the channel.' (13) The Chancellor was very worried when he wrote this letter to Lord Melbourne, from Dublin, in November 1836. In Spring Rice's opinion two of the worst kinds of joint stock banks were carrying on business in Ireland: these were the National Bank, and the Agricultural Bank. The National Bank, which Spring Rice felt was the better of the two, had O'Connell as a director and it enjoyed the strong support of Irish people who backed repeal. The National Bank and the Agricultural Bank had branches in almost every village in Ireland, according to Spring Rice. The result was a very extended circulation of paper money and the granting of large amounts of credit. The Chancellor had cautioned Mr. Guinness of the Bank of Ireland in relation to this worrying state of affairs and had asked him to follow the pattern of restraint shown by the Bank of England. Instead of following this advice the Bank of Ireland continued with a lower rate of discount than that paid in London. The

result was that English bills were sent to Ireland for discount and gold was taken in return. The rate of discount was finally raised but this move caused more trouble for the National and Agricultural Banks could, consequently, only meet demands on them for gold with great difficulty. 'How they can open tomorrow I know not - or how they can continue to pay their balances'. (14) wrote the Chancellor to the Prime Minister. If either bank stopped payment then the other one would go to the wall also; their deposits were very large and consequently many individuals would be ruined.

> I know not how the Bank of Ireland stands at this moment but I aim to see the Governor and Deputy Governor tomorrow morning. They are generally well provided with Gold. Our balance is about £400,000, which we had resolved to be remitted to London. This order I have for the present suspended lest it should increase the danger. (15)

The Provincial Bank, on the other hand was well prepared for the crisis. It had an agreement with the government to keep one-fifth of its assets in gold but in fact it had almost one half of them in gold and its circulation of notes was small, for there was a legal liability upon the Bank to pay on demand gold to the value of the bank notes presented. (16)

However, the financial crisis of the early winter of 1836 was not confined to Ireland. The sale of Exchequer Bills was very sluggish in London. Exchequer Bills are interest bearing promissory notes or bills, issued by the Treasury, under the authority of Parliament, for the payment of the current expenditure of the state. The Chancellor received a letter from Cole and Mullens, Stock Brokers, which explained why the Bills were selling

so slowly and the explanation showed that a great financial crisis was at hand. 'The great demand for Money' wrote the stock brokers, 'begins to produce a want of confidence and the whole of the securities in the Stock Exchange have declined today.' (17) This letter was dated 8 November 1836, two days after Spring Rice wrote his letter to the Prime Minister from Dublin.

In December of the same year the Chancellor submitted a Paper to the Cabinet on Joint Stock Banks. These were banks set up by many shareholders. The question was posed in the Paper whether or not a Bill should be introduced in the Commons to regulate their activities. The evidence given to the Parliamentary Committee on these banks showed that they were increasing rapidly in number and were swallowing up private banks. Spring Rice's memorandum demonstrated the unsatisfactory nature of these banks.

> No regulation exists against commencing business till all the shares are subscribed for. No regulation exists with respect to any given amount of paid up capital. No regulation exists to prevent the indefinite multiplication of shares of a trifle amount, secured by deposits merely nominal. A bank may now be created with a nominal capital of one million, in shares of £5 with £1 or 1/- only paid up. (18)

The joint stock banks did not have to invest any of their money in public securities; publicity of accounts was not enforced; the proprietors had no right to see a balance sheet before declaration of a dividend and there was no strictly enforced obligation upon these banks to back the issue of their notes with gold. The Chancellor felt that all of these problems should be

dealt with by any bill introduced to solve this very worrying situation. (19)

The Chancellor's handling of the financial crisis in Ireland demonstrated his ability to analyse the faults and failings of the financial institutions in the country. However, the problems posed by the joint stock banks existed in Britain also. As has been shown he was not reluctant to deal with these matters. His ability to see the limitations of the banks demonstrated the fact that he paid great attention to detail and had the financial knowledge to suggest various solutions.

However, solving the problems of the joint stock banks would not solve the real financial problem. An historian writing about the economic crisis of 1836, which at first seemed to be most noticeable in Ireland, made the following analysis of the causes:

> .....a sudden rise in the demand for 'cash' against paper or book assets - of either domestic or foreign origin - severe pressure on banking liquidity, a consequent contraction of credit and a downturn in general economic activity - the extent of the latter being very variable and open to attribution to 'real' factors, stock levels, investments, savings, harvest yields etc, raising analytic issues. (20)

IV

The Orange Order and its activities were a constant source of annoyance to Catholics in both Ireland and Britain and in the

1836 session of Parliament, the Radical MP, John Hume, renewed the attack on the Order which had begun in 1835 with a Select Committee of the House of Commons. Spring Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been a member of this Committee, as had Daniel O'Connell. The Committee uncovered evidence of lodges in the army, 'and the outline of an unlikely plot to exclude Victoria from the succession to the throne and to put in her place the Duke of Cumberland, the king's brother and the Orange Grand Master.' (21) These extraordinary findings spurred Lord Melbourne's Government on to take special measures against the Movement and its provocative marches. In 1836 12 cavalry troops, 34 infantry companies and 33 stipendiary magistrates were sent to places where the Government expected trouble on 12 July. A year later a much smaller force was needed and finally in 1840 the Lord Lieutenant announced "that he hoped the 12th would be as peaceful as the previous year".(22)

Senior when writing on the Orange Order in Ireland does not praise the Melbourne Ministry for a stand against the intimidation and bigotry of this movement. In his opinion it was forced into the measures which it took because of the plot against Princess Victoria.

> Although the whigs were undoubtedly irritated by the Orange processions and the Orange connection with tory politics, they were also annoyed with O'Connell and inclined to accept the lodges as an established element in Irish politics. It is doubtful that the second Melbourne government would have taken special measures against the Irish movement had it not been for the peculiar activities of the British



lodges which came to a rather sensational climax in the summer of 1835. (23)

However, this opinion does not take O'Connell's influence on the Government into account: neither does it deal with the dislike and distrust of the Order which Spring Rice had expressed since his earliest days in the House of Commons. These influences upon the Government's decision cannot be ignored.

Chapter 11.

The Deepening Financial Crisis; The Tithe Question and the Irish Poor Law Unions, 1837-38.

In July 1837, Spring Rice presented his budget for the year. He anticipated that the surplus would be £400,000. The income for the previous year was below the amount estimated; also the expenditure had been less than the amount estimated. But for this latter occurrence, it was most probable that the surplus would have been a deficit. (1) All through 1837 Great Britain suffered from the financial crisis which seemed to have its beginnings in the winter of 1836. However, the crisis deepened for there was a contraction of the credit necessary to maintain speculative dealings. One historian of this economic situation has summed up the cause in the following manner:

> .....the contraction originated by the Bank of England in an endeavour to protect its gold reserves, which were being subject to an external drain: in 1837 caused by American purchase of gold to enable the U.S. to return to a gold-based currency; (2)

The Chancellor has been sharply criticized by some historians for being unable to solve this mounting financial crisis. However, not all of the criticism is fair. It was very difficult for him to deal with an economic crisis with its origins in the United States; especially as his party depended upon the Radicals and the Irish to stay in power. Controversial remedies such as the return to an income tax would not have won support from these groups. Donald Southgate has the following comment to make on Spring Rice's years at the Exchequer.

> It is hard to sympathise with a Spring Rice

> paralysed by deficits, because he had not grasped earlier opportunities. The deficits, a reflection of economic depression might well have been regarded by a Huskisson or Peel as a challenge. It is very difficult to quarrel with Gladstone's verdict - 'Upon one great subject the Whigs showed their hereditary infirmity. Their finance, usually indifferent was never so discreditable as in the time of Lord Monteagle.' [Spring Rice] (3)

As will be shown later this assessment by Gladstone was not totally unbiased for he had a very bitter quarrel with Spring Rice during the 1850s. Therefore, his opinion cannot be entirely relied upon.

Carless Davis is another critic of the Whig financial policy. He has written the following: 'The narrowness of the Whig intellect is nowhere more evident than in the field of economics and finance. Between 1830 and 1841 the policy of the Exchequer was tame and halting.' (4) Lord Althorp proposed to his Cabinet colleagues that they should re-impose income tax. However, they would not accept this and Althorp was obliged to substitute for the income tax a system of duties on transfers of land. This proposal was also rejected by the Cabinet. (5) Althorp's successor at the Exchequer, Spring Rice had no room manoeuvre when dealing with the financial problems of the late 1830s.

King William 1V became very ill during the summer of 1837, so ill in fact, that his death was expected at any moment. In this

context Spring Rice wrote to the Prime Minister. He was of the opinion that even though a new reign seemed very likely it did not mean that there would be any great changes in the Government. However he proposed one change at least. 'But you may perhaps have occasion to consider some new arrangements and it is in reference to that contingency that I write.' (6) He wished to put his name forward for the position of Speaker of the House of Commons, if by some chance Abercromby should resign. It is clear from his letter that he was deeply unhappy in his important Cabinet post and that he longed to be free.

> Were I ambitious ambition would have been more than gratified. But I am not ambitious. I neither asked for not sought this appointment and more than once I have shrunk from the weight of the responsibility and the sense of my own inadequacy. (7)

However, Abercromby did not resign and Spring Rice continued as Chancellor of the Exchequer under the new sovereign, Victoria.

At the general election held in 1837 the Conservatives had many more candidates than they had in 1835. Their slogan of 'the Church in danger' was a powerful rallying-cry which fitted comfortably with the anti-Irish feeling and detestation of O'Connell in the country generally. (8) Adelman in his recent book has drawn our attention to Francis Baring's observation on the political thinking of the time.

> Francis Baring, a devoted Whig supporter, admitted: 'Everything which I should call liberal....in Ireland has always been done against the feeling of the mass of the people

in England proper...and
O'Connell and the "Church in danger"
have been the cause of our being beaten
in England'. (9)

Nevertheless it was a hard fought election and the Conservatives gained only thirteen seats more than they did in 1835. This did mean however, that the Government's majority was reduced to just over twenty, and this placed its legislation at the mercy of Peel and the Conservative party. (10)

111

The question of the payment of tithes was an issue which had not yet been solved. Lord Melbourne's Ministry had made an attempt to deal with the matter in April 1836 when a new Bill was introduced in the Commons. Tithes were to be replaced by a charge on the owner of the first estate of inheritance in the lands liable to the payment of the old tithes. The rent charge was to be estimated at the rate of £70 in the £100. The money raised was to be lodged in the hands of ecclesiastical commissioners, by whom the encumbant would be paid a sum in proportion to the number of Protestant inhabitants of the parish. (11) However, this Bill was rejected by the House of Lords because of its Appropriation Clause. (12)

The Appropriation Clause was one of the most important issues at this time. Spring Rice submitted a printed statement to the Cabinet on the matter in December 1836. He re-stated his thoughts on the problem of appropriation of Church of Ireland funds and he made it clear that this issue was not of great importance in Ireland, which seems a rather strange conclusion.

> Lord Mulgrave's letter does not throw additional light on the tithe question. All that is material is his statement that the appropriation clause is not considered in Ireland, or by the parties most interested, as being very important.
> To me, if that clause can be carried it is important; 1st because I sincerely wish to preserve the Irish Church when it is reduced to its just proportions; and 2nd, because I think the character of the Government and of the majority of the House of Commons is bound up with the resolution on which Sir Robert Peel resigned. (13)

In January 1837 Lord Howick, Secretary at War in the Cabinet wrote a memorandum in which he stated that the Tithe Bill then being drawn up should be rejected.

> It seems to me that there is a failing at the very foundation of the scheme, in as much as it proceeds entirely upon the assumption that the Appropriation Clause derived its importance from the direct practical effects it was calculated to produce without reference to the means by which they were to be accomplished. In my opinion this is the very reverse of the fact. (14)

However, the 1837 election as has been seen, further weakened the Whig Ministry's power to deal with controversial matters. In spite of this Lord John Russell made a powerful attack on the idea of a state funded Church in the House of Commons in May 1838.

> The idea of endowing the teachers of a particular sect - a miserable moiety of the population, amounting to at most 800,000 individuals - with nearly half a million annually of the public money, because a vast proportion of the men of property and learned professions are attached to the connection of church and state, is about as great an absurdity as any one of his lordship's attempts to conciliate the parsons and their abettors. If the men of property and the learned professions must have bishops and deans, and archdeacons, let them put their hands into their own pockets and support their clergy at their own proper cost; (15)

The Tithe Act of 1838 converted the charge to a money payment which fluctuated with the price of grain and was calculated at three-quarters of its nominal value. The payment was to be made by the landlords rather than the tenants. However, this meant that the cost was simply passed along to the tenant through his rent. All arrears of tithe were cancelled. Russell believed that the Act was the most important legislative contribution to peace in Ireland during his lifetime but Catholics still had to contribute to the maintenance of the Church of Ireland which did not please them. (16) In spite of all of the efforts of Spring Rice, Russell and others the Appropriation Clause had no chance of passing the House of Lords.

IV

Inevitably Spring Rice's position brought him into contact with

the ruling family of the Empire. The contact brought with it pleasant and unpleasant experiences. One such annoying experience was caused by the debts of the Duchess of Kent, the mother of the Queen. The Duchess, it was estimated, owed at least £55,000, and she hoped that the Queen would pay £30,000, out of her privy purse. By agreeing to this arrangement the Queen would make herself personally responsible for the money and no public investigation would therefore be necessary. However, the Cabinet would not allow the Queen to make this agreement but Spring Rice was prepared to recommend to the House of Commons payment of the debts incurred by the Duchess during the Queen's minority. This demonstrated his tact and his desire to compromise. In this situation his tact was of no avail and the Duchess rejected the suggestion with anger. 'She feels it due to her Honour' she wrote 'and her position as Mother of the Queen to decline negotiations with Her Majesty's servants...Please tell Mr. Spring Rice she declines any negotiations with him. Rather than negotiate she will go straight to Parliament and tell her hard story.' (17)

There were lighter moments to Spring Rice's life as Chancellor for his position necessitated a great deal of entertaining.

> Lady Theodosia Rice entertained a fashionable party on Wednesday, when the superb suite of drawing-rooms overlooking the parade in St. James's Park were illuminated the second time this season for the reception of: Prince John Sontza, the Russian Ambassador and Count Charles and Countess Pozzo di Borgo, Baron Bulow etc., (18)

The party met at ten and broke up at half past twelve when most of the company then went to the house of Viscountess Beresford in

Cavendish Squard. In March 1838, the Chancellor and his wife gave a dinner party at their residence, 11 Downing Street. Among the company were the Belgian ambassador, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Viscount Morpeth, Lady Elizabeth Howard and Sir Stratford and Lady Canning. After the dinner an evening party was given at which all the ambassadors were present. On the following day a small party dined, in honour of the Marquis of Sligo, at 11 Downing Street. The Queen invited the Chancellor and his wife to a dinner party on 19 March of the same year, and the Queen's uncle, the Duke of Sussex gave a dinner, in his capacity as President of the Royal Society, at Kensington Palace, to which the Spring Rices, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Colonies were invited. (19) As has been seen mixing with the highest in the land did not reconcile Spring Rice with the difficulties of his office; it would have delighted an ambitious man and spurred him on to further heights.

Spring Rice's children also benefited from his position. His eldest daughter, Mary Alicia had succeeded the Honourable Miss Pitt as Maid of Honour In-waiting to the Queen and his eldest son Stephen Edmond was appointed Commissioner of Customs after acting as his father's secretary from 1835 to 1838. (20) The appointment of Stephen to the customs and the Chancellor's actions in relation to the Civil List were bitterly criticised by the Freeman's Journal during 1838. The Civil List was the money provided for the upkeep of the royal establishments and for the payment of members of the Royal Family. The Civil List Committee appointed in December 1837, divided forty-seven times on various issues. On every division the Chancellor was in favour of giving the money to the Royal Family while Joseph Hume, the Radical MP voted against all of the motions. The entire savings, after thirty-one days work, amounted

to £3,000.

> By virtue of his office of minister - certainly not by virtue of his services as Chancellor of the Exchequer, for no man ever bungled so egregiously, - he will be entitled to a pension of 2 or 3 thousand per annum and Mr. Spring Rice's sympathy for the pensioned is therefore natural enought. (21)

V

In 1838 the general financial situation of the Kingdom continued to deteriorate. In the words of the Journal again 'Mr. Spring Rice's financial statement on Friday evening just amounts to this - there is a considerable falling off in the revenue and the deficiency is to be made up by a new issue of Exchequer Bills.' (22) In his budget speech the Chancellor pointed out that in 1836-37 Government income had been £48,340,000, while in 1837-38 it was £45,808,000, and he accounted for the fall in returns in the following way.

> The operation of the commercial crisis to which I have referred - the diminution of demand for our manufactures and exports and the diminished employment of hands to a certain extent, has of course shown itself in the diminished receipts for the year. (23)

The Chancellor went on to say that there would be a deficit of approximately, £300,000, or £400,000. If however, there had been no revolt in Canada or if there was no need for the West India slavery loan, then there would have been a surplus. He concluded

by moving, by way of resolution, that the sum of £13,000,000, be raised by exchequer bills, so that he could provide for government expenditure in 1838. (24)

While Spring Rice appeared unable to deal with the economic problems this period saw the beginnings of an assault on the tariff system. By this system some sections of the economy were protected to the disadvantage of the consumer. As one historian has expressed it 'it was in 1837, the first year of severe economic difficulty, that Greville's mind turned to the corn laws and their likely repeal.' (25) However, Spring Rice could not replace the Treasury's income from tariffs with a move to the income tax and so economic matters went from bad to worse. Evans in his book on Britain's political parties states the following:

> The Whigs failed to cope competently with mounting economic difficulties which brought higher prices and widespread unemployment. As the financial deficit steadily mounted, even the sympathetic observer Lord Holland noted that it [the Government] was 'fast assuming the fatal character of Mediocrity. (26)

VI

The introduction of a Poor Law into Ireland was still being discussed during 1837 and 1838. The report of the Irish Poor Law Commissioners stated that there were 2,300,000, paupers in Ireland. (27) However, the Bill introduced in the House of Commons in February 1837 provided for 100 workhouses; each workhouse would accommodate 800 people. The Freeman's Journal was very

critical of the provisions of the Bill.

> Every person occupying or holding houses or lands valued at £5 yearly rent is to be subjected to the rate. We think it would have been much wiser to render all occupants liable to the assessment. The exemption (especially when the landlord is compelled to pay half the amount chargeable on his estate) will act as a positive inducement to the heartless proprietor to rid his property of a class of tenant whose poverty adds to the amount of his (the landlord's) own taxation. (28)

However, the paper's most stinging words were reserved for O'Connell. It was a touch of irony that Spring Rice must have enjoyed.

> But the woeful exhibition was that of O'Connell. He denounced poor laws while misery and starvation called for their enactment. (29)

This conflict arose because of O'Connell's views on the Poor Law. As L. J. McCaffrey has written: 'The Irish poor law bill was offensive to O'Connell's laissez faire convictions and contradicted his knowledge of the Irish economy.' (30) McCaffrey goes on to state that Lord John Russell had made up his mind that Ireland was to have a Poor Law modelled on that of Britain 'so he completely ignored the report of the Irish poor law commission. What was good for England was, according to his utilitarian logic, also good for Ireland.' (31) As a very senior member of the Cabinet it seem probable that Spring Rice was in general agreement with

Russell. However, McCaffrey seems to be over-simplifying the issue. The expense of providing for 2,300,000, paupers must have struck both Spring Rice and Russell dumb with horror, especially if the extremely difficult economic situation of the Kingdom is remembered. The Poor Lsw Commission rejected the idea of providing workhouses for the vast numbers mentioned. Instead they recommended legal provision, financed by rates, to support the blind and idiots, home relief for the sick and institutions to provide for deserted children, orphans, the aged and infirm and helpless widows. (32) George Nicholls, a member of the English Poor Law Commission, recommended the introduction of the workhouse system into Ireland. However, he believed that the number of people needing the institutions was 80,000, a number which would be far more appealing to the Government than 2,300,000.

In a speech at the Corn Exchange, Dublin, in January 1838, O'Connell denounced this reduction in the numbers to be cared for. He went on to demonstrate that the figure of 80,000, had been arrived at in a false and underhand manner.

> Mr. Nicholls said "in Kent, Sussex, Oxford, and Berks, the amount of indoor pauperism as returned on 29 September last, was just one per cent on the population. These four counties were amongst the most highly pauperised."
>
> But mark, to bring down the distribution of these four counties to one per cent of the population he confines himself altogether to those who receive relief in the workhouse. He carefully omits by one of those dexterities which Fogarty McGee calls an "ingenious device"

> to notice that besides the one per cent relieved within the workhouse there were five per cent more relieved in these counties without the workhouse. (33)

O'Connell had mixed feelings about the new Poor Law but he was not alone in this. William Smith O'Brien MP brought up one of the most contentious areas of the Act when he stated that the pressure of the poor rate upon encumbered estates 'will undoubtedly... force embarrassed landlords to sell portions of their estates in order to discharge themselves from encumbrances'. (34) The Poor Law Commissioners reported that everyone seemed to view their approach 'with more or less alarm, and to regard the introduction of the new law as a new evil.' (35) The reason for this was fear of the financial consequences of feeding and maintaining such a large number of paupers by public taxation. (36)

In conclusion it seems suitable to quote what O'Tuathaigh has written about the Poor Law.

> Even the Poor Law Act, the most notable innovation of the late 1830s was an odd hybrid between local and central control, and was in any case simply transplanted from Britain without any serious consideration of its suitability for Ireland.' (37)

Chapter 12.

Resignation from the Government, 1839.

Abercromby, the Speaker of the House of Commons, resigned in the early summer of 1839. Spring Rice wrote to Lord Melbourne and again requested the position for himself. 'The Speaker's decision' he wrote 'has again brought within view that object which on three former occasions I sought for as that which on every ground, public and private, as is considered by me as the most desirable on which I could look. (1) He went on to say that events had occurred in his family that increased his desire for the post. The event to which he was referring was probably the deteriorating health of his wife although he did not state this in the letter. He gave reasons for his desire to leave the Government which were not very convincing. 'My savings, I should have for my children - my summers for those who are dependant upon me in Ireland and whom I have so much neglected.' (2) However, further on in the letter it becomes very clear that he could no longer endure the stress and strain of high public office. If he left the Exchequer Francis Baring would replace him and the gain to the public in Spring Rice's opinion, would be considerable. However, if he himself were sent to the House of Lords and given another Cabinet appointment he would be very unhappy. 'If I went to the House of Lords in political office political anxieties and duties would still follow me...' (3) His letter gives the impression that he was a man in mental agony; he seemed as though he felt he was in a form of dreadful prison and he would do almost anything to escape.

Spring Rice also wrote to Edward Stanley in an attempt to gain his support. Stanley had resigned from Earl Grey's Cabinet in 1834 on the issue of the appropriation of funds from the Church of

Ireland. He was, in 1839, no longer a Whig but had joined Sir Robert Peel's Conservative group in the Commons. Therefore, in appealing to him Spring Rice was hoping to gain some support from the Tory opposition in his bid for the Speakership. (4) Spring Rice told Stanley that for many years he had wanted a very different kind of life from that to which circumstances had called him. However in his own words he stated: 'Causes with which I need not trouble you have compelled me to remain chained to the car.' (5) He went on to state that the fact of the Speaker's resignation due to ill health 'had been confidentially made known to John Russell, to Sir Robert & I understand the intention will be communicated to the House on Monday night.' (6) In order to test the support Peel would give him, he permitted Stanley to show the letter to his leader. The fact that Spring Rice was willing to solicit the help of his political opponents is further proof of his desperation. At all costs he wanted to resign from the Cabinet: mentally and emotionally he was not able to cope with the pressures of the position which he held.

In reply Stanley stated that in 1835 he would have had no difficulty in supporting Spring Rice for the Speaker's Chair. He wrote that 'at that time you and I had not widely diverged and differed except on one point.' (7) This was the appropriation of Church of Ireland funds. Now, however, other issues parted them. For example, Stanley was a protectionist in relation to the Corn Laws. This meant that he strongly opposed efforts then being made to allow the importation of foreign corn into Britain, free of duty. This also demonstrated that Spring Rice supported the Anti-Corn Law League. He did this because as has been seen he was a supporter of free trade. The relationship between free trade, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the prosperity of

the manufacturing sector of the economy is demonstrated by Evans in the following quotation.

> Once food prices rose in later 1830s, manufacturing free traders could argue that the Corn Laws had damaging effects throughout the economy. British workmen would agitate for higher wages which would be spent on food rather than manufactured goods. Higher labour costs rendered manufacturers less competitive in world markets. Also, since the Corn Laws enabled foreigners to export less grain to Britain than they would like, they earned less British cash and had in consequence less to spend on importing British manufacturers. So the textile mills worked at less than full capacity. Unemployment increased; so did the dangers of bankruptcy among entrepreneurs. (8)

Spring Rice was much too conservative to be a very strong supporter of so middle-class a movement as the Anti-Corn Law League. However, he was also a free trade Chancellor of the Exchequer dealiang with an economy which was under severe pressure. Stanley recognized that Spring Rice was not a fellow protectionist. It would be logical that the Chancellor would lean towards the repeal of the Corn Laws in order to serve the manufacturing base of the economy.

There were other reasons why Stanley would not support Spring Rice. He disapproved strongly of the combination of the Whigs with the Radicals and the Irish, and he also felt that the election of the Speaker was a party question. As he informed

the Chancellor:

> .....when Abercromby's successor is selected from the Cabinet of the Administration, it becomes an expression of opinion, not the merits of the individual not even his individual political views, but on the politics as a whole of the Cabinet of which he is a member. ' (9)

By 7 May 1839 the news of Spring Rice's ambition was public knowledge in the House of Commons. Lord John Russell wrote to him and advised against putting his name forward. Both Melbourne and Russell felt that it 'would only lead to disappointment on your part and embarrassment to the Party.' (10) Russell regretted very much that he had to inform Spring Rice of these realities. Again, it was stated, the problem was caused by the Radicals; they would not vote for him. Russell tried to soften the blow when referring to the reasons for the Radicals' strong objection to supporting the Chancellor. 'At the same time I think it but natural that a Chancellor of the Exchequer should have made opponents by pursuing the chief line of his duty.' (11) However, it appeared that this time Spring Rice was not going to take the advice of either Russell or Melbourne, for Russell wrote to him again on 9 May as follows:

> Melbourne and I advised what we thought was best for your reputation, as well as for the Party. But if you persist in being a candidate all your late colleagues will I am sure give you their best support. If on the other hand you think of leaving Parliament, for which I can see no just ground, I shall take no part in the

election of a Speaker and shall abstain from giving any vote on the subject. (12)

All of the advice and warnings seemed to be effective for Spring Rice withdrew from the Speakership contest.

It seems that by 1839 Melbourne's Government was in an even weaker position that it had been in 1835 or 1837. As Evans observes: 'The Whigs lacked firm leadership. Melbourne presented a posture of languid, aristocratic amateurism in a political world increasingly made for professionals. (13) Charles Greville, Clerk to the Privy Council, believed Melbourne's Government by 1839 to be 'in a wretched state of weakness, utterly ignorant whether it can scramble through the session'; while Lord Holland stated....'I perceive a want of energy, boldness, and decision.' (14) In fact Melbourne resigned in May 1839 in the following circumstances. On 7 May the Government asked the House of Commons to dissolve the Jamaican House of Assembly. Both Radicals and Conservatives raised an outcry and the Government survived with a majority of five votes. In this untenable position Melbourne resigned. (15) Sir Robert Peel was asked to form the new administration. However, as a condition of taking office he insisted that some of the Whig ladies-in-waiting to Queen Victoria should resign and be replaced by Tory ladies. (16)

The Queen precipitated a constitutional crisis by refusing to agree to Sir Robert's demand because she was extremely attached to Melbourne. Spring Rice wrote to Melbourne at the height of the crisis. He was extremely worried by the situation. 'I can think of nothing but the subject of our last Cabinet' he wrote. 'I do not think it possible to over estimate the interests involved in

the case.' (17) He could see that the Queen had placed herself in a very dangerous position from a constitutional point fo view. He clearly saw that she was acting in a very provocative manner. 'If Peel yields all is safe and right' he wrote 'but if he does not yield and the formation of his Cabinet is prevented the danger to the Queen may be extreme.'(18) Spring Rice's letter seemed to indicate that Melbourne's Government supported the Queen in her resolve to defy Sir Robert. 'Let people suspect our advice is given not for the purpose of protecting her from unfair aggression but to keep near her person our own connections public opinion will be fiercely against us....' (19) he warned Melbourne. To avoid this charge of self-interest Spring Rice suggested a possible solution to the problem.

> Though the Queen cannot make any concession and though in making them she may fear the appearance of harshness and injustice might we not by withdrawing those Ladies immediately connected with ourselves extricate the Queen and resolve the difficulty. I mean those immediately connected with the Cabinet, whether they be Ladies or of the subordinate grade in the Household. Did not Lady Durham resign on some grounds of a similar kind? (20)

This letter indicates that Spring Rice was a man of subtle mind. He was determined to find some acceptable way around the problem and in the above letter it would seem that he had. He was also sensitive to public opinion and its swings and aware that the Queen alone could not keep the Government in power.

> You and John Russell have stated that you have not found your Government to possess the Confidence of the House of Commons. How can we go on without it? and will this affair give it to us? (21)

Melbourne and his Cabinet returned to power because they won back the support of the Radicals. (22) However, these last two years of the Government's life were particularly difficult ones for the Whigs. One historian of the period has summed up those years in a list of depressing events.

> The country was now going through a severe period of economic and social crisis marked by the revival of the Chartist movement and bitter hardship for the working classes, whose problems were worsened by the financial timidity and incompetence of the government which led to soaring food taxes and declining revenue. (23)

The budget speech delivered in July 1839 repeated the picture of gloom drawn in the previous few years. The estimated receipts were £47,271,803, while the actual receipts were £47,883,118. There was a surplus of £611,315. (24) However, this was not as cheerful a result as it first appeared and Spring Rice explained the reasons in his speech.

> I regret to state the result is not as satisfactory as I could have wished because whilst the income of the country has exceeded my previous anticipation, the expenditure of

> the country has exceeded my estimates in a much larter proportion. Mainly because of events in British North America the excess of expenditure above the estimates is £785,556. (25)

While Spring Rice could blame events in Canada for the deficit in the Government's finances the real underlying reasons for the economic crisis in which the United Kingdom was plunged seemed to originate in the United States. As Brian Murphy has stated in his book on the history of the British economy the crisis of 1839 certainly had American origins. (26)

> The specific triggering factor was perhaps as in 1847 a gold outflow occasioned by unusually heavy grain imports; but the points of vulnerability to the consequent curbing of the Bank's discounts were not, on this occasion, occupied by British speculation but by American ones - in chief one particular American speculator, the Bank of the U.S. which had been attempting since 1836 to hold a gigantic corner in Liverpool consigned cotton by discounting its own bills and other American securities, in London. (27)

The budget speech contained a very interesting statement by the Chancellor. He indicated that he would introduce a Penny Post Bill, if Parliament undertook to make up any deficit which would result. Rowland Hill, whose idea this was, when giving evidence before the Committee looking into the matter, stated that the loss to the Exchequer would probably be in the region of £400,000. The Chancellor had serious reservations about

this estimate and was of the opinion that the deficit would be much greater. (28)

These facts indicate that Spring Rice was open to new and useful ideas provided that they did not become a drain on the Government revenue. They also demonstrate Gladstone's bias against Spring Rice when he made the following statement:

> In 1839, when the revenue was already deficient, he executed the unexampled juggle of abandoning the Post Office Revenue and recording by Resolution a promise to find a substitute for it in the following year. Before that following year arrived he had worked himself by a most discreditable process into the office he now holds (peerage and Tellership of the Exchequer) and had bequeathed an embarrassed Exchequer to Mr. Baring. (29)

1V

The Municipal Corporations of England and Scotland had been reformed in 1835. A Commission of Inquiry published in 1835 revealed that the Corporations in Ireland also urgently needed reform. All but one of the 68 corporate cities and boroughs were in Protestant hands. The electorate was extremely small in number and the Corporations rarely took an active part in promoting the general welfare of the area under their control. The Conservatives wished to limit as much as possible, the amount of power in any proposed new system. (30) In July 1839 the Government's Irish Corporation Bill was in the House of Lords.

Lord Lyndhurst, a Tory peer, had added amendments to the Bill which the Freeman's Journal disapproved of.

> This matter was reported on Friday evening after the unavailing attempt on the part of the Lord Chancellor [Lord Cottenham] to get rid of one of the most objectionable of the Lyndhurst amendments, which provides for the perpetuation of the present system of manufacturing fictitious freemen. The Bill, as it originally stood, recognized and preserved the rights of every one of the present race of fictitious freemen but the clause as amended, extends the same privileges - no matter how fraudulently acquired - to their descendants. In other words it repeals one of the most valuable provisions of the Irish Reform Bill (which forbids the creation of honorary freemen) and legalizes this fraudulent practice which has enabled the present corporation to foist upwards of 1200 of their creatures upon the electoral roll of the city of Dublin. The amendment of the Chancellor was lost by a majority of nearly two to one. (31)

These limitations were unacceptable to O'Connell and the Whigs but by the middle of 1839 the Ministry was so enfeebled that as an eminent historian has written 'it had either to accept a compromise measure or abandon its proposals altogether'. (32)

V

During the early nineteenth century the Bank of Ireland

dominated the Irish banking scene. According to the Act of 1808, the Bank's constitution could be abolished by the Government any time after 1 January 1837. The Bank enjoyed the exclusive privilege of issuing notes for use up to a fifty mile radius outside Dublin. This consequently imposed restraints upon the expansion of the joint stock banks. The privileges conferred by the Banking Act of 1782 had been modified in 1821. (33)

From the beginning of 1837, therefore, the Government was free to withdraw the Charter or to promote legislation to abolish the Bank's special privileges. However, it was under no obligation to act in any way on either matter. It was, on the other hand, under a statutory obligation to repay £1,750,00 on 1 January 1838. This was the sum that the Bank had given to the Government in capital loans. In order to avoid repaying money which it did not possess because of the financial crisis, an Act of 1837 postponed the date for repayment by one year. All of the powers and privileges of the Bank were also confirmed for another year. In 1838 another Act postponed repayment until 1 January 1840. (34)

The Bank's critics made no move against these arrangements and appeared to prefer to await the outcome of the Parliamentary Committee which was then meeting to consider various aspects of the Bank's powers. However, in 1839 Spring Rice sponsored a Bill in the House of Commons which proposed to extend the date, after which the Charter might be terminated, to 1 August 1844. (35) He had negotiated the terms of the Bill with the Bank 'but to the evident surprise of both it evoked a storm of protest' (36) according to one of the historians who has written on the development of the Bank. The fact that the Chancellor was taken by surprise in relation to this issue would indicate that he had lost his

ability to keep abreast of what people were thinking and feeling. It also indicates a lack of interest on his part, for he was extremely anxious to retire from the pressures of office.

From a report in the Freeman's Journal it would appear that the Bill did not arouse much interest in the non-Irish members of the Commons.

> For eight mortal hours Mr. O'Connell and a few Irish members - including Sir William Somerville Mr. Hume, Mr. Reddington, Mr. R. D. Browne, Mr. Gisborne and Mr. Ellis - fought the good fight. They stood up stoutly for the commercial privileges of their countrymen and at length they had the satisfaction of driving the enemy discomfited from the field. The debate commenced at five o'clock in the evening and continued without intermission till past one in the morning; during all that time not a voice - with the exception of the Chancellor of the Exchequer - was raised in favour of the measure. (37)

These proceedings in the House of Commons give some idea of the difficulty of the task of the Chancellor. His life would be bearable if he was a man driven by great ambition. However, by 1839 his life had lost all of its political drive.

His political enemies won the battle of the Bank of Ireland and Spring Rice was forced to withdraw the Bill.

> The Chancellor of the Exchequer after making a long and querulous speech complaining of the opposition he had experienced, announced his intention of withdrawing the Bank of Ireland Bill

and of bringing in two Bills to continue the Acts of last session till 1841 and to fund £900,000 more of Exchequer Bills held by the Bank of Ireland. (38)

VI

On top of all of his worry about the economic problems of the United Kingdom, Spring Rice also had to worry about his wife's declining health. In July 1839 he wrote to Lord Melbourne and stated: 'Pennington [her doctor] has been down here [Tonbridge Wells] today to visit L. Th. and his report is so very gloomy as very nearly to break down my spirits & hopes altogether.' (39) He went on to say that were it not for the fact that he had to fight for the very difficult and unpopular principle of the monopoly of the Bank of Ireland he would insist on resigning at once. However, as soon as the question was decided by the House of Commons 'I must absolutely ask you for my liberty' (40) he declared to Melbourne. The budget had already been presented so there was now no reason why he should not leave the Cabinet. 'I hope, therefore, you will not think me unreasonable in wishing you now to carry into effect those arrangements which were concluded some months since but postponed at your request.' (41) At last Spring Rice had his way: he was created Baron Monteagle of Brandon on 5 September 1839 and was given the position of Comptroller of the Exchequer on his resignation from the Cabinet. There seems nothing in all of this to support Gladstone's statement that Spring Rice 'worked himself by a most discreditable process' (42) into the post at the Exchequer and his seat in the House of Lords. He had, in spite of his own inclinations, stayed in the Cabinet and weathered some very difficult storms

in order to support his political colleagues. As he himself stated in his letter to Lord Melbourne from Tunbridge Wells 'I have had a hard struggle in what I have already done and it was right that I should do so, as it might have been difficult for another to have taken over my business till after the budget.' (42) At last Spring Rice was free from the crushing burden of government office.

Chapter 13.

Peaceful Years, 1839-1845.

Lord Monteagle, as Spring Rice had now become, did not enjoy peace or tranquility on his release from office. Lady Theodosia died on 10 December 1839. 'My poor wife's existence for the last 14 months has been one of constant suffering' (1) he wrote to Sir John Newport. She died from what he called 'diseased lungs'. (2) 'She told me that she could have wished & prayed for death' he wrote 'but that she would not allow herself to do so lest she should fail in resignation to the will of God. To her the change is gain.'(3) His letter gives evidence of his attachment to his wife but there is no deep and bitter sorrow expressed. He seemed, in fact, relieved and grateful that both her suffering and his own was at an end.

> With the exception of my eldest daughter who is suffering from a severe cold we are all well & have every reason to be grateful for the support which God has given us, & for the comfort we derive from each others affection.' (4)

His interest in and genuine love for his children was one of Lord Monteagle's most engaging and obvious characteristics. He now had the time to worry about them and to concern himself with their education. In a letter written to the Rev. Joseph Blakesley, who was a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (5) Monteagle informed him of the death of Lady Theodosia. He went on to express worry about his son Charles, who had been admitted pensioner to Trinity College on 15 April 1837. (6) 'Will you look after Charles' he wrote. 'He loved her dearly & he is not well.

He had better not come.' (7) As this letter is dated 11 December 1839, Monteagle is clearly referring to his wife's funeral. He went on to say that it was Theodosia's wish that Charles should work for his degree for she had asked him to return to Cambridge for the winter term even though her health was quickly deteriorating.

Monteagle was also concerned about his fourth son Aubrey, who was born on 15 August 1822 and was admitted pensioner at Trinity College, Cambridge on 23 June 1841. (8) In the letter written also to Blakesley about 1840, he stated that it was time to begin preparing his son for college 'and it is a very peculiar tutor that I should make for him' he wrote. 'He is to be a Clergyman by his own choice.' (9) His father wanted Aubrey to be placed with a tutor who was a pious and active parish minister but recognised that it would not be easy to combine these requirements with the talents of a good teacher. Aubrey was not quick and he was at times a little deaf, 'so much patience and many allowances would be required for him.' (10) From this letter it is clear that Monteagle had a deep knowledge of his son's personality and his physical limitations. It is also obvious that he had put much thought into the academic needs of Aubrey in relation to his proposed career.

From the 1840s onwards Monteagle maintained a detailed and intimate correspondence with Charles. It dealt with family matters and also contained comments and insights of a political nature. For example, in October 1840 Monteagle wrote to Charles sympathising with him on his lumbago, which was a complaint he also suffered from.

> The cause of lumbago with me has always been the same being in too

warm a room especially if the
back was exposed to the fire &
afterwards going into a Draft
of air.' (11)

He went on to warn his son that if he was to curtail his painful malady 'a careful avoidance of relaxing heat is of the first necessity.' (12) Politics were also discussed. Monteagle felt that it would be difficult to replace Lord Holland in the Cabinet. He had been chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and had resigned in 1840. He thought that the only possible person to fill his shoes would be Lord Cranbourne but he was not convinced of his caution and prudence. (13) The tone of this letter was friendly, relaxed, intimate and confidential. It seems very obvious that Monteagle loved his son very much and the feeling was returned.

On 13 April 1841, Monteagle remarried. His second wife was Mary Anne daughter of John Marshall of Hallsteads, Cumberland. (14) Before the wedding he wrote to Charles and told him that he would be as totally committed to the interests of his children as ever and that the proposed marriage would make him even more anxious to obtain a fuller share of their hearts and affections.

Do not suspect that you will have a lesser
share of my heart hereafter than you have
had heretofore - do not think that my
house any more than heart will be less
your own than you have hitherto found it.
I thus speak no less for myself than for
another who never could have been the
object of my profession if I could not in
this respect answer for her as I would on
my own behalf. (15)

In this letter he openly declared his love without any hint of embarrassment. There is no evidence of any selfishness or lack of concern for his family; Monteagle is not totally wrapped up in his own interests and future plans.

A letter which Monteagle wrote to Charles in 1843 gave a great deal of information about the family's financial situation and his attitude to positions in public service and his own aristocratic privileges. Charles was having trouble living within his income. In reply to a letter from him bewailing this fact Monteagle explained that £10,000 from the Mount Trenchard estate was settled on his seven children who had no opportunity of inheriting his title and estate. This would mean £1,500 capital for each of them and this, in turn, would yield an income of £75 per annum. However, he had increased the £10,000 Irish pounds to £28,000 English pounds, thereby giving them a larger income. He had also sent three of his sons to university and this cost at least £1,800 for each of them. He continued the letter in a somewhat angry tone. Clearly he was disturbed by his son's lack of appreciation for all of his work and generosity. 'No one intellectual advantage that could be obtained for any young man in this empire, whatever might be their rank of their position - never has been refused to any one of you...' (16) Monteagle hastened to add that he was not regretting anything that he had done for his children.

Monteagle's observations on securing public positions for his family give an interesting insight into his beliefs in the matter of political power and privilege.

> But though you earn your salary it is to me you owe it. I obtained it as well as your brother's seat at the

> Customs, not as a political favour - but I earned it by my own public labour - by the sweat of my own brow by twenty years devoted to the service which gave me as great a right to demand what I obtained for my children, if they were competent & deserving, as a General officer who had been in the Penninsula has to get a Commission for his child. Your establishment & Stephen's forms as much a part of the remuneration of my service & arose so strictly out of it as my peerage and the office which I fill at the Exchequer. (17)

Charles was not Monteagle's only concern; he was also very interested in the advancement of his son William, who had been born in London on 1 November 1823. He was admitted pensioner at Trinity College, Cambridge, on 19 August 1842 and was awarded an MA in 1845. He entered Lincoln's Inn on 24 January 1845 and was called to the Bar in 1848. (18) Charles and William lived in their father's house at 37 Brook Street, London, in the autumn of 1845 while he was at Mount Trenchard. Monteagle sent Charles instructions relating to the quiet life William should live while studying. In return Charles replied that these recommendations would be 'strictly and carefully attended to - I think all will go straight & the quiet life we are likely to lead combined with the regular & early hours which we have adopted will give him a very advantageous opportunity to study.' (19)

Charles himself was planning a visit to the Continent and he assured his father that he would profit from the experience.

The trip was to last about eleven weeks and he had discussed the cost with his Irish cousin, the poet Aubrey de Vere. The decision finally arrived at was that he would need a guinea a day for expenses.

> We propose to start about the middle of November to travel as we can through France to Marsailles and thence to the French Packet of the 27th for Naples. There to spend a week or ten days and arrive at Rome at about the 2nd Sunday in Advent. We would then have a clear month for Rome and then according as time permitted see Florence on our way back. (20)

As always Monteagle was helpful and interested. He promised to give Charles letters of introduction to such influential people as the Austrian minister at Florence and the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Normanby. Lord Normanby had been lord lieutenant of Ireland under the Melbourne government; his title during those years was Lord Mulgrave.

111

A very vivid but unflattering picture of Lord Monteagle during the early 1840s has been left to us by Maria Edgeworth. Her attitude towards him had changed radically since the 1820s when she praised him highly. It seems that the reason for this change was political; however, she does not clearly state this in her writing. They met in late December 1840, at a dinner party.

> Spring Rice - I beg his Lordship's pardon - Lord Monteagle seated himself in an armchair beside Miss Edgeworth who had on first entrance made him rather a drawback stand-off

curtsy when he had offered his greetings to her as an old friend (for reasons best known to herself). But now he seemed determined there should be a thaw -.....(21)

She went on to describe their conversation in such a way as to make her disapproval of Monteagle and the Poor Law in Ireland, perfectly clear to her mother, to whom the letter was addressed.

> Then Mr. Nicholls (responsible for recommendations in Poor Law, lived in Ireland 1838-42 to supervise its operation) and the Poor Laws with Lord Monteagle bent down to the tea table-cloth (totally d-n me if I came) deferential waiting for Miss E's opinion of the System and the working. With a courage that would have surprised you but which thank Heaven never fails me when I have an object that I believe to be good in view I spoke to my Lord Monteagle much more roundly tho' with less deference to his knowledge than I should (with good reason) to Mr. Butler and in short - Dr. Hawtrey nodding approbation - ended with all will depend upon how you follow up this test of destitution. When your workhouses have shown all they can do viz. to number and provide for the absolutely helpless - all that in Ireland will ever go into them - Then it remains to supply employment and wages for the able bodied and willing to work and this can be done in some measure by Government lending more and trying again with more precaution what was tried with Mr. Nimmo and others. He pressed me to name the employments

> Making roads and footpaths and draining bogs etc., - (22)

The above account by Maria Edgeworth demonstrates that it was not only in the House of Commons that life was difficult for Monteagle. Every dinner party could contain a guest who was ready and willing to take him to task for some aspect of the Whig Government's policy. It also shows that he was a man of great patience and courtsey for he exhibited no annoyance or impatience towards his questioner and her criticism of his colleagues' decisions.

Maria Edgeworth was also unkind in her description of Monteagle's physical attributes at this stage in his life. Their hostess asked him about his plan to re-marry.

> And is it true Lord Monteagle - fixing her eyes upon him whose electrified grey spare hairs in the off-skip were through black coats just visible now is it really true he is going to be married again? (23)

IV

After he left government Lord Monteagle continued to correspond with all of his friends and this correspondence provides many insights into his attitudes and beliefs on a wide range of subjects. One person with whom he exchanged letters was Richard Monckton Milnes who was a great name in London society.(24) Milnes was a friend of Monteagle and of Monteagle's eldest son, Stephen. In a letter to Milnes written in the 1840s Monteagle discussed an attack made upon him concerning, in particular, his position as Comptroller of the Exchequer. It was clear that Milnes had concurred in the attack for Monteagle pointed out

the distinction to be drawn between public and private business. He stated that he was the last person 'to imagine that the discharge of any public duty should be restrained or biased by any personal feeling towards myself.' (25) Also he regarded the majority of the opposition with esteem and therefore, he did not suppose that they meant him 'unkindness or censure.' (26) The personal attacks made in debate were, he believed, 'rather for the gratification of those who made them than necessary for the purposes of the argument.' (27) If there were men who could believe that the pension given to Sir John Newport was for the purpose of buying him out of his job as Comptroller of the Exchequer, which he had held from 1834 to 1839, with the object of giving the post to himself and if they could go on believing this in the face of the contradictions of Lord Melbourne and of Newport himself, then he could have no sympathy with such men, 'but must consider them as capable of base acts who can pollute their very thoughts with such vile imaginings.' (28) He stated that the Radicals were always his enemies. 'That the radicals to a man would willingly throw me over I know from experience'.(29) But there were others who were not Radicals, in whose way he had stood, who would like to see him hurt: however, Monteagle does not name these men. The insinuations made against him, he felt, would not have been attempted if the lies put out by The Times had not passed 'the credulity even of party violence'. (30) It is clear that even though he was no longer in the Cabinet Monteagle was still capable of arousing great animosity. In politics this would indicate a person of strong views forcefully expressed. The anger aroused by his policies followed him out of government: this shows that he was a man who was not easily overlooked or forgotten.

Because of his policy on the appropriation of Church of Ireland funds Monteagle was not always a great favourite with Irish

churchmen and he also had disagreements with the Church of England. In a letter to Blakesley written in November 1839 he discussed the Whig attempt to deal with the question of educational reform. According to Monteagle, the Church of England believed that the education of all children should be entrusted to its clergymen.

> We had repeated interviews with the Archbishop [of Canterbury] and Bh. of London before the subject was mentioned in Parliament. Our view was still for peace. We should have accepted the whole scheme of the National Schools, creeds catechism and all provided the children of dissenters were not compelled to join in these proceedings if their parents made an objection. (31)

However, the Government was unsuccessful in this matter and because of its attitude it was accused by the Church of England of teaching error and heresy.

Monteagle went on to discuss his ideas on the teaching of religion in schools. It should be simple for it was an absurdity to go into difficult and obscure points of theology with children. Such things were best taught by 'ministers of religion in the pulpit or by the parent to his child at home'. (32) He made fun of some of the teaching priorities of the Established Church for it was not ten years ago that the convicts in the hulks were required to learn the 39 Articles by heart, '& the number of pickpockets & felons who could perform this feat was exactly reported to the Secretary of State & laid before both Houses of Parliament'. (33) In his opinion this performance did little or nothing to improve the morals or uplift the spirits of those on board these floating prisons.

It is very easy to see from these opinions expressed by Monteagle why he had so many enemies. A politician with clear ideas, forcefully expressed, is bound to make enemies and he had made many in his lifetime.. These enemies were as different from each other as O'Connell and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Nevertheless they were united in their opposition to what Lord Monteagle stood for.

Another person to whom Monteagle wrote and expressed his political ideas was Lord Melbourne who ceased to be prime minister in 1841. After a general election Peel and the Conservatives were returned to power. However, early in 1842 Peel was determined to introduce a new Corn Bill based on moderate rather than extreme protection; this involved some reduction in the duties on the 1828 sliding scale. (34) Monteagle wrote to Melbourne in 1843 and discussed the workings of Peel's Corn Law. In his opinion it was 'a very complete failure; indeed so complete as to demonstrate down to the most superficial observer the inherent and incurable vice of its principle.' (35)

> The high prices & short supply of last year, the very bad weather & floods made the harvest of 1842 a bad one in anticipation. Hence merchants & corn factors felt a conviction almost amounting to a certainly that grain would be admissible at the shilling duty. They gave the most unlimited orders for the purchase of foreign grain on this hypothesis & all the markets of the world were ransacked to ensure the largest supply. (36)

Most of this purchasing was done on credit, prices rose, distress increased. However, when the actual harvest came in it was

extremely good; therefore prices fell and ruin followed for the merchants. As Monteagle put it 'The result was an instant depression of prices & the greatest amount of ruin & distress ever inflicted on any one branch of commerce.' (37)

The letters that he wrote to Melbourne demonstrate a number of things about Monteagle. He did not forget his sick and now lonely colleague when he had left his position of power. His approach to him was generous and respectful and was full of reminders of Melbourne's former status. This is seen particularly in a letter addressed to him in October 1842. 'As in old times when I acted as your Lieutenant I should have been bound to make you a report upon the prospects of the Financial Year I do not see why I should not now perform the same duty.' (38) The letters also demonstrate that Monteagle had lost none of his power to analyse a political situation of complexity.

During the 1840s O'Connell organised a powerful campaign for the repeal of the Union and according to his old enemy, The Times, Monteagle had paid him a long visit.

> Nothing could be so completely false as the statement which I see has made its way into The Times;' he wrote to Melbourne, 'that I have paid a long visit to O'Connell from which it is inferred that I have been a party to some supposed arrangement by which Repeal is to be given up & what is called Federalisation is to be supported. I have done many foolish things in my time but never quite so foolish as this. (39)

Monteagle continued to discuss Irish affairs in the letter to Melbourne written from Mount Trenchard in October 1844.

> We are very quiet here. But the attachment of the people to O'Connell is as strong as ever. I do not think there is much faith in repeal. Indeed, the bulk of the advocates of repeal support it on the grounds that it is only by bullying that anything is to be got out of England. (40)

His comments on Repeal and the reasons behind the movement are interesting. He was honest and clear-sighted enough to admit to the people's feeling for O'Connell but in his opinion Repeal was not a deeply held conviction. It may be his own firm belief in the Union that inclined him to this latter interpretation.

In the same letter he commented on the Devon Commission. The Commission had been set up under the Earl of Devon to enquire into relations between landlord and tenant. As a result of the Commission Peel introduced a Bill to ensure that outgoing tenants should receive some compensation for improvements they had made to their holdings. However, this aroused too much opposition and the Bill was withdrawn.(41) Monteagle summed up his feelings on the Commission in one word 'humbug .. '(42) He felt that what was really needed by the rulers of Ireland was a wise man to tell them how to employ the vast population of the country because it was 'infinitely beyond our power of employing them profitably...' (43)

As may be seen from many of the letters quoted Monteagle lost none of his interest in politics because he had resigned from the Cabinet. He had developed opinions on almost every important topic of the time.

Chapter 14.

The Famine, 1845-1850.

The famine of the second half of the 1840s was the worst disaster ever to strike modern Ireland. Its beginnings were hardly noticed in London at the time. Charles Spring Rice writing to his father Lord Monteagle, in October 1845 mentioned the potato shortage in the following relatively casual manner.

> I shall be very glad to hear what you think about the potatoes - It was reported in the city yesterday that the accounts were exaggerated, but with the prices already high in England & rising every market & a great competition for supplies everywhere on the Continent, the present prospects are not pleasant.' (1)

However, as the autumn progressed the crisis deepened and Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister in a cabinet report to the Queen informed her that he had laid all of the information he had collected 'on the unfortunate failure of the potato' (2) before the Cabinet. Clearly the Government had begun to realise the seriousness of the situation for he went on to inform the Queen that Parliament was prorogued until 27 November but it could be recalled within a fortnight. In his report of the 5 November Peel stated that there were important differences within the Cabinet in relation to the correct measures to cope with the 'scarcity in Ireland'. (3) Peel had received letters from Lord Bessborough and Mr. Vesey MP for Queens County which led to the conclusion that the reports of shortages had been exaggerated. (4) At a Cabinet meeting on 19 November, it was decided to prorogue Parliament until 16 December and a Commission was set up 'to take

precautionary measures against the calamities from scarcity and disease to be apprehended from the failure of the Potato Crop'.(5) It is clear from this that Peel took the matter very seriously indeed and was not lulled into a false feeling of security by misleading reports from Ireland.

The extreme shortage of food in Ireland brought the matter of the Corn Laws to the centre of the political stage for Peel expressed the opinion that the complete repeal of all duties on all foods was essential to deal with the problem. (6) In late November the Cabinet agreed to special relief measures for Ireland and to the secret importation of maize from America. Peel also insisted that these actions must be accompanied by agreement to abandon the Corn Laws. (7) One eminent historian on looking at the question of the Corn Laws has put forward the following reason why Peel took the decision to abandon them in November 1845. 'It was not as if such actions could have a dramatic effect on the food supply in Ireland, given the fact that the Irish peasantry just could not afford to buy grain, and supplies from Europe were in any case limited. For Peel, opening the ports was in the first place a moral gesture, and part and parcel of his policy of conciliation in Ireland. To maintain the Corn Laws while Irishmen starved would be intolerable. Furthermore he had convinced himself that, given the state of public opinion, once suspended it would be impossible to re-impose the Corn Laws without a political furore which he was determined to avoid. In all this Peel was doubtless sincere. But it is also important to realise that by late 1845 he no longer had any faith in the Corn Laws and was unprepared to go on defending them.' (8)

Peel's Government was defeated in the House of Commons on 26 June 1846 just a few hours after the House of Lords agreed to the repeal of the Corn Laws. The fall from power was brought about by a

Coercion Bill for Ireland. Therefore in the summer of 1846 the Whigs returned to power under Lord John Russell.

Blight again destroyed the 1846 potato harvest and Lord Monteagle's public statements on the matter seem vague and ambiguous. In August 1846 he made a speech in the House of Lords on the Constabulary Force (Ireland) Bill in which he made a passing reference to the distress in Ireland. Lord Monteagle pointed out that the Imperial Treasury already paid two-thirds of the expenses of the constabulary fund in Ireland and this Bill would, if carried place the whole of that charge on the State. It was intended that the Bill would remove nearly all local authority over the police. The main result of carrying this measure would be the saving of £160,000 a year to the landlords of Ireland. 'Now' Lord Monteagle continued, 'he was not inclined to express any opinion adverse to the landlords of Ireland for he thought they had often been most unfairly blamed; but he would remark that under the present circumstances of that country it would be more desirable to apply that sum to the relief of those who required more than the landlords.' (9) It is very difficult to work out from this statement whether Monteagle was more concerned with the question of local control over the police or the matter of feeding the hungry in Ireland. However, later in the same session of Parliament he expressed more of his ideas on the distress in Ireland. For example he agreed with Lord Lansdowne, the Lord President of the Council that the Government should not purchase the Indian corn which was required in Ireland but should depend on private speculators for its importation and sale. (10) This shows that he was still a dedicated believer in laissez-faire economics. However, he did scold an almost empty House of Lords for belatedly discussing the employment of people in order to provide relief for the hungry in Ireland. (11) As he continued with his speech doubt was cast

on his strict belief in free trade.

> It ought to be recollected that the peasantry of Ireland grow their own food, and they were, by this disease of the potato crop, deprived of the first necessity of life. Under these circumstances therefore, however, they might respect the doctrines of strict political science and non-interference yet they would not be doing their duty as legislators if they stood by and allowed the people to perish without interfering to prevent it. He had great confidence in the effect which would be produced by a free trade in Indian corn and it afforded him great satisfaction to find that the people of Ireland had not only accommodated themselves to the use of Indian corn as food, but had begun to prefer it to their usual food. (12)

From this part of his speech it appeared that Monteagle subscribed to the free trade doctrine as long as it supplied people with food. If the food was not forthcoming then it seemed that he was prepared to step outside the confines of doctrine.

He also discussed relief works in his speech.

> He contended the groundwork of their measure should have been the "profitable" employment of the people. But if they set their baronial sessions to work without reference to "profitable" employment they would be making "relief" the only object whilst they would be wasting capital and destroying the funds that would employ labour. (13)

It can be seen from this speech that Monteagle had given a lot of thought to the terrible problems facing Ireland and he appeared to have a practical compassion and understanding for the country and its people which was lacking in the Cabinet.

On his way home to Mount Trenchard in September of that year Monteagle saw at first hand how the blight had destroyed the entire potato crop. He wrote to Charles Edward Trevelyan, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, describing the terrifying scene which greeted him on his journey from Dublin to County Limerick. 'I have travelled about 160 English miles from Dublin to this place without seeing one single potato field which was not blighted.' (14)

The Earl of Bessborough, who had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in July 1846 wrote to Monteagle concerning the new Relief Act. Bessborough wanted to interpret it in such a way as to enable him to employ people upon schemes which could benefit individual landlords, in other words he also wanted to engage people in "profitable" work. A correspondence he had with the Prime Minister, led him to believe that this might be possible but in order to get more clarity on the matter he sent Redington, the Under Secretary for Ireland, to London. Redington had a conversation with Trevelyan who was unsympathetic to Bessborough's idea for he saw it as a means of favouring Irish landlords. (15) In order to be truly just the Government would have to extend such preferential treatment to all the landlords of the United Kingdom and Trevelyan felt that Parliament would never approve of such a step. Bessborough asked Monteagle to try and change Trevelyan's mind. 'You know Trevelyan well you might be able to open his eyes....' (16) This gives some indication of the influence

Monteagle still retained in Government circles. It also shows that his opinions, which differed from those of the Cabinet, were well known in Ireland.

His reply to this letter from the Lord Lieutenant gives an indication of how Monteagle's attitude had changed as a result of moving from the relative security and prosperity of Britain to the chaos and starvation of Ireland. He seemed full of bitterness and despair. The distress was too widespread, he felt, for public works to provide an adequate solution when they were limited chiefly to the building of roads and bridges. 'If you ask me to suggest roads in this neighbourhood which I can make or mend so as to provide employment for a starving people, I can hardly suggest to you employment enough to furnish our people with a breakfast'. (17) However, he felt that private means offered an ample source of support for the people; the system of taxation should compel landlords to exert themselves in order to help the starving people. Monteagle went on to state that he hoped that Bessborough could have the Relief Act moulded and fashioned in such a manner 'so as to make it applicable to works of a different description from roads & bridges....' (18) If this could not be done Monteagle felt that neither the Lord Lieutenant nor the people of Ireland themselves would escape the most terrible consequences for he stated 'the sooner you determine that Parliament shall meet in November to amend the law, the greater will be your safety & that of the Irish public likewise.' (19)

Monteagle had views on handling the crisis in Ireland which differed very considerably from those of his Whig colleagues in power. He, of course, lived for some months in every year in Ireland; he saw for himself people dying from lack of food. By contrast, the reactions of the Prime Minister, Trevelyan and Labouchere, the

Chief Secretary for Ireland seemed superficial, vindictive and silly. They seemed unaware of the depth of the tragedy. This is shown clearly in Trevelyan's answer to Bessborough's request in relation to "profitable" work. He feared that it would show favour to Irish landlords; the country was full of people dying from starvation and the Treasury was concerned about appearances. The attitude of the Prime Minister was strange for a man from whom one would expect a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the country he ruled. As his biographer Prest has written: 'Lord John identified the Irish land owners as the authors of the famine, and he bitterly accused his old colleague Monteagle and his fellow landlords of seeking reward for the duties they had neglected.' (20) This is certainly a very superficial conclusion on Russell's part. Economists at the present time, writing on the subject of Ireland's Great Famine cannot give just one reason for the dreadful situation in which the country found itself. The terrible crisis of the 1840s has been the subject of a detailed economic analysis by Joel Mokyr who has the following to say about the causes of Irish poverty.

> Why did Ireland starve? To start with, it should be emphasized that Irish poverty was not really one single "event". Rather, we are dealing with a series of related but separate phenomena which did not necessarily share the same causal mechanisms. Irish agriculture was poor and backward. Ireland did not undergo an industrial revolution. The Irish potato crop failed in the 1840s. These three "events" were all part of Ireland's economic plight, but they were not necessarily caused by the same factors. Nor did they inexorably lead to each other,

although feedback mechanisms no doubt existed. It should, then, come as no surprise, that the question "Why Ireland Starved?" cannot be answered in a single sentence.' (21)

It is surely not unreasonable to expect that Russell and his Cabinet should have seen Ireland at this time of extreme crisis in a more complex and compassionate way than they did.

111

At a more local level Monteagle had pressing worries about getting Indian meal safely from Limerick city to Foynes, the village on the banks of the Shannon estuary which is closest to Mount Trenchard. However, price was his main worry. Costs were already high for Indian meal but they would go considerably higher when the winter advanced and demand increased. Another worry Monteagle had was the problem of milling the Indian corn. In his district there were three mills, apart from the mill at Askeaton which was owned by the Russells, a rich family of mill owners from Limerick. The mill at Newbridge could only be used for wheat; the one at Loughill was almost useless and that at Mullagh could supply 120 barrels a week. When demand for the milled corn became really pressing he feared that the people would be in the hands of 'a close monopoly'. (22) He could see nothing but disaster ahead. 'Already we hear that the people have been killing sheep in the fields. This portends a desert first & then a battlefield'. (23)

Since returning to Ireland in September, Monteagle had attended the meetings of the Relief Committee at Shanagolden. Here he found that the work was honestly and carefully done. The Committee had a fund of £465, made up of a government grant of £180

and the remainder came from private subscriptions.

Labouchere, the Chief Secretary, in September 1846, wrote a letter to all county lieutenants. It contained a recommendation which was to be passed along to all relief committees that Indian meal should be sold in small quantities at the 'price of ordinary years'. (25) Monteagle felt that this instruction showed just how little Labouchere knew of Ireland, for Indian meal was a new food import to the United Kingdom as a whole. The letter also demonstrated the Secretary's lack of knowledge in other areas. The Shanagolden Relief Committee was selling meal at 1/- per stone but the purchase price, which the Committee had to pay was 1/6 per stone. If the cost of carriage from Limerick and the storage and clerical expenses were added the price should be 1/8 per stone. In order to encourage private capital to import and sell food the Shanagolden Committee eventually decided to charge 1/6 per stone. This compromise would appear to be Monteagle's idea for he continued: 'The introduction of private capital is the more important because from the lamentable universality of the failure this year persons of a better class will fall on the Indian meal & in assisting the class below them we should not inflict a wrong on the other occupiers of land.' (26)

In a letter to Lord Clarendon, President of the Board of Trade, Monteagle poured out his feelings of frustration, exhaustion and lonliness.

> Relief Committees, Special Presentment sessions, meetings of Magistrates & many other hard things with hard names have occupied me from morning till night & I am now writing after all my party have long since gone to bad, with the agreeable prospects of beginning work again

before breakfast. (27)

He also made it clear in the letter that it was his idea to raise the price of the Indian meal which was being sold by the Shanagolden Relief Committee. 'I venture to propose the simpler but truer principle of following the fluctuations of the market. My Committee were with me but what is better the people acquiesed. Still it is alarming to contemplate how high prices are likely to go.' (28)

All of Monteagle's correspondence at this time demonstrate his endless dedication to his duty. It also makes clear his understanding of the details involved in the heartbreaking job he had set himself. He had the interest and he had the knowledge which the Government in London so sadly lacked. If he had had a post in the Cabinet, or better still if he had led the Whig party, which he could have done if he had had the drive and ambition, this period in Ireland's history might not have been so tragic.

Monteagle wrote to Labouchere, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and criticized his instructions to the relief committees. 'In two essential principles <u>they will not work.</u>' (29) Labouchere wanted the relief committees to deal with the crisis parish by parish. But the parishes, as Monteagle pointed out, were not geographical units. For example, one part of the parish of Nantenan was ten miles from the other part and, in fact, was much nearer to the parish of Rathronan. This irregular division of parishes occurred in many places all over Ireland. The result of Labouchere's instruction would be that detached sections of parishes would get no help at all. Monteagle's solution was simple. 'You must leave the power to the Lieutenants to strike out the Relief Districts without limitation. If you define

you will go wrong.' (30)

In Monteagle's opinion Labouchere was also incorrect in relation to the composition of the committees. Monteagle felt that anyone who subscribed more than £1 should be a member. This would encourage people to give money. 'Further you exclude the R. Catholic curates who have been our most active & useful coajutors zealous & earnest in the performance of all those functions.' (31)

The Earl of Clarendon wrote to Monteagle and stated that neither himself or the Chancellor of the Exchequer had heard anything of the new suggestion from the Board of Works for the construction of railroad causeways as an alternative form of relief work. At the latest Cabinet meeting, held to consider the problem of supplying food in Ireland, it was decided, stated Clarendon, that the difficulties of applying money to the construction of railways were insuperable. Both Clarendon and the rest of the Cabinet considered that the plan of the Board of Works was better adapted for the wasting of money than anything else. He listed the problems in the following manner:

> .....for how are you to get over engineering obstacles or to settle the best lines, or to obtain the land, or to adjust the compensation I am at a loss to imagine & the more I think of it the more impracticable it appears to me however good in principle or desirable in practice it may be. (32)

This was not the only discouraging letter Monteagle received from Britain. Trevelyan's answer to the problem of the lack of facilities for grinding corn was to arrange for the grinding of as

much corn and meal as possible in Britain thus 'leaving the mills in Ireland to the private hands.' (33) This was the very situation that Monteagle feared for it put the people at the mercy of monopolies. In relation to the other topic which Monteagle raised, that of the purchase of handmills, Trevelyan had the following equally frustrating and unhelpful comment to make.

> Handmills, with the use of which I was familiar in India, would, I think be a valuable resource, and I am to procure some steel mills for Sir R. Routh as specimens when I receive proper directions from him; but as far as I am at present able to judge it would be difficult for the government to supply such mills in any quantity likely to be of use and it is a branch of operations which ought to be left to private management. (34)

The huge contrast between Monteagle's attitude to solving the problem of starvation in Ireland and that of the Government is explained by two basic facts: Monteagle was an Irishman living part of the time in Ireland. As Mokyr has stated, the contrast arose because 'Ireland was considered by Britain as alien and even hostile country.' (35) He goes on to amplify this theory in some detail. 'It has also been pointed out by Lebow (1977) that the British attitude to Irish poverty was quite different from British views toward their own poor. While in Britain poverty was considered the result of economic fluctuations and structural changes in the economy, Irish poverty was viewed as being caused by laziness, indifference, and ineptitude. Consequently, the

British government did not bear the same responsibility toward the Irish poor as they did in Britain.' (36)

As time passed Monteagle grew angrier and angrier with his Whig colleagues. The anger burst out in a letter he wrote to Lord Bessborough in October 1846. 'It is childish not to be prepared to act with vigour & resolution in the exigency in which we are placed. I am both an Economist and a Treasury man but after what I have seen I know the Government must be prepared to face much responsibility if they wish to keep something together. If it were not for the happy accident that I am ready to spend £4,500 of my own money in aid of a similar sum at Foynes this country would be in reality as well as in figure in a blaze. But even with the prospect of this, for the works cannot begin quite yet, we shall have infinite difficulty in struggling through.' (37) This letter gives a frightening idea of the lack of interest displayed by the London Government in the starving people of Ireland. Monteagle went on to demonstrate further the inadequate nature of the relief which did arrive. He stated that at Shanagolden and its surrounding townlands there were 250 families suffering from severe hunger, yet the works could support 35 labourers and no more. 'Is not this one of the greatest trials to which human endurance can be subjected?' (38) he asked of the Lord Lieutenant in passionate language.

Nassau Senior, the economist visited Lord Monteagle at Mount Trenchard in 1852. During the visit he had long discussions with both Monteagle and his eldest son, Stephen, as to whether or not they considered the relief measures taken during the Famine to be effective. Senior was shown some of the relief works constructed at the time. One such piece of work was a road half a

mile in length, which ended in a bog; it was of little use to anyone and yet it had cost the barony £2,000. The only power that the local ratepayers and landlords had over the relief works was that they were permitted to make suggestions as to what they considered were the most useful projects to be undertaken. They also had to propose works which would employ all who were in need. According to Monteagle this was an impossible task when one considered the limitations imposed by the Government. The works could not benefit any private individual. This was the law under the Labour Rate Act, which according to Monteagle was not introduced until the middle of August 1846 'and hurried through in ten days after almost all the Irish Members had left London.' (39)

All proposed projects for relief had to be put to a special public baronial meeting and the selection of the projects also had to be made in public. Mobs besieged the meeting, and threats and violence became commonplace. One hundred and fifty proposals were made at one meeting in the Shanagolden session house. All of them were forwarded to the Board of Works, for in the tumult and confusion it proved impossible to make any decisions. A very vivid description of the riotous behaviour in the session house was given by Monteagle's eldest son.

> Our small sessions house was filled with a mob of rioters, heaped upon one another's shoulders. Everybody was resolved to carry his own project, and to defeat his neighbour's. It was a scene of confusion and violence such as no one who has not seen an Irish mob half mad with excitement can conceive. If the Government would have acceded to our request and divided

> our barony (which is half as big as a small English county) into two or three manageable districts, we might have exercised some discretion; but in defiance of our remonstrances, they chose to throw 150 square miles into one relief district, and the consequence was, that we were neither assisted by local knowledge, nor protected by local influence. (40)

The reality which comes through from these observations is one of total and absolute confusion. It appears, if Monteagle and his son are to be believed and there seems no reason not to believe them, that eveything the Government decided upon turned out to be at best inefficient and at worst disastrous.

Another serious complaint which Monteagle made was about the exposure to the elements of the old and the sick involved in the relief works. The winter of 1846-47 was extremely severe. The workers were men, women and children. Some of the men were very old; all were miserably clothed and ill-fed.

Because the Government would not import grain all food supplies were left in private hands; therefore, food was not always available and even when it was available it was often too expensive for the people who were most in need. The results were fatal. Monteagle described, in vivid detail, the awful fate of these poor people.

> Some were rapidly carried off by fever or dysentery, others perished gradually; their legs swelled, their strength failed; many went into the workhouses to die. Many are there

> still, men and women not forty years old, who look as if they were seventy or eighty; and, in fact, are as irrecoverably infirm as if they were eighty. (41)

It appears that Monteagle lost his belief in laissez-faire economics, if his comment to Senior about the Government purchasing grain is taken at face value. He stated in a nutshell the inadequacies of the system in a famine-stricken Ireland. Private capital would not always ensure that food was there to be purchased because the returns were not attractive enough and even if food was there to be bought the really poor could not always afford it. It is logical to assume that Monteagle would not have adhered rigidly to a philosophy of non-interference in economic matters in the face of this great tragedy. This assumption rests upon other evidence. In a letter which he wrote to Sir Robert Peel as early as October 1845 Monteagle had the following to say about economics:

> .....but if we have to deal with a famishing people then adherence to ordinary rules becomes impossible & human life must be saved even though the principles of ordinary Economical science are set aside for the time. (42)

Again it does not seem too fanciful to assume that Ireland's great trial would not have led to so many deaths and hardship if Monteagle had a seat in the Cabinet during the terrible years of 1845-1850.

Monteagle further told Senior that he would have made the relief districts much smaller and would have allowed work to be done that would benefit private individuals. The able-bodied

would, therefore, have had productive work and the old, the sick and the children would have been given relief in their homes. Funding for all work should have come from both local and central funds. He acknowledged that this system would also have had its problems but it would have provided relief for the hungry and in the end there would have been something to show for both the work and the money spent on it.

The Government believed that the landlords had both the duty and the power to provide for all on their estates during the Famine. Monteagle thought that this idea was completely illogical. It was the same as expecting the owners of houses on the Marine Parade in Brighton to employ and feed all who rented their rooms. There was another difficulty here which the Government did not seem to understand. The Irish landlord could not limit the number of sub-tenants on his estate; he had the legal power to do so but if he enforced his power he ran the risk of being shot by one of the disappointed Irish. (43)

IV

Lord Monteagle always saw emigration as a solution for Ireland's problems of poverty and unemployment. During these Famine years he was chairman of a Select Committee of the House of Lords which looked into what was termed 'colonization from Ireland'.(44) However, he made it clear that he did not see emigration as the only solution to all of the problems.

> .....one who like me has given up the last two years to the subject, one who, without considering it "the one thing needful" believes it to be a needful thing & without which in many cases, all others will be fruitless or

rather cannot be tried at all. (45)

A man of Monteagle's obvious compassion looked desperately for a solution. Around him there was little but death and misery. A modern appraisal gives us some idea of the vast horror of the starvation Monteagle had to look at everyday he was in Ireland.

> Ireland's time on the cross - the terrible subsistence crisis of the 1840s - has been the subject of a monumental econometric inquiry by Joel Mokyr. Varying estimates of famine mortality abound in the academic and popular accounts. The tendency in recent years has been to settle for a figure under the politically emotive one million mark. Mokyr revises the revisionists, insisting that the true incidence of famine deaths has been substantially underestimated. He offers instead a set of estimates ranging from 1.1 to 1.5 milions. Even the lowest bound estimate, it will be noted, is far in excess of Cousens's elaborate and widely accepted computation of 0.8 millions.(46)

Monteagle saw people die daily. An insight into both his compassionate nature and his practical attitude to life is shown in a letter which he wrote to Lord Clarendon, who had become Lord Lieutenant on the death of Lord Bessborough.

> No man alive looks more anxiously for an honest excuse to return to England than I do - & John Russell expressing a wish that I should see him on Emigration subjects would seem to furnish a justification.

> But I dare not yield to it, till I can have arranged as best I can do so for the employment of my poor neighbours during the Winter. When that is done he may command me by word of mouth. (47)

The basic practicality of providing work and therefore food was Monteagle's first priority. Larger issues such as emigration were pushed into the background for some time.

However, while wanting nobody to die of starvation Monteagle believed that the country was over-populated. He summed up this idea of his in a very long letter which he wrote to Lord Clarendon on the subject of emigration. 'It is because our population is in a state of local congestion which brings imminent peril on the whole body politic that we are unable to apply those remedies which require time for their application & operation.' (48) He went on to state that emigration should be supported by an Irish Land Tax and again he took issue with Trevelyan.

> Trevelyan in his "Irish Crisis" (he will have another to write before long) seems to think that Emigration is sought as a <u>substitute</u> for other improvements. On the contrary it is in many instances a <u>condition</u> necessary to such improvements. (49)

But was emigration the solution to Ireland's problems or was Trevelyan correct in believing that it was a substitute for real improvements? An historian writing on nineteenth century emigration from Ireland has the following comment to make on this issue:

> It [emigration] facilitated the elimination of landless labourers, but made practicable the survival of large families on 'uneconomic'

> holdings by injecting into the farming sector a steady flow of cash remittances from relatives already prospering overseas. It cushioned the impact of industrial reorientation in Ulster, but helped discourage the investment of capital in other regions by depleting population, and with it the potential level of home consumption. It restricted unemployment, but also raised the ratio of unemployable dependants to persons of working age. In short, as many contemporaries believed, emigration was a palliative drug to which Irish society had grown addicted. The Irish as a race might benefit by their dispersion; yet Ireland as a nation could only suffer. (50)

Monteagle when he encouraged emigration meant well but it is doubtful if the plan really helped Ireland in the long term.

Chapter 15.

Lord Monteagle in the House of Lords.

1850-1865.

As one would expect, Lord Monteagle held very strong views on the thorny questions of the ownership and use of land in Ireland. His own estate consisted of 4,865 acres and contained a population of 1,697 people. Some farms on the estate were run to a very high standard while others were full of thistles, ragweed and rushes. The difference was due to the fact that there were different kinds of tenure. Lord Monteagle believed that the good farms were run by tenants-at-will while the badly run farms were held at feefarm rents or on long leases at low rents. (1)

On his estate the townland of Ballycormick was the one with the greatest number of paupers and it was held at feefarm rent at £2 per year. The townland of Doon Scardeen came second in the pauperism league with 33 paupers compared to Ballycormick's 59. Doon Scardeen had been let in 1800 for three lives at £10 per annum. The townlands with no paupers were all let under tenancy-at-will agreements. According to Lord Monteagle, the Irish tenant was not to be trusted with a lease because his instinct was to sublet the land so that he could have an income without any trouble. (2) Also, on his death, the tenant divided the land among his children. The picture which Monteagle gave of the difficulties of a landlord's life in nineteenth century Ireland are illuminating for he dwelt upon his limited power and his frustration in the face of poorly drafted legislation.

> And there are few districts, and in those districts few properties, in which the landlord can safely attempt to evict on breach of the covenant against subletting

> or assigning, or in which a jury of tenants will allow him to succeed in that attempt. (3)

In this statement Monteagle demonstrated the fact that the landlord did not have the almost autocratic power over his tenants which it was generally believed that he enjoyed. He continued to give further examples of how the law tied the hands of the landlord in Ireland in the statements which he made in relation to squatters on land. The squatter had no rights, therefore he had no responsibilities. He kept himself alive by petty thefts and by taking in lodgers. Because he had so little it was almost impossible to evict him. The English landlord could remove him by magistrate's order but this could not be done in Ireland. In order to rid himself of a squatter the Irish landlord had to bring an ejectment action which could take up to eighteen months to prepare and the landlord had to pay the costs. Monteagle was speaking from personal experience in this matter for he continued by stating: 'After a year's siege I ejected a squatter from the hovel, of which you see the roofless mud walls; he got back in the night through a window and I had to begin afresh.' (4)

Another of the great drawbacks to the development of Irish agriculture was, in Monteagle's opinion, lack of capital. He himself suffered greatly from the inroads made into his income by the results of the Famine. He stated this very plainly to his son Charles in a letter which he wrote in 1857.

> For three or four years my Irish property has been a loss to me not a gain and not one single farthing has been remitted to me to pay my weekly bills. But had it not been for Lady Monteagle's generous

> confidence the Mount Trenchard Estate would have been swept away. (5)

Also to Senior he stated that the principal portion of his rents went in poor rates, various local charges, improvements to the estate or were written off as irrecoverable arrears. (6) Therefore he did not have enough money to drain parts of the estate which needed it and no Irish tenant would have enough capital to do the necessary work.

Monteagle while being very compassionate was very much the conservative aristocratic landowner. This is shown in his attitude to the 'Ulster' custom. He was very much against it for two main reasons. His first reason referred to the lack of capital in Irish agriculture. Under this custom an incoming tenant lost much of his capital because he had to compensate the tenant who was leaving for his interest in the land. This meant that the new tenant was without money to invest in drainage, restocking and the purchase of new equipment. However, it seems that the second reason which he gave was that which expressed his most deeply held beliefs. Monteagle felt that the 'Ulster' custom seriously diminished the landlord's influence in the improvement of the estate. (7) It would not be too unrealistic to assume that Monteagle wished to hold on to the influence which the landlord possessed in matters other than just the improvement of the estate. Foster lists the various areas of influence over which the landlord had control in the 1850s and 1860s and it would be unreasonable to assume that a person would casually part with such power.

> The landlord class still monopolized local government as JPs, Poor Law Guardians and grand jurors, though the number of those

> qualifying for grandee status was declining, and the law-enforcement system had long passed from their control. In the county elections of the 1850s and 1860s they exerted a powerful influence, having in a sense recovered authority since the days of O'Connell. In Parliament, two-thirds of the 105 Irish MPs at Westminister in 1852 were from landed families; in 1859, 87 were landowners, 65 possessing more than 2,000 acres. The county electorate had been quadrupled by the 1850 Reform Act, but the electorate remained dominated by middling and strong farmers over whom the landlords exerted their 'fair and legitimate influence' - which depended not only upon possession of property but also upon residency.' (8)

A quotation from Monteagle's discussions with Senior gives a clear indication of what he thought of the status and function of the landlord. To modern ears it sounds paternalistic but as a statement from a nineteenth century landlord it must also be seen as enlightened and caring. However, it also gives some indication of the power and influence such a man enjoyed.

> .....we are entrusted with wealth and intelligence exceeding those of our tenants, in order that we may assist them in their difficulties, provide for them the means of education, encourage and direct their efforts as cultivators, and promote their physical moral, and intellectual improvement. (9)

Lord Monteagle was a man of a very precise and exact frame of mind. He paid great attention to details. Because of these traits in his character he came into public conflict with Gladstone in the 1850s. The conflict also indicates that he was not afraid of a fight if he felt that he was right. From 1854 to 1856 Britain was engaged in the Crimean War. This put financial pressure on the Government and some of the methods used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to raise money were sharply criticized by Monteagle.

An Exchequer Bill is an interest bearing promissory note or bill issued by the Treasury for the payment of current expenditure by the State. During a debate devoted to an Exchequer Bills Bill, held in the House of Lords in March 1855 Monteagle stated that when Gladstone, the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked Parliament in 1854 for the sum of £1,750,000 in Exchequer Bills he had stated that as much of the £1,750,000 as had been raised should be paid off at the close of the year. He went on to state that Gladstone was now asking Parliament to renew these same Bills without any notice of a change of intention. This amounted to a breach of faith or at least gave Parliament just cause for complaint. Gladstone was naturally upset and wrote to Lord Monteagle and asked '.....upon what authority you have imputed to me the promise above described?' (10) In reply Monteagle referred Gladstone to his [Gladstone's] speech of the 6 March 1854. He pointed out that the Gladstone had made the following statement:

> These Exchequer-bills (£1,750,000) are to be raised simply in anticipation of supplies for which Parliament will have given authority, and when the supplies are in, these Exchequer-bills

will be paid off, out of these supplies
and no more will be heard of them.'(11)

The Exchequer expected an increased income from the augmented income tax which it was estimated by Gladstone would bring in £3,307,000 by the Christmas of 1854. The £1,750,000 in Exchequer Bills was therefore issued to provide for the interval which would elapse before the taxes came into the hands of the Government and the Chancellor promised that the Exchequer Bills 'will be paid out of the growing produce of the revenue.' (12)

During a speech on financial matters delivered on 23 May 1854, Gladstone reiterated the same message.

> As far as the Government is concerned there has been no change in their intentions and announcements from the commencement. The proposals of the Government are twofold. They want (firstly) an enlargement of the permanent income tax and (secondly) they want to make a temporary provision of funds to supply the wants of the Exchequer during the interval before the new taxes come into play. (13)

Therefore, taking all of this evidence into account, it was plain, Monteagle stated, that he had said nothing in his own speech in the Lords that Gladstone himself had not already said. He concluded his answer to Gladstone by asking whether any notice had been given of the proposed change. He himself had looked up the reports of Parliamentary Proceedings and had questioned members of both Houses but he could not find any words from a member of the Government which gave an indication that the Bill included the £1,750,000 together with the ordinary annual Exchequer Bills to be exchanged. The Bill had been conducted through all of its stages without any reference being made to the

changed intentions relating to the £1,750,000 in Exchequer Bills. Monteagle made it very clear to Gladstone that he considered the Government members of the Lords were lacking in both efficiency and an understanding of financial matters when he made the following statement:

> Indeed, though I had given four days' notice of intention of discussing the Bill on the third reading, I must express my doubts whether any one of your colleagues in the Lords were aware of the peculiarity of the case.' (14)

He was also, of course, making it clear that he considered Gladstone lacked a thorough knowledge of the intricacies of Parliamentary procedure and the finer details necessary for management of the Exchequer because he was about to convert these temporary Bills into securities which he described as permanent. Monteagle severely scolded Gladstone in a letter which he wrote in March 1855.

> You apply to Parliament for authority to issue temporary bills, at a short date, for £1,750,000 and having issued them, without notice to Parliament or explanations of any kind, you propose to convert them into securities which you describe as permanent, and which you have designated as 'the falsely called supply bills.' (15)

In his reply Gladstone confirmed that the intention of his speech of the 6 March 1854 was to make it clear 'that if the extra demands for military expenditure did not proceed beyond the amount then asked, the Exchequer-bills in question should be paid off.' (16) However, he went on to point out that his speech made it

perfectly clear that this would apply to listed and defined services. Gladstone told the House of Commons on 8 May 1854 that a margin for unforseen expenditures was necessary and that the £1,750,000 Exchequer Bills formed part of that margin. Gladstone summed up what he considered to be the kernel of the matter in the following sentence. 'Perhaps, however, it may be replied that the whole question is whether Parliament ought to have been better informed when the Exchequer Bills Bill was before them, that the amount voted included the £1,750,000 now in question.' (17) It would appear that Gladstone was simply attempting to play down what was a grievous error in his relations with Parliament. He made further attempts to excuse himself by reminding Monteagle that the Exchequer Bills Bill was passed on 28 February 1855 but the Ministry in which he served had resigned on 21 February 1855. 'I had no more to do with the act of presenting that Bill than your Lordship had....' (18) he protested feebly. However, Monteagle would not accept this reasoning for he pointed out that the day of the presentation of a finance bill 'by no means fixes the date of Ministerial responsibility.' (19) The presentation of a supply bill was one thing but its origin was a very different matter.

It would appear that Gladstone had blundered very badly and Lord Monteagle was the only politician who had the knowledge and the courage to take him to task. The Chancellor never forgave Monteagle for this public rebuke. In a show of innocence and bravado he requested that the entire correspondence on the issue should be sent to the newspapers. Monteagle agreed and the matter was handled by the Morning Post. Arthur Helps wrote to Monteagle on 25 March 1855 and complimented him on the way that he had handled the entire business. Helps was biased in

Monteagle's favour because his first official position on graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, was to act as Monteagle's secretary when he was chancellor of the exchequer. (20) His former secretary praised Monteagle but offered criticism for 'the needless civility which is found in your letter of the 15th inst., and which by the way does not lead to any good result with the said Gladstone, who requires to be dealt with in a clear, hard, precise Melbournian manner.' (21)

111

Lord Monteagle had clear views on Britain's foreign policy. He believed that the Ottoman Empire should be preserved in order to keep Russia curtailed. However, all of the members of the British Parliament were not of the same mind. Sir George Grey who was Home Secretary in Viscount Palmerston's first administration proposed a motion by which Britain should seek peace with Russia and put an end to the Crimean War. Monteagle was highly critical of Grey and his motion in a letter which he wrote to his son Charles, during 1855.

> Grey's motion for peace though it will not be supported will do mischief as weakening the cause of England in the eyes of the world. But what is confidently expected is that Gladstone & his followers feel & <u>will profess</u> their conviction that peace might have been honourably made on the Russian basis. (22)

It can be seen from this statement that Gladstone and Monteagle had very basic differences on more than just financial matters. In other letters to Charles written during 1855 Monteagle always

supported the war and was sarcastically critical of those who wanted peace. John Bright and Richard Cobden were among those who opposed the war with Russia. Monteagle referred to them as 'Peace preservation men' (23) who by June 1855 had 'fairly broken down....' (24) In his opinion both Gladstone and Graham had committed political suicide because of their point of view. As he put it they had 'declared in favour of the Emperor and the knout....'(25) During a debate in the House of Commons, Sir James Graham, who had been First Lord of the Admiralty in Aberdeen's Ministry even went so far as to use the words of the Russian Emperor in describing the Ottoman Empire as dead and he continued by stating that there was now nothing left but to find for it, a decent place of interment. (26) From these opinions it can be seen that Monteagle was very committed to the preservation and extension of the British Empire and the British way of life. These beliefs are very similar to those which he held on the union of Ireland with Britain. They represented a conviction that what was British was worthwhile and should be preserved at all costs.

Chapter 16.

Family and Friends, 1850-1866.

While Lord Monteagle could arouse fierce antagonism in his political opponents he was also capable of winning great loyalty and affection from colleagues, friends and members of his family. From references made during Monteagle's struggle to become Speaker of the House of Commons it appeared that the third Marquis of Lansdowne held him in very high esteem. This friendship was one of the reasons why Monteagle rose to power and influence in such a short time. Another example of the depth of affection with which he was regarded can be seen from a letter written by Arthur Helps who wrote to him declining an invitation to a dinner planned to celebrate Monteagle's birthday.

> If I were in town you might be sure I should come, for though I abominate all dinners and dinner parties as much as our friend Henry Taylor [Monteagle's son-in-law] (1) does, yet I should thoroughly enjoy being with you on your birthday and seeing you surrounded by the friends you have had from college days - and some too whom you have made afterwards, like myself who are no less heartily yours. (2)

In another letter, this time one accepting an invitation for Sunday dinner Helps reminisced about the days when he was Monteagle's secretary.

> I often think of that wonderful piece of dictation of the Pension Report, and wish that I had Gurney here and that we could drive along with similar rapidity. It is pleasant to go back to old times. I have a picture

of you in my mind, dictating in shirt sleeves, while you were dressing that no time might be lost. (3)

These two letters are full of affection and respect. Not only did Helps like Monteagle but he also held him in high esteem because of his great dedication to his duty as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Monteagle had a great need for other people's company and he got very lonely and bitter when it was not available. When writing to his son Charles from Mount Trenchard in 1858 he seemed very low-spirited. 'For the last fortnight we have been living on low diet so far as friendly society is concerned. I know not what we could have done with ourselves had it not been for Stephen de Vere [Monteagle's nephew] who stood by us like a man & will do so to the last.' (4) Monteagle was clearly feeling extremely lonely and depressed for further on in the same letter he became sarcastic and bitter. 'I hope the great event which will soon be recorded in the Morning Post of the arrival of Ld. & Lady Monteagle at their Town residence in Park Street may contribute to give some amusement to the society of London.' (5) He went on to express the hope that his relations by marriage, the Marshalls, his daughter Theodosia and her husband Henry Taylor would soon visit him.

11

During the 1850s Lord Monteagle was constantly worried about the health of his eldest son Stephen. 'Let me know what you think of Stephen' (6) he wrote to Charles in September 1854. He also wished

that Stephen had a house of his own for it would be good for his health. He had offered his own house in Park Street, London to his son but an out break of cholera in that city made him very pleased that the offer was refused.(7) As a loving father Monteagle continued to worry about Stephen's health but he hoped that the condition was not too serious. He always poured out his worries about Stephen to his second son Charles. In a letter he wrote to him in June 1855 he made the following hopeful statement:

> I cannot say that Stephen is free from cough but it is one which does not seem to trouble him much nor do I think it one which proceeds from his lungs, but solely as far as I can judge from his throat. (8)

Clearly Monteagle was a very loving and concerned father for he worried not only about Stephen's health but also about his lack of house and his income. In June 1855 Monteagle was residing at Putney Lawn because he had rented out his house in Park Street. Again in a letter to Charles he expressed his worries and plans for Stephen. 'We shall return to London as soon as Park Street is returned upon our hands by our Bishop Tenant & we can lend our house to Stephen during our visit to Ireland'. (9) He also intended to arrange a fixed income for Stephen for he felt it was necessary for health and stability. At the time he wrote this letter Monteagle's house was full of the friends which he loved to have around him and he was also expecting a visit from his grandchildren. 'Henry Taylor and Stephen's family are all our guests for the present & we have a good deal of quiet pleasant society here which is to expand itself on Wednesday into a large children's party.' (10) Monteagle not only loved his children but he was also very attached to his grandchildren.

In the autumn of that same year, 1855, Monteagle was very upset by the state of his sister's health. His sister Mary had married Sir Aubrey de Vere of Curragh Chase, Co. Limerick. Again in a letter to Charles he expressed his feelings on his sister's state of health. 'I was made weary and unhappy at my sister's appearance when we arrived. She seemed to be sadly weakened and out of spirits.' (11) However, the sight of her relations helped to bring about some improvement in her state of health.

> But I think the sight of those who were dear
> to her acted as a cordial & we are no longer
> timid or apprehensive that the transition to
> Mount Trenchard should be too much for her.
> If the weather should be favourable
> Lady Monteagle will take her down by the
> steamer tomorrow & I shall follow on
> Thursday. (12)

It is clear from this letter that Monteagle loved all of his family in a deep and sincere fashion.

As he became older his attachment seemed to deepen. Of course he now had much more time to himself and he had more time to be lonely and depressed, therefore he cherished more than ever the time spent with his children and grandchildren. In October 1863 he stayed at Netherbury Vicarage, Dorset, with his son Aubrey and his letter to Charles is full of the joy which he experienced during that visit.

> We expect on Saturday morning to take
> leave of this very happy and cheerful home
> for Park St., where we shall hope to dine
> and sleep that night - If any arrangements
> official or otherwise should bring you to

town we hope you may join us & receive & give
the most affectionate welcome you can offer or
we can give. (13)

Towards the end of the letter Monteagle again returned to write of the visit to Aubrey which was concluding and he described it in glowing phrases. 'Our visit to Aubrey which closes, as I have already announced has been like all my intercourse with my children with whom my vacation has hitherto been passed, as thoroughly happy as can possibly be conceived.' (14)

The family affection was not one-sided however. Monteagle's nephew Stephen de Vere had great love and respect for his uncle. This is seen in a letter which Stephen wrote to Monteagle in 1864.

I wish your return home had been so timed as
to enable you to form part of (the most
welcome and most genial of all) in the
family reunion. You speak of "standing
at ease" - that is the very thing all
who love you wish you to do - you have
earned it by a life of incessant labour
but when standing at ease you are working
for the benefit of those around you. (15)

Stephen de Vere wrote the above in the month of July 1864 and at that time illness had struck Monteagle. This fact is made clear by a letter to Monteagle from Lord Cranworth who wrote that the illness was 'owing to your having forgotten that at our age a late night followed by a very long journey, is not too easy a matter to us as it was half a century ago.' (16) By October of that year he had not fully recovered for when writing to Charles he stated the following: 'I am not quite so strong as those who love me might wish. But I am careful and do what I

can to take care of my health.' (17) Charles had a child born to him on 13 September 1864; he named the boy Gerald and Monteagle was very pleased by this choice. 'I am glad that you should have in the latter case picked up our old Florentine ancestral name. This will make a variety & will sound well & look well in our table of descent...' (18) Monteagle was referring to the fact that his own grandfather Thomas Rice had married Mary, a sister of Robert Fitzgerald, the Knight of Kerry. The Fitzgeralds claimed that they were among the oldest and wealthiest families in Tuscany more than a thousand years ago. This interest shown by Monteagle in the family names indicates that his declining health had not robbed him of any of his intellectual activity.

While his own health was giving him some difficulties Monteagle continued to worry about that of his eldest son Stephen. Charles wrote to his father in 1862 and described a visit which Stephen had paid to his house.

> Stephen left us yesterday for Sheen. He has been in capital spirits and we have enjoyed his visit. He is careful about himself and hopeful. I said what I could as to going abroad but found I could not say much without risk of doing more harm than good. I certainly think him stronger than when he was last in England - One afternoon he came in after walking, very much fatigued, but showed great power of rallying in the evening. (19)

Stephen was also hopeful about the state of his own health. Writing to his father from Ireland in October 1864 he had the following report to pass along from the local doctor: 'Dr. Hayes called yesterday and gave a very good report of my chest.' (20)

Finally Stephen did decide to take a trip to the Mediterranean for his health and he left from Liverpool on 18 November 1864. Unfortunately the passage was very rough, particularly in the Bay of Biscay. (21) Monteagle wrote to his friend Blakesley, in an unsteady and almost illegible hand and asked him to write to Stephen at Malta, for letters from home would help him to keep happy and cheerful. Even with his own declining strength Monteagle still worried about his son. Stephen's sons were joining their grandfather at his house in Park Street for Christmas. One was coming from Harrow and another from a naval academy. Indeed Monteagle had a full house for the Christmas of 1864, for Charles his wife and their children and Aubrey 'the family Chaplain' (22) as his father called him, also joined him in London for the celebrations.

The trip abroad did not have the hoped for result and Stephen died on 9 May 1865, on his way home from the Mediterranean on board the steam ship Tripoli. (23) When replying to Lord Houghton's letter of condolence Monteagle wrote that his daughter-in-law Ellen bore her sorrow with a 'calm resignation which nothing but the strength which comes from on high can give.' (24) He himself had gone to stay at East Sheen with his daughter Theodosia and her husband Henry Taylor. One particular paragraph of this letter is very ambiguous. It seems to suggest that he was not allowed to attend Stephen's funeral in Ireland for fear that he might die as a result of the stress of the event.

> A painful restraint was imposed on me by
> those dearest to me to stay here, that till
> some repose had been granted it might
> neither be safe or tender to those
> whose grief is fresh that I should join
> him in Ireland..... (25)

Stephen was buried in the grounds of the Church of Ireland church, Shanagolden, Co. Limerick. (26) By August 1865 Monteagle was well enough to return to Mount Trenchard. He wrote to Charles and told him of the cross which the tenants were erecting in Stephen's memory.

> We are meditating where to erect our cross, the Memorial of the Tenants who have subscribed more than £500 in honour of one whom they all loved so dearly & admired so much. (27)

They chose a site on a rock high above the harbour and village of Foynes where the cross still stands.

The tragic death of his eldest son was not the only trouble which Monteagle had to face in the summer of 1865. Sir Alexander Spearman, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury had been given a difficult task to perform by Gladstone, who was again Chancellor of the Exchequer. Gladstone instructed Spearman to find out exactly what Lord Monteagle felt about proposed changes in the administration of the Exchequer. Spearman in his letter to Gladstone stated the following:

> I have seen Ld. Monteagle who authorized me to tell you that he will not allow any feelings of his own to interpose a difficulty in any way if the Government think it important to give early effect to some changes in the Exchequer arrangements which in their opinion will be advantageous to the Public Service, but which cannot be carried out while he continues to hold the office of Comptroller General (28)

When Monteagle saw the writing on the wall he intended to depart with pride and dignity. With this information from Spearman Gladstone wrote to Monteagle and pointed out that the Government wanted to make important changes concerning the comptrollership of the Exchequer. He continued by suggesting that Monteagle had spent many years in the service of the public and therefore he should resign and have a rest. Upon reading this letter it seems that Gladstone was trying to excuse himself for he knew that what he was doing was insensitive to say the least. He was also careful to offer Monteagle an attractive pension. 'I have to state' he wrote, 'that if it be agreeable to you to quit the office you now hold, Lord Palmerston will advise the Crown to grant to you the Secretary of State's pension since in abeyance.' (29) The letter was concluded with an oblique reference to Stephen's death. 'I need hardly say how deeply I regretted the cause which prevented my seeing you at my table on the Queen's birthday.' (30) It does appear that Gladstone was acting in a rather ruthless fashion. He was dealing with an old man who had just lost his eldest son. Monteagle's world was slipping away from him for his health was very bad and Gladstone was aware of this fact. In spite of all these reasons he pushed ahead with plans that would rob Monteagle of his power and activity; it would have been kinder if Gladstone had decided to wait until he retired from office or died in harness.

Replying to Gladstone's letter Monteagle was proud, courteous and resigned to the inevitable.

> Nothing could be more painful to me or I hope less consistent with the principles of my public life than to hold possession of my office if that were found inconsistent with its improved organization or delay its reform.

> I therefore at once express my readiness to tender my resignation at such time as it should be convenient to Her Majesty's Government to receive it. (31)

However he did allow a personal and rather sad note to creep into his letter and it adds to the belief that Gladstone was acting in an unfeeling and ruthless fashion.

> I confess I do not quit this office in which I have served for a quarter of a century without some emotion nor do I take leave of those who have served under my authority without some regret. They have proved their ability zeal and experience. (32)

The suggestion was raised in the House of Commons that Gladstone's actions lacked consideration for Monteagle. Monteagle heard this and wrote to Gladstone stating that if this charge was repeated in the House of Lords he would contradict it. 'I should have been prepared to state that such statement was wholly without foundation' he wrote to Gladstone, 'as I had already thanked you for the manner in which you had proceeded.'(33) It does appear that Monteagle was clinging to his dignity for few would doubt that Gladstone's actions lacked kindness.

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One of the last letters which Monteagle was ever to write was addressed to his son Charles from Mount Trenchard on 29 January 1866. It contained the following hopeful message:

> I hope & think that I am getting better by degrees & shall do so still more rapidly when permitted to take some exercise & a little more

food, of which I feel an increasing

want daily.....(34)

However, Lord Monteagle was not improving and he died at 5 a.m. on Wednesday, 7 February 1866. He was buried on Tuesday 13 February at Shanagolden in a large grave which contained the remains of his parents, his first wife and his eldest son. (35)

Lord Monteagle once described himself as 'an old Foxite Whig'.(1) According to an historian of Britain's political parties the chief tenets of 'Whig reformist faith' (2) were religious concessions in Ireland and parliamentary reform. Fox opposed the outbreak of war with France; he supported the cause of parliamentary reform when the matter was debated in the House of Commons in May 1793 and he was in favour of concessions to Roman Catholics. (3)

Monteagle does not appear to have been a very radical Whig when his political beliefs are contrasted with those of Fox. For example he was not very dedicated to Catholic Emancipation and only embraced the concept after six years in the House of Commons. Even then he did not really believe that Catholics could be trusted to act as loyal subjects of the Crown for he was in favour of statutory restrictions on the power of the Vatican in religious matters such as the appointment of bishops.

If one looks at Lord Monteagle's opinions in relation to the Crimean war, his dislike of the Russian Empire is very obvious and as has been shown he supported Great Britain's position during the period 1854 to 1856. It therefore seems logical to suppose that he would not have backed Fox in his opposition to the war with Revolutionary France, for French radical ideas posed a threat to the political stability of Britain just as the Russian Empire posed a military threat by seeking to widen its sphere of influence in the eastern Mediterranean.

Without doubt Monteagle had a belief in justice as it was understood in his time. Before he entered the Commons he was a magistrate and in this capacity he arrested Scanlan, the murderer

of Eily O'Connor who is more usually known as the Colleen Bawn. The significance of this action lay in the fact that Scanlan was a member of the local gentry who confidently assumed that he was above the law. Monteagle saw his duty and performed it even though the Spring Rice and Scanlan families were close friends.

It appears that Monteagle possessed a pleasing personality which won him many friends on his way through life. One particular friend the Marquis of Lansdowne, was very influential in forwarding his political career in Britain while his marriage into the wealthy and influential Pery family was a great help in launching his political career in Limerick.

Financial matters seem to have been the greatest focus of Monteagle's interest. His ideas were greatly influenced by the laissez-faire philosophy current at the time. However, his belief in this policy was not absolutely rigid for during the Famine the sight of the old and sick wasting away from starvation touched his heart and influenced him to suggest that a more flexible approach to the tragedy was urgently needed. In a strange way he could be remembered as a great 'might have been' in Irish history. If he had been prime minister in 1846 instead of Russell it seems reasonable to speculate that he would have handled the situation in Ireland very differently, and the level of death and suffering would have been greatly reduced. At least his actions would have indicated to the people of Ireland that they were not being abandoned to die from lack of food by an unfeeling government. Post-Famine anti-British feeling might have been less bitter, so denying the Fenians and their ideological successors much support. Perhaps the Union of Ireland and Britain might even have survived in these circumstances!

Monteagle was passionate in his attachment to the Union for he saw it as a source of great benefit to Ireland and Britain. It was a strange twist of fate that he did not have sufficient ambition to reach out for the greatest political prize in the Empire, namely the post of prime minister, and thereby, perhaps, help to preserve this bond to which he was so committed.

Monteagle was not a great statesman but he appears to have been a very competent administrator. He lacked the ability to formulate new policies and overcome deep-rooted problems. For example as Secretary of State for the Colonies he made no new suggestions to solve the problems in Canada and as Chancellor of the Exchequer he could not solve the huge economic crisis into which Great Britain was plunged from 1837 onwards.

As a committed Whig he supported the reform of the House of Commons in the early 1830s but he was reluctant to go any further than the limits set by the 1832 Reform Act. In this he shared the feelings of most of the members of his party, including Lord John Russell, Earl Grey and Lord Melbourne.

Perhaps the chief tenet of Monteagle's political faith was his belief in the Union and it was this belief which earned him the very vocal criticism to which he was subjected by Daniel O'Connell and his pro-Repeal supporters. The odium in which he was held because of his violent disagreement with O'Connell is summed up in a speech delivered by Richard Lalor Sheil.

> He [Monteagle] sees the poor laws from the Shannon as he sees Repeal from the Thames. He takes a Treasury view of the one, and a Mount Trenchard view of the other.... (4)

Sheil continued his attack by putting his finger upon a very interesting point; Monteagle appeared to be more English than the English themselves.

> He designates himself as a West-Briton. He does himself an injustice for he is more than English.(5)

However, while Sheil meant this as a bitter criticism Monteagle looked upon it as a high compliment for he passionately desired a world where the Irish and the English were indistinguishable in every possible way. Sheil's picturesque image in the following extract from this speech summed up much of what Monteagle desired for all Irish people.

> All the mud of his native Shannon has not only been washed off by his ablutions in Cam, but he comes more fresh and glossy from the academic water than those who at their birth were immersed in the classic stream. (6)

There is little logic in judging a nineteenth century man by the standards of the 1990s. Monteagle must be assessed in the context of his own time. From that viewpoint he could be summed up as being cautiously progressive, compassionate, committed to the continuance of aristocratic government and utterly dedicated to being British.

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'The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice' is the title of a painting by William Turner of Oxford. It hangs in the offices of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, 96 O'Connell Street, Limerick. It was painted to celebrate the return of Spring Rice as Whig MP for the city in 1820. The Chamber of Commerce also has a full-length portrait of Spring Rice on display in its Board Room. It was painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee, President of the Royal Academy, and hung in the Chamber's offices on 19 December, 1822. The cost of the work was £227.10.0. I am indebted to J. Woods, Manager of Limerick Chamber of Commerce, for the above information.

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