

of Knock<sup>1</sup> in a sermon of Sunday 24th May attacked John O'Kane and all involved in organising meetings as preparing the country for revolution. The following Sunday a mass-meeting at Knock was chaired by a local farmer who warned the Archdeacon "don't stand between the people and their rights; if you do you must... accept the consequences"<sup>2</sup>.

Canon Bourke immediately reduced rents by 25%. (Two years later the Bourke rent was again reduced, this time by 40%.)

As news of the success of the Irishtown and Knock meetings spread throughout the west, Daly received requests to organise more such meetings. Among tenant farmers there was a growing sense of panic. The weather had turned cold and wet and a low yielding harvest was now generally forecast. Because of the economic depression in Britain in 1879, migratory labourers were forced to stay at home. Panic among tenants increased their passion for the new movement.

#### PARNELL BECOMES INVOLVED

Parnell took an intense interest in the Irishtown event but the clerical denunciations and the I.R.B. involvement caused him to shy away from supporting the movement immediately. Yet he expected that the radical element of the Home Rule Party would support land agitation.

I.R.B. leaders felt that Parnell's immediate involvement was vital to the organisation's fund raising drive in America as Parnell was one of the most respected and best known Irish men of the time.

Parnell was persuaded to speak at a land reform meeting proposed for Westport and to play a leading role in the fledgling land reform organisation by John Devoy and Michael Davitt at a meeting in Morrison's Hotel, Dublin held on the day of the Knock land reform meeting. Davitt had previously

<sup>1</sup> Knock was later that year to become popular as the place of Marian Apparitions.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Connaught Telegraph' 7th June 1879.

Local folklore suggests that an I.R.B. cell in the Knock area threatened to cut off Archdeacon Kavanagh's ears because of his pro-landlord stance.

met Parnell on several occasions on the subject of forming branches of a Home Rule/Land Reform organisation, but Parnell (on the advice of Isaac Butt M.P.) was afraid of possible litigation should any branch member break the law.

The three men resolved that peasant proprietorship was to be their chief objective in furthering their common goal of self rule for Ireland. Like Davitt, Parnell too saw the new movement chiefly as a device to an end: "I would not have taken off my coat and gone to this work if I had not known that we were laying the foundation in this movement for the regeneration of our legislative independence", he later noted from the platform at the meeting in Galway on October 20th.

Devoy felt that peasant proprietorship would be an interim step to land nationalisation which would follow the establishment of an independent Ireland.

Davitt later regretted his lack of forethought in not visualising that for every landowner the new movement might remove, it would replace with one hundred smaller ones. But in June 1879 he simply saw land agitation as a means of removing the landlords. He later commented, "The more rent for the landlord we abolished, the weaker became the organism of the system which had almost exterminated our race in Ireland and the cry of 'no rent' was soon heard from one end of Mayo to the other".

A campaign for the nationalisation of the land was not possible for two reasons: If such a campaign were successful, and its chances were slim, the land would become the property of the State and no means but outright military rebellion would secure Irish independence if land became State property. Secondly, in the minds of supporters of the movement the slogan 'The Land of Ireland for the People of Ireland' had come to be interpreted as meaning tenant proprietorship. The success of the Irishtown meeting meant it was now too late to change this.

Daly too regretted that the campaign for land reform became aimed exclusively at tenant proprietorship. He recognised that peasant proprietorship would create "a class