Landlord William Scully

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Privilege and Tragedy: The Early Years

"FEARFUL AGRARIAN OUTRAGE IN TIPPERARY. ATTACK ON WILLIAM SCULLY, Esq." These startling words in the small-type headlines of 1868 alerted Irish and English readers to the "terrible affair at Ballycohey" on August 14, when landlord Scully and two policemen were wounded, and Scully's agent and another constable were killed. Having received two shots in the jaw, one in the neck, and others in his body, Scully was not expected to recover. In the usual sense, neither William Scully nor his family could be classified as alien.

In William Scully's case, the struggle had begun less than eight miles away, in Kilfeacle House in county Tipperary, on November 23, 1821, when he was born to Denys Scully and his wife, Catherine Eyre Scully. For four hundred years the Scullys had been a prominent landholding Irish-Catholic family in British-dominated Ireland. This fifth son and ninth child, christened William Francis John, had such a lowly ranking in a large family that his future position in Ireland, even among the lesser gentry, seemed unassured.

Ireland, for many years, had been controlled by a Protestant English government. Land was owned, for the most part, by English nobles who were loyal to the crown and to the Church of England. Blood lines meant everything to this group of nobles. These Anglo-Saxons felt that they were superior to the Celtic races, an attitude that was bitterly resented by most of
the Irish peasants who were Catholic. They served in an inferior role as servants, farmers, and herdsmen for the landlord class. Members of this peasant class, who had the lowest income in the land, had few privileges, and their burdens were heavy. Long on memory, they recalled an earlier, brighter time, when clan chieftains, their own ancestors, owned and controlled the Emerald Isle. To them it seemed almost like yesterday, and it changed nothing in their minds that for hundreds of years, English landlords and their families had been born in Ireland, had lived there, and had died there. To the steadfast Irish the English were aliens, not only because of the violent overthrow of earlier Irish governments and because of their ownership of Irish land, but because of differences in religious commitment. A belief persisted among Irish peasants that "ancient Irish families would recover their forfeited estates."4

The Scully family was descended from the O'Scolaidhe clan, an Irish sept which originally was located in Westmeath. During the twelfth century, pressure from Anglo-Norman invaders pushed most of the family into county Tipperary and elsewhere.5 Denys could easily trace his lineage back six generations, to James Scully, born April 12, 1571, in King's County.6 After the Restoration of Charles II in the seventeenth century, members of the family again settled in county Tipperary near Cashel. There, in the "Golden Vein," they occupied some of the most fertile soil in all of Ireland.

The Kilfeacle location has a long recorded history. Behind the Kilfeacle church, on the road between Tipperary and Golden, was a mote or hill on which an English castle had been erected in the late twelfth century. Various governors of Ireland had lived there as late as the sixteenth century. Later the castle was destroyed, and all brass and iron was removed.7 The Kilfeacle manor house, in the barony of Clanwilliam, was about a half mile north, behind high stone walls erected to the west of a stream that flowed through the valley. A further half mile north were ruins of an ancient stronghold. Round about in the bright-green grasslands were many hovels and homes of other families. In the late seventeenth century, taxes were paid on twenty-one hearths in Kilfeacle town, an indication of the number of dwellings at the time.8

To have Irish catholic families such as the Scullys continuing as landlords and members of the lesser gentry was unusual and unlikely. But the pragmatic English permitted such arrangements when the advantage was on their side. No doubt, earlier leaders of the family served the British in time of war. As gentry they were active in local government and were dependable allies to legal authority. Finally, when the British relaxed regulations that had been designed to hold down Irish Catholics, there were members of the family who served in national governmental positions.

Denys Scully, William's father, received many privileges not generally
granted to his countrymen or, for that matter, given to earlier generations of Irish Catholics. Denys's father, James, who had extensive landholdings, had his residence also at Kilfeacle. There Denys was born in 1773, the second son in a large family. He received a splendid education for the time and was permitted in 1794 to enroll in Trinity College at Cambridge University. Denys was either the first or second Catholic student at Trinity in about two hundred years. But he was not allowed to graduate, because one stipulation for graduation was that he conform to Britain's established church, a step that he would not take. In 1796 he was back in Dublin, where he was admitted to the bar, virtually the only profession then open to Irish Catholics.

By the time that Denys Scully married Mary Huddleston in 1801, he had become heir apparent to his father's position, as his older brother had died. He was slow of speech, but he made himself known by writing several pamphlets supporting the government. Early in 1805, possibly after the death of his wife, Denys was a member of an Irish emancipation deputation which unsuccessfully sought the backing of William Pitt the Younger. By this time Denys was maintaining a Dublin residence on fashionable Merrion Square, across the park from a house that was later occupied by Daniel O'Connell, whom he joined in an effort to obtain greater rights for Irishmen. At that time the character of his writing changed diametrically from its previous progovernmental stance.

Dublin, long the leading cultural and political center of Ireland, had fallen to non-Irish control during the Norman invasion of the twelfth century. A garrisoned Anglo-Norman enclave was organized around Dublin two centuries later. High stone walls, masking trees and huge estates, screened the entrances to the city that came to dominate the Irish scene. In time, colleges and universities, chapels and cathedrals, government buildings, and a business center graced the banks of the river Liffey where it emptied into Dublin Bay. The English lord lieutenant lived nearby in a large mansion on grounds that were later incorporated into Phoenix Park. His seat of governance was Dublin Castle, and his rule, to the native Irish, was that of a foreign master. Social and cultural activity in Dublin was a mixture possessing both Irish and English precedents. Irish gentry associated with their English counterparts, while members of the Irish lower classes and a small middle class had little opportunity for social contact with gentry, either native or foreign. Many landed Irish families maintained town houses in Dublin, and some Irish landlords spent only a small part of each year on their landed estates. The social setting in Dublin, for many of the Irish gentry families, provided timely intimate contact with others in this small, select upper class, an opportunity to form alliances, and a means of solidifying their position.

The marriage of Denys Scully to Catherine Eyre in 1808 brought closer
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ties with English Catholics, as her home had been at Highfield and Newholt, Derbyshire. The contractual marriage settlement of September 7, 1808, gives an idea of Denys Scully's existing fortune in describing the lands and tenements of seven farms, totaling almost sixteen hundred acres, from which he received an annual rental income of more than twelve hundred pounds. Farm names such as Ballinaclough, Knockroe, Folcherstown, Rathmacan, Gortnagap, Keil Ballyonstra, and Springmount, located in the baronies of Clanwilliam, Eliogarty, and Craunagh and in the counties of Tipperary and Kilkenny, show central ties to old traditions, and they alert one to the unique and complex character of Irish landholding rights.10 Denys received other lands when his father died in 1817.

Following his marriage to Catherine, Denys Scully began active and covert agitation to gain some measure of justice for Catholic views in Ireland.11 By 1812 he had prepared a manuscript, which was published anonymously as a small booklet with the lengthy title *A Statement of the Penal Laws, which Aggrieve the Catholics of Ireland: With Commentaries*. Legal sanctions were harshest for publishing such materials; therefore its Dublin printer, Hugh Fitzpatrick, was heavily fined and imprisoned for eighteen months.12 Since the authorship of the disruptive pamphlet was not immediately discovered, no harm came to its author. When it became general knowledge that Denys Scully was responsible for this piercing attack on English authority, his popularity among his Irish countrymen was assured. For a while there was no reprisal from the government, but the opportunity for harassment came in 1818, when Denys's father died and the estate was probated before an English-organized court. Denys's friends and his immediate family were certain that the resulting family lawsuit was instigated by the government because of his harsh criticism of English authority. The court fight was so bitter, costly, and time-consuming that Denys withdrew from public life. By the time the case was settled in his favor, his health was so enfeebled that he could not resume his public career.13

This was the life into which William Scully was born, the youngest child in a well-established landed family. His venerated grandfather had died three years before William was born. He barely got to know his own father, who was unwell and died before William's ninth birthday. The burial of his father among family graves around the ruins of an ancient cathedral on prominent, three-hundred-foot-high Rock Cashel gave a special position to this Irish family and must have made a strong impression on the mind of the young William. Later, one of William's brothers raised a mausoleum, with an elegantly carved Celtic cross, over his father's grave.

William's eldest brother, James Vincent, was twelve years his senior. As first inheritor of his father's position, James received a superb education: like his father, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge; and at the age of
twenty-one he was admitted to the bar at Gray’s Inn. By that time a major share of the family’s estates were under his direction. He was fully aware of the advantages possessed by the landlord class, almost to the state of arrogance, and he was admired by his youngest brother.

Next in line was Vincent James, who was eleven years older than William. Less was expected of a second son in a landed family, although eventually that was to change for Vincent. Denys and Catherine’s third child was another son, Rodolph Henry; and then came three daughters, Catherine Julia Mary, Mary Anne, and Juliana who died before reaching her first birthday. Thomas Joseph Denis Aloysius was four years older than William, and a second sister Juliana was two years older.

In this active upper-class family, William was the baby, the one to be coddled. Little was expected of him, and only a small portion of the family’s claim to wealth would normally reach him, for all of his older brothers had a prior right to the father’s political position. Each child, however, might be granted land in a will. With the girls in the Scully family it was different. Provision was made for them to receive annual stipends from the landholding members of the family, and when they married or went into a religious order, a dowry was provided.

Compared to his later years, this period of infancy and childhood for William was tranquil. There were many members of the immediate family, and there were numerous servants in the Scully household. The two family dwellings, at Kilfeacle and on Merrion Square in Dublin, were ninety miles apart, or two hard days by coach. Major portions of the family spent long
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periods in the Dublin house. Travel back and forth between Tipperary and Dublin was arduous and time-consuming before the railroad was built. Then, the nearby stations of Limerick Junction and Dundrum provided easy access to faster, more-comfortable trains. Occasionally, family members would travel outside Ireland, for education, rest, or recreation, and visitors flocked to the Scully manor house in Kilfeacle or to the town house, no. 13 on the south side of Merrion Square. There Catherine Scully, surrounded by silver and fine linens, was a gracious hostess for a dozen years following her husband’s death.

Typically, other things occupied the time and attention of the children. There were the procession of the seasons, the growth of crops and farm animals, play with brothers and sisters and with cousins and other children. Rudimentary learning of letters, arithmetic, and the Catholic catechism occupied many hours in the childhood years of upper-class children. Special days in the church year and days of recognition for various family members were celebrated.

For growing boys there was the Irishman’s delight in a good horse and equestrian ability, and these were fully a part of the yearning and learning of the Scully brothers. One of the privileges of their class was to ride to the hounds in a fox hunt, and it was a jealously guarded prerogative. It made no difference if the fox sought an escape through a peasant’s field and if hounds and horses tramped the crops down in pursuit. To soar over stone fences on a fine hunter was an ultimate thrill that was particularly exhilarating to several of William’s brothers. Two hunt clubs operated in the vicinity of Kilfeacle House, and in wintertime, hunts were held two or three times each week.

Another privilege of the landholding gentry was the right to possess firearms and to shoot birds and wild game. Ownership of firearms was forbidden to the lower classes, and harsh penalties were meted out to those found guilty of poaching on the game preserves of the upper classes. Peasants who were caught carrying firearms were severely punished. William and his brothers enjoyed hunting ducks on the pond below Kilfeacle House or shooting rabbits and other game in nearby fields. The possession of expensive shotguns and rifles and the ability to use them were prized in the Scully family.

William became a fine horseman, but he was not captivated by such skill. He was more intent upon preparing for a future which in all likelihood would be bereft of a sizable inheritance. No doubt there were family discussions, which he did not fully comprehend at the time, about the operations of the Scully’s bank at Tipperary, one of the few banks in Ireland to survive the financial crises of 1820 and 1825. Probably another topic of conversation was the fact that the bank came to be controlled by John Sadleir, a relative, and then it had a scandalous downfall.
The family's relationship with its tenants remained the most important business concern. Even in the 1820s county Tipperary was gaining a reputation in all of Ireland as the most likely area where Protestant landlords were an anathema. Irish peasants were quick to accept the suggestion that the hated Protestant landlords were "believers of a false religion who cannot escape perdition" and that they were "robbers of former Catholic landlords." Violence was directed toward landlords; their animals were mysteriously injured, poisoned, or killed; and their servants were terrorized. Arson was a perennial problem. Even Catholic landlords were bound to receive threats when agitation built up between tenants and landlords. Some Catholic landlords suffered bodily injury and even death from unknown assailants.

Like his older brothers, William received a basic education at Kilfeacle
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House, with some preparatory training in Dublin. Yet, while his older brother James attended Trinity College, Cambridge, and Vincent went to both Trinity College in Dublin and to Trinity College, Cambridge, William had to acquire his formal education in another, less-prestigious way. As a gangling youth, two months shy of his fifteenth birthday and approaching his mature height of six feet and two inches, he was sent to the Catholic-supported Stonyhurst College, which was operated by the Society of Jesus, near Blackburn in Lancashire (England).

As a Jesuit college, Stonyhurst could trace its Continental beginnings to 1593. Removal to Lancashire came in 1794, at the time of the French Revolution. In England it barely existed for many years because of official opposition from members of the Catholic hierarchy. Finally, in 1829, the pope sanctioned the development of Stonyhurst and other Catholic institutions in England.

To get to Stonyhurst it was necessary for William to cross the Irish Sea from Dublin to Liverpool, and then to travel some thirty miles to the northeast. There he spent a single academic year, in company with more than a hundred other boys, from September, 1836, to July, 1837. Classical education was emphasized, much the same as in other public schools in England. Because of his short stay, Stonyhurst made only a slight impression on William, and he, in turn, left little mark on this venerable college. Years later, William would say that he "had learned the economics of agriculture in schools," perhaps a reference in part to his sojourn at Stonyhurst. 15

After his year at Stonyhurst, William returned home. In the fall of 1837 he began training for a law career in the usual pattern of that time. He was apprenticed in a solicitor's office in Dublin to read law and to perform errands. Although he did not enter the law, William's several years of reading it in Dublin, under the expert guidance of an established solicitor, was an excellent preparation for the time when he began to accumulate land in the 1840s. In the meantime, James Scully was having increasing difficulties with tenants on his extensive estates, and his admiring youngest brother, William, was watching him closely. In many ways James and William were alike.

When Denys Scully died in late 1830, James inherited most of the land. He had just turned twenty-one years of age the previous month, and he was admirably equipped to be active in carrying out the landlord's duties, being college trained and already a member of the bar. James was sure of himself in his new role. A tall, powerful man, he possessed the courage of his convictions as he took over extensive properties, including Kilfeacle House.

In keeping with his landed position and his rank as a gentleman or esquire, James Scully became one of the magistrates for the South Riding of county Tipperary. This important position in local government was shared
by other leading gentry in the area; and because of it, Scully also served as a grand juror in cases called before the local judicial inquest or a court of assize. Politically, Scully was described as a "thorough uncompromising Reformer," indicating his opposition to the manner in which the Corn Laws were carried out, which was believed to be responsible for the impoverishment of Ireland. He also was, "and ever had been, a Repealer," who like his father before him was unalterably opposed to the Act of Union of 1801, which had abolished the Irish Parliament and merged the kingdoms of Ireland and England.16

One of James Scully's first actions as a landlord was to examine the rent rolls and to make minor adjustments, mostly downward. Certain tenants received a reduction of ten shillings per acre, and several tenants who were in arrears for two or three years' rent had their obligations canceled. Such tenants thought that James Scully was a good and kind landlord, and they responded with some affection and honest industry on their small holdings. However, tenants who had a reputation for idleness or disorderly behavior found landlord Scully an uncompromising master who was willing to go to great lengths to force them from his estates. He had no qualms about using every legal means, which provided immense advantages to landlords, in evicting troublesome tenants. Eviction, even though it removed the unwilling or lazy tenant from a mere existence on a piece of land that was much too small to provide an adequate return, was synonymous to banishment for most tenants. They would be forced to leave the only place known to them—their home and relations. Most tenants on Scully's estates were from families who had worked the same land for generations.

During the 1830s, agrarian outrages—the cryptic name for violent attacks on landlords—were more widely reported in the Irish press and in police records. Types of outrages ranged from broken windows, housebreaking, arson, threatening notices, and injury to or theft of property, on the one hand, to assault, robbery of arms, firing into dwellings, aggravated assault, and homicide, on the other. Landlords, their families, and those who served them were the objects of attack; and illegal groups such as the "Whiteboys" and the "Ribbonmen" organized much of their opposition. What the poorest classes particularly opposed was the landlords' effort to enlarge individual tenant holdings at the expense of smaller tenants. One example of violence occurred in 1838, when unknown attackers shot two land agents as they were passing by Ballinaclough, one of James Scully's estates.17

Other outside forces, such as the movement for enclosures in England and the development of new occupations in English mines and factories, which brought a demand for agricultural products from a growing urban market, were influencing Irish response. Given all political, religious, and
cultural factors, in addition to strong reluctance from Irish peasants to change from subsistence farming to staple agriculture, reform and modernization faced insurmountable problems. Rural Ireland, even before the famine, was a time bomb. The inevitable explosion would produce no winners.

Increasingly hard times for farmers in Ireland, in part due to changing tariff regulations of the early 1840s, pressed hardest on tenants with high or rising rents. James Scully’s tenants were gravely affected by the economic slump. To counter this, Scully, who normally employed about forty people around the manor house and on his various estates, in the summer of 1842 increased the number of his staff to more than eighty, including boys and girls as young as eleven years of age.¹⁸

Usually, Irish tenants owned their dwellings and other improvements, while the landlord owned the land. Somewhat earlier, one of Scully’s tenants sold his improvements and his lease to a new tenant for eighty pounds. He planned to use the money to emigrate to America, but then he changed his mind. He sought return of his lease for the eighty pounds, but was unwilling to pay anything extra for crops in the ground. The new tenant was opposed to a resale under those circumstances, and he appealed to Scully, who sided with him.¹⁹

By that time a number of contemporary police accounts say that James Scully had become “a severe and harsh landlord” and a grinder of the poor. From some tenants he was exacting a “rack-rent,” or very near the full annual value of the land they farmed.²⁰ In a police report of 1842, James Scully’s conduct as a landlord was described as being “at variance with a number of people to whom he set what is termed conacre at a rent of £14 per acre, half the money paid in advance. He would not allow the removal of the potatoes until he was paid the other half.” When these renters asked for “an abatement on the sum of the back rents of the crop,” Scully objected sternly, almost to the point of violence.²¹

Nevertheless, reports out of that large Irish county in late 1842 claimed that there was “Tranquility for Tipperary.” The “peace & good order” of the county, which had been so unruly in the past, was attributed to the Tory government then in power.²²

In spite of these news stories, there was no tranquility for James Scully. Anonymous threats were delivered surreptitiously to the door or pinned on the front gate of Kilfeacle House, but the landlord was unmoved—he knew his rights. As he had never married, he had only himself to protect, and he felt adequate to the task. He failed to understand the impact of his rental policies on his tenants, and when his family and friends suggested that he reduce his rentals as a protection to his own life, he refused to listen. He knew that English and Irish law gave tremendous authority to the owner of
the land, and he was sure of his own ability to handle whatever would come his way. About his only concession for his safety was his willingness to always carry his silver-mounted pocket pistol and a stiletto when he left the house. Although advised to avoid areas away from the manor house after dark, James Scully was unafraid.

On Sunday night, April 24, 1842, a note was nailed to the front door of Kilfeacle House which showed a coffin with a body lying in it and the legend “This is the last notice.” No one inside heard a sound to alert them to danger. Around 10:00 P.M., as he was preparing to retire for the night, James Scully was shot while he was standing by a closet window near his parlor in Kilfeacle House. Five shots came through the window, one striking him “in the left cheek, which carried away three of his back teeth, injured his tongue, broke his left jaw, and lodged in his right cheek.” Two bullets just missed his head, and the other two struck the wall just in front of where he was standing. The slug in Scully’s cheek was successfully removed, and his recovery began. His escape from the assassination attempt was considered providential. A hundred pounds was offered as a reward for information leading to the arrest of the culprits, but it was never claimed. 

Some arrests were made, but no one was ever brought to trial. Typically, there was a general silence from potential informers, members of the lowest class. After all, it was a case involving class against class.

In October a convicted pig thief in the Limerick gaol claimed to be one of “four armed men who attacked Mr. Scully’s house,” and he “named the man who fired the shot” that wounded Scully. But nothing came of this confession.

In the meantime James Scully was feeling so fit by August that he embarked on a three-month’s tour of the Continent. He returned to an Ireland of long winter nights in November and got to his Kilfeacle manor house late on the afternoon of Saturday, November 26. His youngest brother, William, who had just turned twenty-one years of age, was among the family and servants present to welcome James home. In the excitement and turbulence of the arrival, mention was made of ducks on the pond located about one-quarter of a mile below the house. Impulsively, James decided to go hunting; so he and his brother William quickly got their shotguns in order to take advantage of the fleeting daylight. A few minutes before 5:00 P.M., they departed for the pond. Shortly after five o’clock in the cold twilight, William, having stepped into the water, decided to return to the house. He traded weapons with James, giving him a double-barreled shotgun, as it was loaded properly for the ducks in the area; then he quickly returned to the warmth of the house. William had been out of Kilfeacle House some twenty minutes. When the usually punctual James did not return for the regular six o’clock dinner, William became uneasy and sent
servants to the pond to search for his brother. They soon returned without any news.25

Messengers were then dispatched to the police barracks, which were four miles away at Bansha, and to the home of Jeremiah Scully, a cousin, in Golden. Jeremiah came hurriedly, and subinspector Gannon and a party of police began the search by lantern light, concentrating their effort in the large pasture adjacent to the pond. Between eleven and twelve o'clock the dead body of James Scully was found, about seventy-five yards from where William had left him. He had been shot twice in the back, and he was lying face up, "his nose broken, and face frightfully disfigured." A mallard and his India-rubber cape were found nearby. His rings, gold watch, silver-mounted pocket pistol, stiletto, and small tablet had not been touched; but the shotgun was missing, although a piece of the gun's stock, presumably broken over Scully's head, was recovered.26

There were extensive reports of James Scully's murder throughout the British Isles. The assassins had apparently been watching Scully closely, and they had been alerted when he returned to his manor house. News of this "wild justice of revenge" emphasized the "extraordinary sensation through the country" that was caused by this most-recent outrage in Tipperary. The government offered a reward of £200, which was augmented by pledges from others, including £1,000 from the Scully family, so that the total reward exceeded £2,000.27 The official police report agreed with the general feeling that Scully was murdered because of his treatment of certain tenants:

27
21407 Tipperary S R
4265X Kilfeacle
7032 26 Nov 1842

James Scully Esq
murdered & robbed
of a gun for
having dispossessed
defaulting tenants
£200 public £50

Homicide private reward

24/11 42

Police Report

—Official report at Dublin Castle
Some news accounts attempted to point a moral from the ghastly conditions that brought about Scully’s death. The London Times dwelt on the motives of the slayers, describing the crime as

the desperate act of famished fathers, blinded to consequences and nerved to crime by the sad sight of homeless and shivering beings, to them dearer than life; and whose wan cheeks, as they pined and faded under the dark scowl of the monster rack-rent, pointed the silent finger of revenge. To men who have never known any other means of redress, or experienced any better or more effectual remedy for oppressions, than the bullet of midnight assassination, the temptation of opportunity was irresistible.  

The Times also pointed out that neither religious views nor class or rank could account for widespread assassination in Tipperary. Not only Roman Catholics but agents, yeomen, and laborers “appear indiscriminately the victims of this fearful organization,” which seemed to exist for criminal acts.

Early in December a nearby landlord had the following posted on his property:

NOTICE

is hereby given that any person who values his life or Property or that of his friends or Relatives will have nothing at all to do either directly or indirectly with certain holdings convenient to Mocklerskill lest he may meet his fate in a similar manner to that of Scullys

D.C: in particular will ) I am etc —
please note the foregoing )
and circulate it among ) Neddy Irontride
his friends ——

Other reports from Cashel were associated with Scully’s murder. One verbal nighttime threat was: “Take this as a warning. Have nothing to do with the lands of Mayfield or you will get the Death of Scully.”

From January 30 through February 11, 1843, sixty-two persons, including William Scully and his cousin Jeremiah Scully, were examined by the solicitor for the crown in an effort to build a case against the murderers of James Scully. Very little information that would be usable in a public trial was brought forward. The murder of Scully’s herdsman on January 12 was unrelated to the death of his employer six weeks earlier, although it, too, was an act of revenge. In 1851 the estranged wife of one Andrew Coffey
accused him of the murder of James Scully. He was arrested in Liverpool, where he had lived for seven years, and was returned to Tipperary for a hearing. Since the only witness against him was his wife, who according to law could not be examined against him, he was released by the authorities.\textsuperscript{32}

William Scully was twenty-one years of age when his brother was murdered. His father had died when he was only nine, and James had been the much esteemed oldest brother, almost a father image. His loss was a personal tragedy to the youngest brother. Their mother, Catherine, had grown old and blind, and she could not provide the leadership in the family that had been supplied by James. In this transition, Vincent became the head of the family, and William became the owner and landlord of small holdings.\textsuperscript{33}

But if conditions were bad in Ireland in the years before 1842, the ominous Potato Famine, which devastated the Irish landscape in the next few years, compounded the miseries for both tenants and landlords.