The Protestant Orphan Society and its social significance in Ireland 1828–1940

June Cooper

Published by Manchester University Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/51521

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1965936
Favourably as the committee would regard the Poor Law for the aged and infirm; they cannot consent that the orphan children of their fellow Protestants should be thrown into a position calculated to undermine their faith, and deteriorate their morals, and which experience has proved to be one attended with an awful mortality in the case of children.

Introduction

At a time when only rudimentary elements of a ‘poor law’ were in place, the DPOS embarked on a period of expansion through the foundation of parish auxiliaries. Local PO Societies, which were not subject to the direction of the parent body in Dublin, were also formed. Thus, by 1838 when the Poor Law was extended to Ireland, the charity had become an established source of private poor relief for respectable Protestants in reduced circumstances. Though an extensive public poor relief measure, the Poor Law was intended to stigmatise pauperism. Workhouses were regarded as dens of proselytism and immorality, and as a ‘badge of shame’. Given the Protestant minority status which was magnified in the workhouse environment, respectable Protestant widows with dependents sought and were encouraged to seek private rather than public assistance. This chapter explores the Protestant mindset post-emancipation and argues that religious rivalry accounted for the growing support of PO Societies pre-Poor Law and that the charity was self-promoted as a superior alternative to workhouses post-Poor Law on the basis that its system had succeeded where the Poor Law failed: it maintained widows and children’s health, well-being, respectability and future prospects.

Preserving a Protestant presence in Ireland

Catholic emancipation did not solve the Irish question as liberals had predicted leading to widespread agrarian unrest. Conflict over the tithe,
a tax charged on agricultural produce for the support of the Church of Ireland and its clergy, eventually proved irrepressible for a number of reasons: the poor harvest of 1829, unresolved Catholic grievances post-emancipation and encouragement from Bishop James Doyle to refuse payment. In 1831 there were serious outbreaks of violence, for example, in Newtown Barry, Wexford, and the Carrickshock incident in Kilkenny, during which seventeen people died, the majority of whom were policemen. Protestants in Kilkenny also resisted payment of tithe. Moreover, there was opposition to priests’ dues which led to the foundation of the Threshers, a secret society, in the west of Ireland. Church of Ireland clergy experienced grave difficulties during the 1830s due to the withholding of tithe until they were provided with relief in 1832. The Tithe Composition Act was carried in 1832 and the 1833 Church Temporalities (Ireland) Act resulted in the internal reform of the Church of Ireland.

Protestant emigration in the pre-famine years was attributable, in part, to fear of attacks during the tithe war and to concerns that they no longer had a viable future in a country where their status was fast diminishing. As Desmond Bowen contends, ‘At all times the culturally besieged Protestants feared assimilation through intermarriage and sometimes feared annihilation through some kind of jacquerie’. J. B. M’Crea, Independent minister, Ebenezer Chapel, Dublin, referred to Protestant emigration and the ‘security which many of the reformed are seeking on foreign shores’. Protestant converts emigrated steadily in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, for example, a convert, an ex-policeman and blacksmith from County Mayo, was boycotted by the local priest for a decade before he eventually emigrated to Canada. Protestant tenant farmers refused to pay the exorbitant rents set by landlords, leaving Catholics to take up the land. There were reports that a number of Protestants had planned to leave as soon as their leases had expired ‘as they had no chance of a renewal on fair terms. The landlords now care no more for a Protestant than for a Roman Catholic’.

As O’Connell appeared to have bypassed Protestant opinion on the issue of the repeal of union, former liberal Protestant supporters and the general Protestant population became increasingly defensive and alarmist. The National School System, to be managed by the National Commission and by the majority church in each locality was rejected by the Church of Ireland and subsequently by Presbyterians. The decision to do so led to further Protestant alienation and the foundation of the Church Education Society in 1839. (Church of Ireland schools remained independent until 1860.)
Protestant societies and associations were founded in the 1830s during a period of continued economic depression to preserve a Protestant presence in Ireland. The Protestant Conservative Association was founded in 1832.\(^{21}\) The Protestant Association of Ireland registered voters and aimed to protect persecuted Protestants in the south.\(^{22}\)

The *Dublin University Magazine* called attention to Protestant emigration in 1833:

We have no desire to magnify this evil beyond its just dimensions, but we ask, of what use will be the Protestant press – the Conservative Clubs – our Tory Principles – even the Established Church herself, when the Protestant population has emigrated? – of what use will be the protecting measure, when there are no Protestants to protect? It will, then, be mere idiocy, or, at least, a waste of time and talent to devise plans for the support of the Protestant interest, when those who are the bone and sinew of that body shall have abandoned the country forever. The magnitude of this evil will stand revealed still more plainly when we reflect on the value of the character and principles of that class.\(^{23}\)

The report on the condition of the poorer classes (1836) brought to light that ‘the Protestants see their numbers daily diminishing, and they think if they remain at home they will be exposed to violence’.\(^{24}\) The report identified the sharply reduced circumstances of once respectable families.

I often meet with cases of great distress where the parties have been respectable; widows of clergymen, doctors, attorneys, and merchants, and of gentlemen who had been officers. We have lost some of our members (speaking of the Room-keepers’ Society), who have been reduced by distress to discontinue their subscriptions. I have known many persons who had been members of the institution who have been subsequently obliged to seek relief from the institution.\(^{25}\)

The Association for the Relief of Distressed Protestants (ARDP) was founded on 1 October 1836 after the Poor Relief Commission’s report.\(^{26}\) In the 1840s Revds H. R. Halahan, Eugene O’Meara, and R. J. McGhee, Alexander Leeper and Dr John Ringland were members of both the ARDP and DPOS committees. Church of Ireland Christian fellowships were founded in the 1830s to assist Protestants in times of hardship and to encourage religious practice.\(^{27}\)

**The development of county PO Societies pre-Poor Law**

From 1832 onwards, Roman Catholics could openly give land for the purpose of building churches and schools.\(^{28}\) The rising Catholic middle class contributed to the foundation of ninety-one convents by
the 1840s while ninety-seven churches were established under Daniel Murray’s episcopate from 1809 to 1852. Further concessions were granted under the Charitable Donations and Bequests (Ireland) Act, 1844 and the Maynooth grant was increased in 1845. Protestant evangelicalism also grew steadily and by the mid-1830s a colony for converts had been established in Dingle, and Revd Edward Nangle had founded the Achill mission.

In the pre-Poor Law years, Houses of Industry and Mendicity Associations remained essential sources of poor relief. In 1834 Henry Inglis recalled a visit to the Dublin Mendicity Society where 2,145 people were reliant on charity and of these ‘200 were Protestant’. Moreover, he stated that the bulk of its subscriptions came from the Protestant rather than the Roman Catholic middle class. J. B. M’Crea, Independent minister of the Ebenezer Chapel, Dublin, D’Olier Street (opened 5 November 1820), delivered a speech on the subject of Irish Protestant orphans in 1833.

I had previously no idea, though quite aware of the spirit and feeling of the respective communities, that so large a capital was supplied by Protestant benevolence for the almost exclusive service of the Roman Catholic population. I could not imagine, that with the reiterated boastings of the increasing wealth of the Popish body, so little was done by it toward the support of our public hospitals; whilst the mass of mendicants, paupers, and invalids, relieved by those institutions, are members of that communion by which Protestants are stigmatised, persecuted, and proscribed. M’Crea reported that from a total of 8,000 Protestants in a ‘southern town of great importance’, there were ninety-one Protestant orphans ‘of whom fifty five live entirely by semi-mendicancy and the rest are maintained by individual charity or the precarious returns of casual employment’. M’Crea also heavily criticised the ‘heartless proprietary’, for their neglect. Two years later, he submitted a petition to the House of Commons requesting an investigation into Roman Catholic societies.

A petition of John Benjamin McCrea; praying the House to appoint a Select Committee to inquire into the number, nature, operations and tendency of Monastic, Conventional, and other houses of seclusion in Ireland, their comparative finances, numbers of inmates, and the rules of their internal government and economy since the year 1825; and to obtain particularly all possible information respecting the several houses of the Society of Jesus, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Confraternity of Carmelites, and the Monks of La Trappe, with their constitutions, tests, declarations and resources.
According to its annual reports, the ARDP was founded as, ‘all the charitable institutions of this city being founded on general principles and consequently chiefly occupied by Roman Catholics who are the great majority of the poorest part of the population so that consequently our poor Protestant brethren are neglected in their daily ministrations’.  

Given the absence of legal provisions for the support of orphans at this time, increasing Roman Catholic influence, claims that the ‘Church of Rome’ reported a rise in intermarriages and increasing Protestant emigration, the DPOS sought to expand. Initially, auxiliaries were set up in many Dublin parishes to collect subscriptions. The outbreak of cholera, which first appeared in Belfast in March 1832 followed by Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway, placed fresh demands on private charity. Many orphans were taken in by relatives while other destitute children and widows resorted to begging. St Vincent’s Hospital (by the Sisters of Mercy) and the Cholera Orphan Society were founded in the wake of the epidemic.

The Cork POS was founded in 1832. In the 1830s approximately one-third of the population in the city parishes of Cork were Protestant. Owing to the growing number of orphans on its roll, thirty-nine in its first year, the Cork POS employed an Assistant Secretary and Travelling Agent, ‘to conduct the complicated machinery of the Society’s exertions, and to form Auxiliary Associations in the country’. The ‘common cause’ promoted by the Society in Cork, as in Dublin, was the preservation of bereaved Protestant families:

The pressing dangers to which the destitute children of our brethren are exposed, call imperatively upon every Protestant of honest and conscientious feeling, from the peer to the mechanic, to come forward and support this Society, so closely connected with the happiness and stability of our country – it calls on the benevolent to cast in of that which God hath given them, to aid in raising up the orphan’s head from the father’s tomb – to dry the falling tear of helpless misery – to staunch the bleeding heart of widowed grief.

The annual report was enthusiastic and urgent in its pleas to the public: ‘increased support must be sought – warmly attached patronage must be acquired – and the luke-warm and the timid roused to decision’. The orphans of mixed marriages as well as Protestant parentage were admissible. Almost half of the orphans who were admitted to the Society had lost either one or both parents to cholera.

In 1832 applications for the admission of ninety-three cholera orphans from Limerick were sent to Dublin; however, as the DPOS was still in its infancy, many of the children had ‘perished’ before help was
forthcoming. The Limerick POS (LPOS) was subsequently founded by Revd William Maunsell on 25 February 1833 to assist families in distress. Revd Maunsell died of fever in 1836; the Vicar of Bruff, Revd Godfrey Massy, who ‘scarcely received any clerical income’ during the tithe war, was subsequently appointed co-secretary. In his history of Limerick, Fr John Begley refers to Massy in the following terms: ‘full of the idea of converting the papists, a very common idea at the time, he made a survey of the parish to find out his prospects in the new field that was opening out before him, and did not overlook his formidable adversary, the priest’. According to Massy, the priest was indeed a force to be reckoned with. Well-connected with the resident gentry, Dean MacNamara was thought responsible when a respectable Protestant family ‘lapsed into popery’. Massy said of MacNamara, ‘his smooth, oily manners and insinuating address, his electioneering power and ready wit secured his welcome at the table of the rich. While his singular skill in ruling and pleasing the mob made him a perfect dictator among the poor’.

During Massy’s appeal for funds, the indifference of absentee landlords was mentioned as well as the cold responses of the resident landlords who it was stated were overburdened with requests for assistance. The LPOS was regarded as ‘proof to the drooping Protestant, that he is still cared for’. The Society was said to bring together ‘all sorts and conditions’ of Protestants to ensure their ‘mutual welfare’. The orphans of mixed marriages were admitted. Also referred to as the Protestant Orphan Friends’ Society, in 1840 there were 215 orphans under its care. It is important to restate that many of the PO Societies which formed after the DPOS were not connected to it or subject to its direction. In its 1834 annual report, the DPOS clarified its position:

The Carlow Association, Kingstown and Limerick have been formed, having the same object, and on the same principles as your own, though not in connexion with it. In Cork, also, a society has been instituted for the relief of Protestant orphans; differing, however, from yours in extending its benefits to children, of whom only one parent has been Protestant.

Local PO Societies were typically founded if the DPOS could not admit orphans due to lack of funds. Newly formed PO Societies corresponded with the parent body primarily in the initial months of establishment to seek advice on general management. The Vicar of Clogheen formed the County Tipperary POS (TPOS) on Tuesday 8 December 1835. The Earl of Glengall presided. The TPOS resolved at its inaugural meeting held at the Courthouse, Clonmel, on 16 December 1835, that ‘requests be made to the Protestant Orphan
Society in Dublin for information respecting the duties of the assistant secretary, the annual expense of each orphan and the salary allowed to nurses. 61 Prior to the foundation of a separate local society, the Dublin POS was likely to have admitted children from that county. As a rule children were returned to that parish and thereafter became the responsibility of the local PO Society. The TPOS accepted applications from Protestant and mixed marriage families. Meetings were held throughout the county which resulted in 'some auxiliaries' 62 being formed.

Preparatory to this meeting circulars were addressed to the noblemen and influential Protestant gentry of this great county, and, with very few exceptions, favourable answers were returned, and liberal donations and subscriptions promised. The list of noblemen and gentlemen, who on the instant, became guardians of the charity is sufficient evidence of the respectable and influential patronage which it received ... They sent deputations throughout the county, in order to make known the objects of the Society, and to create a general interest in its favour. 63

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Protestant landlords, such as the Tandys, encouraged growth in areas such as Mountshannon, where a Protestant church was built and Protestant labourers and tradesmen were introduced to the area. 64 By the early 1830s over five hundred Protestants resided there along with a population of 1,682 Catholics.

Protestants also migrated to other parts of Tipperary such as Templemore where by the early 1840s there was a population of 3,685. 65 Cloghjordan was mentioned in the 1838 TPOS annual report as having a ‘considerable Protestant population’. 66 The Society had received several applications from that area. Infantry regiments were consistently stationed in Tipperary town throughout the nineteenth century which is reflected in the names that featured in the annual reports and with the applications made to the Society, which are discussed in the next chapter. Military barracks were built in the town in 1879. 67 The Kilkenny POS was founded in January 1836 68 and provided for orphans ‘either or both of whose parents may have been Protestants, a preference however to be given in all cases where both parents shall have been Protestants’. 69 The Society admitted a small number of orphans.

**PO Societies and the Poor Law**

Opponents of the Irish Poor Law included the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, who believed the measure did not fit the Irish context. 70 The Earl of Roden and the Earl of Glengall, previously mentioned in relation to the Dublin POS and the Tipperary
PO Societies and the Poor Law, 1830–50

Table 2.1 POS development, 1832–44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County POS</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>1832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drogheda</td>
<td>1838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s County</td>
<td>1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s County</td>
<td>1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>1844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DPOS annual report, 1845.

POS, were also vocal opponents. When the Poor Law bill was read before the House of Lords, Roden objected to it because ‘it would ruin the best gentry’ which was described as an exaggerated plea. He also presented a petition from the corporation of tailors at the third reading and stated that the bill ‘has spread the greatest alarm and dismay among all classes of the community in Ireland’. Daniel O’Connell also opposed the bill while William Smith O’Brien pointed out that it did not take into account the unsuitability of workhouses for pauper children. Workhouse relief under the Poor Law (Ireland) Act, 1838, divided the country into 130 poor law unions.

Founded in 1840, the Westmeath POS aimed to prevent Protestant widows and orphans becoming dependent on workhouse relief. The Tipperary POS (TPOS) annual report, 1840, described the Protestant population as a ‘small defenceless flock’ which ‘must be carefully watched’. After the extension of the Poor Law, the TPOS insisted ‘that no political arrangement to alleviate, “according to law”, the destitution of the poor of this land, can or ought to supersede, in the south of Ireland at least, the necessity of these institutions’. The DPOS resolved
in 1840 that ‘while we feel grateful to the Government of the Country for making a legal provision for our destitute Poor, we are fully persuaded that the Work-house is not a suitable asylum for our Protestant Orphans’. The grounds for opposition to the placement of Protestant orphans in workhouses were threefold: deterioration of physical health and moral health, religious interference, and poor education with no future prospects. Greater concerns were raised for children who had to remain in workhouses over long periods and were therefore more likely to be corrupted than those temporarily dependent on indoor relief.

PO Societies were among many private charities to point out the inadequacies of the Poor Law. In England Captain E. P. Brenton founded the Society for the Suppression of Juvenile Vagrancy in 1830. The Society, which became known as the Children’s Friend Society in 1834, organised the emigration of destitute and orphan children to the Cape of Good Hope and Canada. Vice-patronesses of the Society included the Countesses of Cork, Carysfort and Wicklow. Captain Brenton stated in 1837 that ‘we ask for a comparison between the relative merits of our school, and the workhouses, the prison, the penitentiaries, the hulks, the madhouses, and the penal colonies; for all these owe their being to the neglect of the education of this mighty empire’. PO Societies also objected to the placement of children in workhouses because the Poor Law failed to provide them with apprenticeships, and education in workhouse schools was inadequate. In 1841 TPOS committee members remarked, ‘the Poor Law could hold out to these children no prospect of future independence or comfort’. The DPOS annual report of the same year contains similar comments:

Under the provisions of the Poor-Law Act, very little is contemplated beyond the mere support of paupers; no arrangement whatever is made with the view of bettering the condition of the children under their care in after life. Your committee would then ask, are the Children of Protestant Parents, with such serious disadvantages as these, to be encouraged to enter and remain in a Poor-house, there to live and die paupers?

Joseph Robins observes that destitute Protestant orphans sent to workhouses were ‘placed at the mercy of Catholics in those areas where the guardians, and consequently the workhouse officers, were mainly of the Catholic faith; Protestants could not look on with equanimity’. By 1845 there were 123 workhouses in Ireland.

The DPOS compared its methods with the ‘Poor-house system’ in 1842 based on information supplied by Dublin Poor Law Guardians. The DPOS deemed its system superior ‘with regard to both moral effects and economy’, and predicted that as soon as such findings became
known, ‘there will be no more necessity for handing over to the Poor-house, the orphans of our brethren’. At this time, the DPOS confirmed its commitment to ‘the defence, preservation, and support of poor Protestant children’.

The fact cannot be denied that when the Orphan Children of Protestants, both of whose Parents are dead, have been admitted into the Dublin Poor-houses, they have in some instances been registered as members of the Church of Rome. Children of seven and eight years of age have also been permitted to change their religion, and to such an extent was this system carried, that the Government Commissioners were compelled to interpose their authority, in order to check the growing evil. The reports of cases, brought the notice of the Poor-Law Guardians, in addition to other sources of information, which not un-frequently occupy a prominent place in the columns of the public press, and which bear upon them the stamp of truth, are, your committee conceive, a sufficient warrant for expressing more than a doubt as to the propriety of allowing Orphans of Protestant parents to enter a Poor-house.

Although regulations were in place to deter interference with children’s religion, such as a requirement of parental consent for under fifteens to change their religion in the workhouse register and only in cases where the Poor Law Guardians were certain that the original entry was incorrect, the measures did not appear to have included orphans and foundlings. In Dundalk Union Workhouse in 1842 such a case arose. Two orphans, aged nine and eleven, were admitted to Dundalk Union Workhouse when it was opened on 14 March 1842 and on that day were registered Protestants. The family had moved to Dundalk from Newry; the children’s mother had died of cholera. After their father’s (a carpenter) subsequent death in 1837, ‘the children became orphans in a district in which they had neither friends nor relations’. The Vicar of Dundalk, Elias Thackery, who had for a time contributed from private means to their care, presented evidence that the parents and the children had always been Protestant. The union-house register said otherwise, ‘admitted on the 14th March, and entered as Protestants. But in the margin of the book is this remark, opposite to the name of these children:- “R. Catholic, by order of the Board of Guardians, dated April 4th, 1842 – T. O’Reilly, master”. The case became a precedent and the Poor Law Commissioners concluded that the Board of Guardians had violated the 49th section of the Irish Poor Relief Act, 1838. Several local PO Societies were founded in the following years. (The Louth POS was founded in 1850.) The DPOS persisted in its claims that workhouses were unsuitable shelters for Protestant
children, and that the implementation of the Poor Law rather than reducing the relevance of PO Societies had, in fact, called for their ‘more hearty assistance’. During the 1840s, efforts were made to maintain existing DPOS auxiliaries and to promote the foundation of additional auxiliaries. The Belfast auxiliary reported in November 1844, ‘the attendance was large and respectable, especially of ladies’. Revd Thomas Gregg, who was on a deputation from Dublin, spoke at the meeting reminding the audience of its Christian duty to care for destitute orphans; ‘he also showed the misery in which various orphans had been found at the time when the Society’s protection was afforded them’. Revd O’Meara, the Visiting Secretary, who was responsible for raising the DPOS profile, credited Revd Thomas Drew with the foundation and support of the Belfast POS auxiliary and the ‘progress of the orphans cause in Belfast and the neighbourhood’. Born on 26 October 1800 in Limerick city, Thomas Drew became a prominent evangelical and member of the Orange Order. A curate in County Antrim before his appointment to Christ Church, Belfast, in 1833, he founded the Church Accommodation Society in 1838 and though regarded as a formidable leader – the driving force behind church building, and numerous and highly beneficial social reforms, such as medical care for the poor – he was viewed as a controversial figure in other respects, who lost favour with the more moderate Bishop Richard Mant. Drew was also a secretary of the Belfast General Relief Fund during the famine which raised funds in Belfast for the relief of the poor throughout Ireland. He garnered support from Methodists and Presbyterians in Belfast who were also admissible to the DPOS. It is likely the auxiliary was founded due to a fall off in employment for weavers in the predominately Protestant area of Ballymacarrett. Subsequently, Protestant orphans from Belfast and the surrounding areas were admitted to the DPOS. The Belfast auxiliary continued to collect the funds necessary for the children’s upkeep. Despite the outward appearance of support, the gentry gave only a tepid response to requests for funds. In 1843 Revd C. H. Minchin, the DPOS, vowed to ‘try by every means in his power to prevail on our rich gentry to remove the stigma by multiplying their subscriptions, and thus giving practical proof that they have the prosperity of the institution really at heart’. The Society continued to appeal to the better off members of the church for donations to assist the Protestant poor: ‘the law of opinion is against him, the coldness, the distrust, and not unfrequently undignified hostility, and harassing persecution … they not merely profess the same religion as yourselves; but on account of that
religion they suffer hardships and trials to which you are strangers’. As mentioned earlier, the Society was viewed as a ‘social bridge’ for the ‘class extremes’ within the church.

From the early 1830s, attempts were made to establish DPOS auxiliaries outside Ireland. In May 1832, the committee advertised an appeal to the Protestants of England in the *Record* newspaper, London: ‘A door has been opened, though to a trifling extent and as yet with little success, to introduce through the medium of the public press – this society to the notice of the Protestants of England’. After a number of deputations, auxiliaries were eventually founded in Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle upon Tyne, Eccles, Hull, North Repps, Norwich, Nottingham and Southport, though donations were not substantial. The Society’s highly significant influence on Scottish boarding-out schemes is considered in chapter 4.

**Women’s role**

It was common for women to participate in charitable work primarily as fundraisers while men took on a more public role. Women – clergymen’s wives, daughters and other committed women of the church – became involved in the DPOS collection process from 11 July 1832 onwards: ‘Mr. D. gives notice that he will on next Wednesday evening move to solicit religious females to collect for this society’. In 1833, 143 women subscribed to the DPOS. In this year alone, women stood out as leading donors, making up 56.81 per cent of the total collected. By 1834, twenty-nine women collected subscriptions on behalf of the DPOS. Twenty-seven men collected in the same year. ‘Your funds have been largely increased through collections which have been made among the upper classes of life by many benevolent ladies in the city and in the country’. Women were acutely aware that they too were susceptible to widowhood and possible destitution.

The anonymous author of *The Orphans of Glenbirkie*, published in 1841 to raise funds for the DPOS, was thought to have been a woman connected with the Deaf and Dumb Society, which was founded by Revd Edward Herbert Orpen. ‘The profits arising from the sale are to be devoted to the rescue of the numerous orphans of our destitute brethren from the miseries attendant on poverty’. Copies were sold by booksellers and at the office of the DPOS, 16 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin and ran into a second edition. The author was initially told that ‘the tale is too romantic; but the romance of the story owes nothing to her fancy or invention, for the entire incidents were derived from the story of James and Jannette Forrest, contained in the Protestant Orphan
The family on whom the story was based lived in Hamilton, Scotland.

Jannette Forrest was the daughter of a most respectable farmer in the neighbourhood of Hamilton who left her a free house, well furnished, and upwards of one hundred pounds. She married Forrest, and in a little more than four years his extravagance and dissipation left her houseless and penniless. He locked her up at night in their empty house, and returned the keys to the landlord. Her feelings when she discovered herself to be thus forsaken may be imagined – but there was none to witness them; and when the door was opened some days afterwards, she was found lying upon a bed in a state of decided lunacy. For years this continued, unconscious of her bereavement, with the exception of occasional ravings about her children until last April.

Mr Forrest had taken the children, a boy and a girl, and following his death, which was caused by a fall from a horse, they were ‘received under the protection’ of the DPOS. Jannette was unaware of their whereabouts and remained so until the DPOS committee was informed of her story and arranged their return.

The author of the book also wrote *Norman Lyndesay, the Orphan Mute: A Narrative of Facts*, in aid of the Juvenile Deaf and Dumb Society, among others, such as *The Little Chimney Sweep*, which included true stories of the deprivation of child slaves and child mortality among chimney sweeps. *The Orphans of Glenbirkie*, and other works by the same author, informed the wider public of the challenges faced by the deaf, by Protestant widows and orphans, and of the exploitation and endangerment of child workers. On 10 October 1846, Miss Jane Phelps, Wilton, Salisbury, England, wrote to the DPOS committee stating that ‘the cash sent for the copies of *Orphans of Glenbirkie* may be applied to Society’s use’. These books as well as the printed annual reports enhanced the Society’s reputation and elevated its status promoting an air of respectability which in turn improved the orphans’ future prospects: the DPOS aimed, where possible, to maintain children in the same class as their fathers.

These books were unquestionably important social commentaries which had no doubt been inspired by Charles Dickens’s classic portrayal of Oliver Twist. Dickens used fiction to express his criticism of social ills, particularly the treatment of children, and his astute observations shaped future social reform measures. Workhouses were depicted as entirely unsuitable for children; juvenile delinquency and street trading were also themes. Dickens also helped to redefine Victorian childhood by challenging contemporary attitudes with sentimentalised notions of children
and childhood. Charlotte Brontë, the daughter of an Irish clergyman, Patrick Brontë (Brunty) published Jane Eyre in 1847. Brontë’s poignant portrayal of a young orphan offers important insights into the treatment of charity children in the nineteenth century. Significantly, Arthur Bell Nicholls, Patrick Brontë’s curate, who married Charlotte Brontë in 1854, raised money for the Protestant Orphan Society in 1870, which, following the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, lost part of its income (applicable to Percy Place training home) and appealed for funds.

Protestant famine relief work

Charges of ‘souperism’ have largely overshadowed the good work of many Church of Ireland ministers and their families, some of whom died through concerted efforts to alleviate the suffering of others. Even mild typhoid fever struck all classes causing more deaths among those with less immunity – the better off. All relief workers ran the risk of contracting fevers. The Dublin Parochial Association was founded in the Chapter House of Christ Church in 1847 to ‘assist the parochial clergy by equalising the distribution of charity throughout the city’. In early 1847, ‘one in ten’ people admitted to the North Dublin Union Workhouse were Protestant.

Some two hundred doctors and medical students died in 1847, and in Mayo, Cork and Armagh medical relief was severely lacking. Dr Neason Adams ran the dispensary at Dingle from 1834 to his death in 1859. Born in 1824, Joseph Kidd, a Quaker, and Limerick native, a homœopath, and future physician to Benjamin Disraeli, arrived in Bantry in 1847. Medical relief in the area at the time was wholly inadequate due to the illness of one of the local physicians. Not long after his arrival, he recorded the death of Revd Dr Trail who had ‘died of exhaustion’. Kidd treated fever and dysentery with considerable success. The Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, who too was a faithful supporter of homœopathy, donated much needed funds to provide convalescing fever patients with rice (it was more palatable than Indian meal), milk, bread and fuel.

Kidd remained in Bantry for two months and in a resolution passed by the Bantry Relief Committee, the Vicar of Bantry, Revd Mr Murphy, proposed and Revd Mr Begley, acting parish priest, seconded, ‘that thanks of this committee are due to Joseph Kidd, Esq. M.R.C.S. for his assiduous and kind attention to the sick poor of Bantry’. Arthur Guinness was another advocate of homœopathy. He and a number of other Church of Ireland clergymen and laymen founded the Irish Homœopathic Society in Dublin in 1845. Guinness reported in 1846
that a whole convent in Dublin had been converted to homœopathy by Charles Luther, a homœopath who had been practising in Dublin from the 1830s. Revd William Smyth Guinness, rector of Rathdrum, and local superintendent of DPOS orphans, was also a member of the Irish Homœopathic Society.

**PO Societies and the Great Famine**

Rved Thomas Gregg, Dublin POS (DPOS) committee member, died after thirteen days of severe illness on 22 April 1846:

Mr Gregg with a generosity that made him heedless of his own temporal welfare, bestowed his money and his time (too truly it may be added) and his health in the service of this society. (Rescuing the orphan ready to perish or in procuring funds.) In him the church has lost one of the noblest examples of living faith. While we mourn his loss may it be given to us to emulate his example.

Rved John Nash Griffin was appointed secretary in Rved Gregg’s stead.

The Poor Law Amendment Act, 1847, provided outdoor relief and also placed the burden of poor relief on local ratepayers. In the same year, the DPOS assisted a number of families though it regretted it could not do more without jeopardising the future well-being of all newly admitted orphans as well as those already in its care. At a meeting dated 2 July 1847, the committee discussed current applications and approved twelve urgent cases. The Meath POS was equally cautious regarding the release of funds during the famine years.

In Cork during the ‘female industrial movement’ poor women made clothes from the gingham material produced by Cork weavers which was then bought by the Ladies’ Clothing Association to provide the poor with clothing. Cork gingham was sold by the Board of Manufacture and the Ladies’ Auxiliaries Association promoted the revival in Dublin. As mentioned in the next chapter, the DPOS girls wore gingham dresses. Lady Dunraven, a Limerick POS subscriber, supported Limerick weavers. Among other initiatives, embroidery schools, the Ladies’ Industrial Society of Ireland, and convent industrial schools were set up to meet the demands of the famine. Protestant and Catholic clergy and Poor Law Guardians throughout the country also supported the movement.

At the close of ‘black 47’, the Cork POS committee reflected on the devastation of that year:

So eventful a year as the present over the orphan society nor perhaps has ever been recorded in the annals of our country. Famine has scattered its
blight over our now depopulated county sowing thickly the seeds of pesti-
lence and fever almost amounting to plague, cuts off thousands upon thou-
sands of our fellow creatures. Amongst these are to be found the parents of
many respectable and comfortable families whose orphan children are now
thrown upon charity of the benevolent ... The names of 50 applicants are
already upon our books and when our clergy are relieved from the pressure
of labour which at present occupies them how numerous may we expect
will be the claimants upon the society’s funds.\textsuperscript{142}

In March 1849, the DPOS noted the ‘unprecedented monetary dif-
ficulties’ and the ‘afflicted land’. It indicated that it had ‘help from
England during the famine’ because of the ‘greatly diminished resources
of our fellow Protestants’.\textsuperscript{143} A letter was received from Arklow, County
Wicklow, offering a sum of money towards the upkeep of cholera
orphans from the town. The chairman stated, ‘let him know that there
will be others who have lost both parents from the “ravages of cholera”
and that we will proceed as normal’.\textsuperscript{144} The manner in which the com-
mittee dealt with the request proved its impartiality. For example,
during a four month period, the Society received sixty-four applications
but admitted only five orphans. The DPOS noted at length the far-
reaching impact of the cholera epidemic of 1849:

The extent of the ravages of Cholera, in Dublin and many other parts
of Ireland, is very imperfectly known to those who did not feel its con-
sequences, owing to the want of any official accounts to record the
magnitude of the calamity: but soon this Society felt those consequences, in
the appeals of multitudes of Orphans. In every year there have been many
applications before your Committee, in behalf of children whose parents
belonged rather to the middle than the lower ranks of society: the number
of applicants of that class was augmented to a lamentable extent towards
the close of the past year. On the list of candidates were Orphans of profes-
sional men, of those who held respectable situations, of some comfortable
farmers, and of tradesmen, whose children never knew the want of comfort
until they were suddenly deprived of a parent’s care: to these add, the
Orphans of one who was for many years a Member of your Committee,
and who had long sincerely and cordially devoted his time and exertions to
the work of this Society, and then some idea may be formed of the weight
of misery that has pressed and is still pressing upon this institution.\textsuperscript{145}

Reluctant to overburden its funds, the DPOS did not approve all appli-
cations for the year 1849.

The Kilkenny POS (KPOS) also revealed the perilous state of its funds
in 1849, ‘that it is a subject of painful regret that the circumstances in
which the Society is now placed not only renders it unable to receive
several urgent applications for the admission of Orphans, but that the
most strenuous exertions will be necessary for the maintenance of the children at present under its care’.\textsuperscript{146} Despite having already admitted ten children for that year, the committee had been ‘compelled to reject every further application for admittance’.\textsuperscript{147} There was even discussion that it might be necessary to ‘remove’ some of the orphans already under its charge. Although circulars had been sent to the ‘landed proprietors, resident and non-resident’ in the hope of gathering funds, apart from a ‘few exceptions’, their pleas went unheard.\textsuperscript{148} The KPOS reminded its subscribers that it was

\begin{quote}
...essentially a poor man’s Society – to encourage the Protestant of the humble class amidst the many difficulties and discouragements to which, in such a country as this, they are peculiarly exposed, by convincing them that they are not forgotten by their richer brethren, and by relieving them from what perhaps is the sorest of the many trials incident to their low estate – the agonising reflection that, when they shall be no more, their children will be left to choose between destitution on the one hand and apostasy on the other.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Revd James Graves was a member of the KPOS committee. Graves was one of the founding members of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and contributed hugely to the field of archaeology in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both Thomas Shaw Esq., Kilree, Kells, County Kilkenny, another KPOS committee member, and Revd Graves were members of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society.\textsuperscript{150}

\section*{Missions}

Redemptorists and other religious orders such as the Passionists, the Oratorians and Rosminians set up missions in England and Wales in the 1840s and 1850s ‘in the hopes of winning a harvest of conversions’.\textsuperscript{151} The Vincentians preached in Athy in 1842 and in Dingle in

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Countrywide applications to the DPOS, 1849}
\begin{tabular}{lccc}
\hline
Election date & Applications & Admissions & \% \\
\hline
January & 48 & 6 & 12.5 \\
March & 56 & 20 & 35.7 \\
May & 58 & 12 & 20.7 \\
July & 59 & 12 & 20.3 \\
September & 58 & 6 & 10.4 \\
November & 64 & 5 & 7.8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{Source: DPOS annual report, 1849.}
1846 to challenge the reported successes of Protestant missionaries.\(^\text{152}\) In Scotland the Edinburgh Irish Mission was established in 1842 to counteract Catholic attempts to convert Protestants and to advance Protestantism through the conversion of Catholics.\(^\text{153}\) The *Belfast News-Letter* reported in 1846 that the Sisters of Mercy and Catholic missionaries were in Western Australia and, while their main focus was the conversion of ‘the aboriginal tribes’, they had ‘attracted many Protestant observers’.\(^\text{154}\)

Fr Gentili and Fr Furlong carried out a ‘spiritual harvest’ over a sixteen month period from January 1847 to April 1848 during which time they had preached at fifteen missions in England and visited Ireland on three occasions. While the missions were aimed mainly at the ‘spiritual advancement of Catholics’, there were numerous accounts of Protestant conversions. At one mission the ‘fishers of men caught in their apostolical net fifty-three Protestants’.\(^\text{155}\) There were reports that in total ‘at least four hundred Protestants’ had been converted.\(^\text{156}\) Among them were converts returning to the Roman Catholic church. In London, an Anglican minister and his family converted.\(^\text{157}\) Back in Dublin, during the third mission and a typhus fever outbreak, Fr Gentili died on 26 September 1848.

Alexander Dallas officially formed the Society for Irish Church Missions to Ireland (ICM) on 29 March 1849 (however, he had been laying the foundations for its establishment from before 1845),\(^\text{158}\) which received the majority of its funding from English sources.\(^\text{159}\) While there was a degree of Irish Protestant support there was also intense criticism of its controversial methods.\(^\text{160}\) Its main bases were in Connemara and Dublin.\(^\text{161}\) Dallas firmly believed that the famine had been a sign of the ‘second coming’; the millenarian prediction gave urgency to his mission. The ICM’s goal was to ‘to communicate the gospel to the Roman Catholics and converts of Ireland by any and every means which may be in accordance with the United Churches of Ireland and England’.\(^\text{162}\) Protestants asserted that moral reform and social order depended on access to the bible and Ulster was held up as an example of the pacifying effects of Protestantism. The Oxford Movement, which began after the Church Temporalities Act, 1833, anti-ritualism, John Henry Newman’s conversion in 1845 and European revolutionary spirit, fuelled support for the ICM.\(^\text{163}\)

In 1849 Dr Paul Cullen, whose family ‘represented the Catholic gentry class’ was appointed Archbishop of Armagh.\(^\text{164}\) Daniel O’Connell had assured Cullen in 1842 that, ‘If the union were repealed and the exclusive system abolished, the great mass of the Protestant community would with little delay melt into the overwhelming majority of
the nation. Protestantism would not survive the Repeal ten years’. By 1850 there were 1,250 nuns and 2,500 priests in Ireland. Irene Whelan contends that ‘Catholic religious practices in Ireland were shaped by the Protestant challenge’. The character of the Church of Ireland was equally shaped by Catholic revival; PO Societies represented one of its most crucial defence strategies and by 1850 sixty DPOS auxiliaries had been founded in parishes throughout Dublin, in Derry, Belfast, Enniskillen, Newry, Monaghan and Wicklow.

**Conclusion**

The confident eighteenth-century Protestant identity was replaced with a defensive, conservative, self-reliant and insular character as power gradually transferred from Protestant to Roman Catholic hands. The foundation of an alternative to national schools in the form of the Church Education Society signalled the increasing polarisation of ‘the two peoples’.

An additional element of this shift was the promotion and development of a private poor relief system in the form of PO Societies, aimed at respectable bereaved Protestant families, and, in the case of certain local PO Societies, mixed marriage families. The reasons for the promotion of private relief were threefold: first, Protestant children were the religious minority in workhouses; second, children’s physical health was compromised; and, thirdly, widows and children were thought to be in danger of ‘moral contamination’ and, thus, likely to lose their respectability. The inability of PO Societies to approve all applications, the admission of Protestants to workhouses during the famine, and Roman Catholic missionary activity abroad suggest that there was a legitimate demand for PO Societies which prompted further development. The next chapter examines in detail the boarding-out system developed by the DPOS and local PO Societies in the first half of the nineteenth century.

**Notes**

1. DPOS annual report, 1843, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 15.
7 Ibid.
8 3 & 4 Will. IV, c. 37 (14 Aug. 1833).
10 Bowen, *Protestant Crusade*, p. 132.
14 Ibid., p. 235.
15 Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes, p. 10.
18 See Acheson, *History of the Church of Ireland*, p. 143.
19 Ibid.
20 Moffitt, *Irish Church Missions*, p. 35.
23 Ibid.
24 Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes, p. 10.
25 Ibid., p. 103.
26 Milne, *Protestant Aid*.
32 Ibid., p. 17.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., p. 11.
37 Milne, *Protestant Aid*, p. 5.
39 Minutes, 1831, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/1.
40 DPOS annual report, 1832, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7.
41 Ibid.
44 Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, Two Paths, One Purpose, p. 12.
46 Cork POS annual report, 1832, p. 6, RIA.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Massy, Footprints of a Faithful Shepherd, p. 320.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 315.
54 Ibid.
55 Massy, Footprints of a Faithful Shepherd, p. 324.
56 Ibid., p. 345.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p. 327.
60 DPOS annual report, 1834, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 12.
61 Minutes, 16 Dec. 1835, Ireland, County Tipperary POS papers, MS 32,521 (with the Permission of the Board of the National Library of Ireland).
62 TPOS annual report, 1837, NLI, County Tipperary POS papers, MS 32,530/A(2), p. 5.
63 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 TPOS annual report, 1837, NLI, County Tipperary POS papers, MS 32,530/A(2), p. 5.
68 Kilkenny POS annual report, 1849, p. 5, RIA.
69 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
73 Robins, Lost Children, pp. 159–60.
74 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 DPOS annual report, 1841, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 11.
78 Robins, Lost Children, p. 257.
82 TPOS annual report, 1841, NLI, County Tipperary POS papers, MS 32,530/A(6), p. 17.
83 DPOS annual report, 1841, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 10.
84 Robins, Lost Children, p. 252.
86 DPOS annual report, 1841, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 10.
87 Ibid., p. 11.
88 Ibid., p. 10.
89 Ibid., p. 11.
90 Robins, Lost Children, p. 245.
91 Minutes of Proceedings of Dundalk Union, relative to two pauper children, HC 1842 (545), xxxvi.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 DPOS annual report, 1850, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/18–23.
95 DPOS annual report, 1843, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 15.
96 Belfast News-letter (19 November 1844).
97 Ibid.
98 Minutes, 29 Oct. 1847, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/4, p. 169.
101 Kinealy and MacAtasney, The Hidden Famine, p. 32.
102 Register of applications, 1837–50, NAI, POS papers, 1045/5/2.
103 DPOS annual report, 1843, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17, p. 21.
105 DPOS annual report, 1832, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 10.
The Protestant Orphan Society, 1828–1940

107 Minutes, 11 July 1832, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/2.
108 DPOS annual report, 1833, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1–7.
109 Ibid., 1834.
110 Ibid., 1831, p. 13.
112 Ibid., p. 8.
113 Ibid.
114 Register incoming letters, 1846, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/3.
118 Acheson, History of the Church of Ireland, pp. 187–91.
122 Dyson and Ó Gráda (eds), Famine Demography, p. 35.
124 P. Comerford, ‘A bitter legacy?’, in The Great Famine, pp. 5–9, p. 6.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid., p. 251.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., p. 71.
133 Kinealy and MacAtasney, The Hidden Famine, p. 100.
134 Minutes, 2 July 1847, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/4.
136 M. Cronin, ‘The female industrial movement, 1845–52’, in B. Whelan...
137 Freeman’s Journal (9 September 1850).
139 Massy, Footprints of a Faithful Shepherd, p. 412.
141 Ibid., p. 75.
142 Minutes, 1847, RCBL, CPOS papers, PRIV MS 519.1.
143 Minutes, 23 Mar. 1849, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/4, p. 268.
144 Ibid., 9 Nov. 1849, p. 308.
146 Kilkenny POS annual report, 1849, p. 7, RIA.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
153 Moffitt, Irish Church Missions, p. 15.
154 Belfast News-letters (18 May 1846).
156 Ibid., p. 263.
157 Ibid.
158 See account of the build up to the foundation of the society in Moffitt, Irish Church Missions, pp. 46–51.
159 Ibid., p. 134.
161 Ibid., p. 36.
162 Prunty, Margaret Aylward, p. 42.
164 Bowen, Protestant Crusade, p. 260.
165 Ibid., p. 263.