Thomas William Rolleston: the forgotten man

MARIA O'BRIEN

Thomas William Rolleston was involved in the Irish Revival in its various guises from its inception in the mid 1880s till his own death in 1920. This essay will highlight Rolleston's involvement in the Irish Literary Revival, the Gaelic League and Plunkett's co-operative movement. Rolleston has hitherto been a shadowy figure passing through Irish history and culture. His involvement and commitment to Irish culture and economics was immense but not without some controversy.

Thomas William Rolleston (1857–1920) was an author, poet and journalist. He was a member of the minority landowning class, his family having arrived in Ireland as part of the plantations in 1610. In the tradition of his class, he was educated at St Columba's, Rathfarnham, and Trinity College, Dublin. Trinity was the bastion of unionism in Ireland, but in the last two decades of the nineteenth century it produced a number of graduates who reacted against their alma mater and began to explore the possibility that a new Ireland might be created where instead of cultural friction, cultural fusion might be created.[1] These graduates included Rolleston, Charles Hubert Oldham who was the driving force behind the Contemporary Club, the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association (hereafter IPHRA) and the *Dublin University Review*, and Douglas Hyde, a founder of the Gaelic League in 1893.

After a spell in Germany (for his wife's health), Rolleston returned to Ireland in 1884 and immediately became involved in the Young Ireland Society, the Contemporary Club and later the IPHRA. Rolleston, like many others of that period, was profoundly influenced by Standish O'Grady's bardic sagas of Ireland. John O'Leary, the old Fenian, also exerted a powerful influence on Rolleston. O'Leary was imprisoned and later exiled for twenty years for his part in Fenian plans for an uprising in the 1860s. His exile ended in 1885, and his return to Ireland coincided with Rolleston's return. Rolleston believed O'Leary was 'trying to instil a spirit of tolerance into the narrow and bitter patriotism of the National League'. During his exile, O'Leary's nationalism had developed a cultural aspect. Believing all literature was essential to the development of nationalism, O'Leary saw all literature as nationalist and all nationalism as literature. He followed in the tradition of the Young Irelander, Thomas Davis, arguing in favour of a cam-

1 F.S.L. Lyons 'Yeats and Victorian Ireland' in A. Norman Jeffares (ed.) *Yeats, Sligo and Ireland* (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980) p.120.

paign to convert the Protestant gentry to Irish nationalism. He believed they had been bribed into becoming West Britons by corrupt patronage of Dublin Castle. His desire to win back Protestants to the national movement was reminiscent of Tone and indeed of O'Connell. By doing so, O'Leary believed it would remove one of the visible props of English conquest in Ireland.[2]

Consequently, it is not surprising that O'Leary cultivated the friendship of people like Rolleston, Charles Hubert Oldham and the young Yeats. All were members of the Protestant ascendancy and were just the recruits to the national movement O'Leary sought. Rolleston, Yeats and John Taylor, a barrister, were known as O'Leary's disciples. By 1885, Rolleston was regarded as the most devoted of these disciples.[3] Roy Foster has highlighted O'Leary's importance to people like Yeats and Rolleston, as O'Leary was an introduction not only to the acceptable face of the extremist Fenian tradition but also to a kind of free-thinking Catholic intelligentsia of whose existence Sligo unionists (and to this could be added King's County Protestants) were blissfully ignorant.[4] O'Leary indicated new ways in which both Yeats and Rolleston could 'belong' to the new Ireland – an Ireland where like-minded people of both religious traditions could share pride in an ancient culture rather than remember the conflicts and dispossessions of the past.[5]

In February 1885, a new journal, the *Dublin University Review* (hereafter *DUR*), was founded in the tradition of the *Dublin University Magazine*. A journal of literature, philosophy, poetry and politics, it was edited and contributed to mainly by members of the Contemporary Club, although Rolleston and Oldham did the vast majority of the work. Discussions at the Club were often incorporated into the contents of the Review.[6] Rolleston is often quoted as the person, who launched the Review, but William Crook suggested it, and a group consisting of Crook, W.F. Bailey, a barrister and later governor of the National Gallery, and C.H. Oldham among others collectively launched it.[7] The *DUR* was a product of Trinity College, Dublin, and Rolleston later described it as emanating from Trinity.[8] As early as 1880, Rolleston broached the idea to Walt Whitman, the American poet, of establishing 'a paper in which politics, literature etc would all be treated from the highest republican standpoint, it might do much'.[9]

2 Ibid., p. 165. **3** Kevin Alldrit, *W.B. Yeats: The man and the mask* (London: John Murray, 1997) p. 49. Also, see Mary Macken, 'W.B. Yeats, John O'Leary and the Contemporary Club' in *Studies*, 28 (Mar. 1939) p.138; and W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies: memoirs and reflections* (London: Bracken, 1955) p.213. **4** Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life: I – the apprentice mage* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) p.43. **5** Ibid. **6** Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the politics of print* (Cork: Cork UP, 2001) p.47. **7** Horst Frenz (ed.) *Whitman and Rolleston: a correspondence* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), p.7. Frenz mistakenly identifies Rolleston as the force behind *DUR*. See also P.S. O'Hegarty 'Whitman and Rolleston: 'A Review' in *Dublin Magazine*, 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1953), p. 53. O'Hegarty corrects Frenz's mistake. See also Padraig Yeates, *Dublin lockout, 1913* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2000) p. 352. He mistakely identifies Rolleston as the founder of the *DUR*. **8** Alldritt, *W.B. Yeats* (1997), p. 41; see also Frenz *Whitman and Rolleston* (1969), Rolleston to Whitman, 4 Aug. 1885, p. 102. **9** Ibid., p. 18; Rolleston to

The *DUR* was established to aid the direction and development of Irish opinion among the 'cultivated classes of the country'. Its proclaimed *raison d'être* was the rehabilitation of Protestants to the centre of Irish affairs. Yug Mohit Chaudhry argues that the *DUR* was a political enterprise from its very inception and drew its impulse from a political project, that is, home rule, and consequently it had a clear political agenda.[10] Foster disagrees with this assessment and regards the *DUR* as part of the attempt to create a national literary culture. It was an alternative to politics and was concerned with the aftermath of national autonomy.[11] Foster's argument is supported by the fact that political discussion was prohibited in the Review.

After six months, the embargo on political discussion was lifted. Around this time, Rolleston became editor of the Review (until this point Oldham was the nominal editor), and it is possibly to surmise that he was responsible for the change in editorial policy. He sent Whitman a copy of the magazine 'of which I have been made editor'.[12] Yeats later claimed responsibility for securing Rolleston the post.[13] Yeats told Lady Gregory how he and another convinced Oldham to make Rolleston editor. Oldham was the prospective editor of the *DUR* but according to Yeats, he knew nothing of literature. It was of some amusement to Yeats and his friends to suggest something to Oldham and make him believe the idea was his. Consequently, Yeats went to Oldham and 'suggested in that way that he should make Rolleston editor. So next time I went to see him he told me that he was not all pleased with the present editor. Now there is a man called Rolleston who lives twenty-five miles out of Dublin, I am going to make him editor'.[14]

The *DUR* remains significant because it was the first journal to publish Yeats. This occurred under Rolleston's editorship of the Review. It offered a broad intellectual range and cultural cosmopolitanism. It introduced Irish readers to translations of Heine and serialized Turgenev's recently translated *On the Eve*. Rolleston is in fact credited with introducing Turgenev to Irish readers.[15] It also published important articles such as Hyde's 'A Plea for the Irish language', which was an outline of his seminal address 'The Necessity for De-anglicising Ireland' that he later delivered in 1892. This plea fell on deaf ears at the Review as its coverage of Gaelic literature and interests amounted to twenty-five pages in twenty-three publications.[16] Its editors (Rolleston and Oldham) questioned the futility of the Irish language:

Whitman, 30 Oct. 1880. **10** Ibid., p. 55. **11** Foster, *Yeats apprentice mage*, p. 41. **12** Frenz, *Whitman and Rolleston*, p. 101; Rolleston to Whitman, 4 Aug. 1885. **13** James Pethica (ed.), *Lady Gregory's diaries* (Gerrard's Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1999) p. 172; also see Denis Donoghue (ed.), *W.B. Yeats, memories: autobiographies – first draft journal* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp 50–1. **14** Pethica, *Lady Gregory*, p. 172. **15** Alldritt, *W.B. Yeats*, p. 41. **16** Chaudhry,

> Do they wish to make Irish the language of our conversation and our newspapers? Impossible and wholly undesirable. Do they wish to make us a bi-lingual people in the sense that everybody should know two languages? But peasantry and artisans cannot be expected to know two languages except at the expense of both. Would they separate Ireland into an English speaking country and an Irish speaking country? But how seriously this would affect the free circulation of thought ... what is there left except to treat Irish as a classic, and leave it to the Universities?[17]

The Irish Literary Society in London evolved from the Southwark Irish Literary Club, which had been established in 1883.[18] The initial meeting to discuss the formation of the Irish Literary Society took place at Yeats's home in Bedford Park at the end of December 1891. Yeats, Rolleston, Dr John Todhunter, a doctor and poet, D.J. O'Donoghue, journalist, biographer and later president of the National Literary Society, William P. Ryan, a journalist, and J.G. O'Keefe, secretary of the old Southwark club, attended the meeting.[19] Before the meeting, Yeats and Ryan discussed Rolleston's role in the society.[20] Ryan states that Rolleston was well known for his work as a scholar, a critic and an editor, but it was Rolleston's Irish work for the *Dublin University Review* that appealed to them. After a number of meetings held throughout January (including some at Rolleston's house in Wimbledon), it was decided to form the Irish Literary Society on 13 January 1892, at the Clapham Reform Club. Rolleston was appointed provisional secretary and proved to be 'an enthusiast and a capable organizer'.[21] Yeats acknowledged Rolleston's contribution to the establishment of the society: 'it was because he had much tact, and a knowledge of the technical business of committees, that a society was founded which was joined by every London-Irish author and journalist'.[22] He described Rolleston as the true founder of the society although he retained some of the glory as the 'general idea was mine'.[23] C.H. Rolleston credited the foundation of the Irish Literary Society to the fact that his father, T.W. Rolleston, was living in London at the time. He mistakenly dated the foundation of the society in 1893 and claimed it evolved from an attempt to issue Irish books.[24] According to his son, Rolleston was the person to whom everyone turned for advice and guidance. His niche in the movement was his organizational skills as he was the practical man, the

17 Ibid. **18** John Kelly and Eric Domville (eds), *The collected letters of W.B. Yeats, Vol. 1, 1865–1895* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) p. 495. **19** William P. Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival* (New York: Lemma, 1970) p. 52; also see Kelly, *Yeats Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 495; and Foster, *Yeats apprentice mage*, p. 118. **20** Ryan, *Irish Literary Revival*, p. 52. **21** Ibid., p. 56. **22** Yeats, *Memories*, p. 199. Yeats and Rolleston are generally regarded as the main instigators of the Irish Literary Society; also see F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and anarchy in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982), p. 38. **23** Yeats, *Memories*, p. 51. **24** C.H. Rolleston, *Portrait of an Irishman – a biographical sketch of T.W. Rolleston* (London: Methuen, 1939), p. 10.

man who thought things out and directed the human factors that had fallen naturally under his influence. He told each member to what end his particular talents might best be directed in order to achieve a more glorious future for the Ireland they loved.[25] Discounting the unconscious bias and hyperbole, Rolleston was regarded by others as the moving spirit behind the Irish Literary Society in London. *United Ireland* identified Rolleston as the prime mover behind the society: 'a few more words about the Irish Literary Society in London, Rolleston, Yeats, O'Keefe and Foley are the prime movers. Rolleston, most of all, very energetic, suave and enthusiastic'.[26]

The political upheavals of 1891, the death of Parnell and the split within the Irish Parliamentary Party gave Yeats the opportunity to push a national literary movement. If Yeats intended to present the cultural revival as politics continued by other methods, then it was doomed as he and his associates were destined to disagree over the question of politicizing literature.[27] This 'disagreement' became apparent with the new 'Library of Ireland' scheme in 1892.[28] The publication and circulation of popular Irish books was an important objective of both literary societies in Dublin and London. To a certain extent, the argument was concerned with control over the series but essentially it was ideological. That is, it addressed the different conceptions of what a 'national' literature should be. Charles Gavan Duffy, a Young Irelander of the 1840s and an associate of Davis, advocated Davis' definition of literature as a propagandist arm of cultural nationalism; while Yeats desired popular and imaginative literature inspired by Irish themes but not written with a political objective.[29] Yeats believed that Duffy was attempting to complete the Young Ireland movement, to finish what had been left undone because of the Famine, Davis's death and Duffy's own emigration.[30] The dispute was complicated by the prevailing animosity between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites, of whom many were members of the National Literary Society.[31]

In *Memoirs*, Yeats claimed that Gavan Duffy had suggested a similar scheme, and it was decided to amalgamate the schemes and organize the sales of the books through the Irish Literary Society in London and the National Literary Society in Dublin.[32] But in *Autobiographies*, Yeats stated that 'the always benevolent friend (Rolleston) to whom I had explained in confidence, when asking his support, my arrangements with my publisher, went to Charles Gavan Duffy and suggested they should together offer Mr Fisher Unwin a series of Irish books. Gavan Duffy knew nothing of my plans, and so was guiltless, and my friend (Rolleston) had heard me discuss many things that evening.'[33] Throughout

25 Ibid., p. 24. **26** *United Ireland*, 16 Apr. 1892. **27** Foster, *Yeats apprentice mage*, p. 115. **28** This scheme was a revival of the Young Ireland scheme of the 1840s, which was produced by Charles Gavan Duffy. **29** Kelly, *Yeats Collected letters*, vol. 1, p. 501. **30** Yeats, *Autobiographies* (1955), p. 206. **31** Ibid., p. 204. **32** Yeats, *Memories* (1972), p. 51; also see Kelly, *Yeats Collected letters*, vol. 1, p. 500. **33** Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 227.

1892, working with the publisher Edmund Downey, Rolleston and Duffy worked tirelessly to get their scheme off the ground, but their attempts proved futile when they failed to raise the necessary capital for the venture. In October 1892, Rolleston approached Edward Garnett, a reader at Fisher Unwin, to take over the scheme without Yeats' knowledge. At this point, he divulged details of Yeats' earlier negotiations with Unwin to Duffy. Yeats objected to Duffy's editorship of the series, as he believed that Duffy had been absent from Ireland for too long and was no longer in touch with the mood of the country. For months, the dispute oscillated between London and Dublin with claims and counter-claims. Yeats believed that Rolleston was entirely under the influence of Duffy and had no control over his own actions. Concurrently, Rolleston believed that Yeats was attempting to make himself the leader of a small clique of 'advanced' men in Dublin. By early 1893, the two societies in London and Dublin reached a limited compromise. Duffy was editor of the series, with Hyde, representing Dublin, and Rolleston, representing London, the assistant editors.

Rolleston is remembered as a minor poet; indeed, he is forgotten, albeit for one poem 'The Dead at Clonmacnoise'. But his poems were included in several important anthologies: *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888) and two anthologies of the Rhymers' Club (1892 and 1894), which Rolleston help found with Yeats and Ernest Rhys. He was included in Yeats' anthology *A Book of Irish Verse*, although Yeats omitted any mention of Rolleston in the second edition. Rolleston with his father-in-law published an anthology *A Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue* (1900). It was considered one of the most important anthologies published at the time; however, it met extreme hostility from Irish Ireland quarters, particularly from D.P. Moran and Arthur Griffith. Both denied that Irish literature or poetry written in the English language was Irish. Moran called it 'mongrel'; it was neither Irish nor English.

Rolleston expressed some scepticism over the possible restoration of the Irish language as the national language of Ireland. In early 1896, this scepticism was still apparent in a speech he delivered to the Dublin Press Club, during which he suggested that the Irish language was not suitable as an instrument for the expression of modern and scientific thought. He added that the Irish language as a medium for social intercourse had disappeared save for some places along the western seaboard.[34] Rolleston's comments resulted in a flurry of letters to the *Irish Daily Independent* that censured his comments. Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association, professed amazement 'at his recklessness of assertion. I was indignant that he had not a tear to shed in memory of the departed soul of Irish National life.'[35] Another asserted that whilst Rolleston's comments were true 'it affords a reason for cultivating a literary revival of the Irish

34 *Irish Daily Independent*, 20 Jan. 1896. **35** Michael Cusack to the *Irish Daily Independent*, 31 Jan. 1896.

language rather than a reason to why it should be left to rust'.[36] Rolleston suggested a 'scientific test'. He proposed to give two representative pieces of modern English prose to Hyde who would translate them into Irish. Hyde would then return them to Rolleston who in turn would give them to another Gaelic scholar to translate back into English and then publish the results in the *Gaelic Journal*. Rolleston promised: 'if the result shall show that I was wrong in my assertion I will only too gladly admit it, and one of the most remarkable facts in the history of language will have been brought to light'.[37] It was decided to hold the proposed test privately between Rolleston, Hyde and MacNeill. The pieces chosen were from the *Life of Goethe* by George Henry Lewes and the *Grammar of Science* by Karl Pearson. The yearbook for the Gaelic League remarked that the result surprised Rolleston and showed him that Irish possessed powers of word formation of which he had not dreamt.[38]

But in 1900, Rolleston returned to familiar territory when he claimed that the Irish people were solely responsible for the decline of the Irish language. The Irish language, 'our great National Treasure' was lost and its vicissitudes was the responsibility of the Irish people:

> Not the Sassenach! Have not our whole people, with their social and political leaders, for the last sixty years, co-operated eagerly with the National Board of Education in digging the grave of the ancient tongue?'[39]

England had offered no opposition to the Gaelic revival, Rolleston declared; the chief secretary was in favour of Gaelic League policy. It was the Irish who were the willing partners in the anglicization of their own country. It was the height of pro-Boer feeling in Ireland; anti-Imperial sentiment reinvigorated Ireland and Irish nationalism, particularly physical force nationalism. Earlier that year, Rolleston dismissed the pro-Boer feeling as a matter of tradition and inheritance, by insisting such feelings were shallow and led to exhibitions that were both silly and harmful.[40] Within Gaelic League circles, Yeats reported to Lady Gregory that Rolleston received a frosty reception at a lecture given by Hyde at which Rolleston spoke.[41] Despite these differences of opinion, Rolleston was an active and enthusiastic member of the Gaelic League. In September 1900 he offered £50 as a prize for the best modernization of an ancient Irish tale.[42] He was a member of a committee established by the National Literary Society to

36 Joseph McKenna to the *Irish Daily Independent*, 27 Jan. 1896. **37** TWR to the *Irish Daily Independent*, 29 Jan. 1896. **38** Gaelic League Yearbook of 1896 (MS 10900 MacNeill Papers) p. 16. **39** TWR, 'Æ and Fiona MacLeod' in *All Ireland Review*, 25 Aug 1900, p. 1. **40** *Echo*, 4 Oct. 1899. **41** Yeats to Lady Gregory 13 Oct. 1900 cited in: Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (eds), *The collected letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, *1896–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) p. 576; also see *Irish Daily Independent*, 12 Oct. 1900 for a report on the meeting and the *Leader*, 20 Oct. 1900. **42** *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 22 Sept. 1900.

inquire into the provisions of Irish classes for members of the society.[43] He was president of the Five Branches of the Provinces in Dublin, and the Glenealy committee invited him to become president of their Gaelic League branch.

The Gaelic League professed itself to be non-sectarian and non-political, but by the early 1900s, it was becoming more identified with nascent Catholicism and Gaelicism. D.P. Moran's newspaper, the *Leader*, regarded Irishness intrinsic with Catholicism, 'In the main non-Catholic Ireland looks upon itself as British and as Anglo-Irish, and if non-Catholics sought to throw their lot in with the Irish nation, it was imperative that they must recognize that the Irish nation is *de facto* a Catholic nation'.[44] Pamphlets by Fr Forde and Fr O'Leary published under the auspices of the League indicated the easy association of Catholicism with the Irish language. In his pamphlet 'The Irish Language Movement – Its Philosophy', O'Leary claimed that Irishness was tied with Catholicism and that the Irish language was infused with religious life.[45] The pamphlet incensed Rolleston and in a letter to Hyde, he warned that Protestants would defect from the Gaelic League if what he described as the 'sectarian and intolerant party' continued to retain the upper hand in the League. He further stated that it would be easy to form a strong party with Castletown as its head who would take up the Celtic Association and make a Gaelic organization for Protestants who were interested in Gaelic matters and Catholics who disliked the introduction of sectarianism in the Gaelic League. Lord Castletown was the leader of the Pan Celts in Ireland and had served in the Boer war. Rolleston insisted this was a serious possibility:

> I am going to thrash the matter out with Lord C. (Castletown) and others, but at the same time I think it is a great pity that it should be so. There are only a million Protestants in Ireland, they cannot be driven out nor can they, like Catholics in England, be regarded as a more or less negligible quantity.[46]

In conclusion, he urged Hyde to redirect the Gaelic League back on its original non-sectarian course.

Whilst Rolleston expressed concern about the Catholic Church becoming dominant in the League, he was also concerned about the Church of Ireland's lack of interest in the League. He outlined in an article 'Irish Protestantism and the Gaelic Movement' the consequences of the Church of Ireland's antipathy to the Irish language.[47] He berated Church of Ireland clergymen for their blind-

43 See Minute Book of the National Literary Society, 9 and 16 Oct. 1899 (NLI MSS 645–6). **44** Georg Grote, *Torn between politics and culture: the Gaelic League, 1893–1993* (New York: Waxmann Munster, 1994) p. 80. **45** Revd Peter Forde, *The Irish language movement: its philosophy*, Gaelic League pamphlet, No. 21 (Dublin, 1899) p. 27. **46** Ibid. **47** TWR 'Irish Protestantism and the Gaelic movement' in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1905.

ness to the vital point that a national church would have to be Irish above all things. He believed that the Church of Ireland had demonstrated a reluctance to all things Irish in the last three centuries and consequently it found itself 'an alien minority, it has cut itself off from all development and all national influence, it lives, one may say, on an island within an island, insulated from all vital contact with the people and keeping up this insulation through all the education institutions in which its influence is strong'.[48] Rolleston asserted that the Gaelic League now presented the Church of Ireland an opportunity to redeem itself in a movement that promoted national feeling. It was non-political, and involvement would not compromise them religiously or politically. Despite his faith in the Gaelic League as a non-political organization, Rolleston worried about the increasing influence of the clergy within the League. He warned the Revd James Hannay that the influence of the clergy would have to be monitored if the League was to preserve its independence. Like Rolleston, Hannay was an advocate of the Gaelic League, but he had first-hand experience of the power of the Catholic clergy. In 1906, John Dillon unmasked Hannay as the author George A. Birmingham. Under this pseudonym, Hannay published two novels, *The Seething Pot* and *Hyacinth*. The theme of both books dealt with the increasing isolation of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in Ireland. The unmasking of Hannay led to a series of controversies. In these, what Birmingham wrote was inextricably mixed up with whom (Hannay, the Church of Ireland rector) wrote it. Hannay was censured for his alleged attacks on the institutions and religious faith of Catholics in Ireland. The initial controversy was a local affair, but it reached national level following a meeting of the Gaelic League in Claremorris in late 1906. Hannay was a member of the Coisde Gnotha (Executive Committee) of the League. The parish priest of Tuam, Canon Macken, objected to Hannay's presence on a committee because of Hannay's portrayal of Irish Catholics in his books. Macken's action breached the constitution of the League, and when this was pointed out to him, he replied he was bound to a higher constitution. The incident sent shockwaves throughout the Gaelic League, but Hannay diffused the situation with his resignation from the Coisde Gnotha. In the wake of such incidents, Rolleston clung to the belief that:

> Politics is fact have now been, like everything else, absorbed into the Church, everything but *one* (Rolleston's emphasis) thing, and that one thing is the Gaelic League. The League represents the last effort of the Irish spirit for nationality and a personal independence. The Church began by opposing it; it's now, as usual, doing its utmost to absorb it, when it will become the mere tame cat like the political party and cease to have any vital existence for the future of Ireland. Whether the League can resist

48 Ibid.

> the Church any better than the politicians did is very doubtful, but we must fight the matter out as best we can – and qui vivra verra.[49]

By 1907, he regarded the non-sectarian constitution of the League as a joke and was unable to give a lecture on the non-sectarianism of the League, 'knowing what I do, to preside at a meeting devoted to a discussion of the non political character of the Gaelic League. I cannot champion it without saying what I know to be untrue'.[50] In 1907, the threat of a Protestant secession from the Gaelic League was resurrected. It arose from a number of meetings held under the auspices of the Branch of the Five Provinces, a branch of the League with a Protestant majority. Irish Protestant Gaelic Leaguers held a number of meetings throughout May to discuss ways and means of bringing the League to the notice of their fellow co-religionists and inducing them to take their part in the movement.[51] Rolleston denied vehemently that there was any discussion among Protestants to secede from the League. Certain Protestant Gaelic Leaguers used the rooms of the Five Provinces 'with a view to concerting measures for extending the principles of the League among their co-religionists'.[52] Rolleston asserted that Catholics predominated the membership at the Five Branches and Protestants would object to such a move. He declared, 'I should never have encountered any such body, much less held office in it'.

Rolleston saw the Gaelic League as a vehicle to bring Irish Protestants into Irish life. He was not concerned with the restoration of the Gaelic language *per se*; this was a chimera as far as he was concerned. He believed the Gaelic League had the potential to be a 'true' national movement on non-sectarian and non-political lines, but this 'potential' was threatened by the nascent Gaelicism of Moran's *Leader* and increasing clerical dominance within the League.

The 1890s saw the blossoming of the Irish literary revival but it was also a period of 'conciliation' in Irish politics. Redmond, the leader of the Parnellite section of the Irish Parliamentary Party, embraced this new direction in Irish politics. According to Paul Bew, Redmond sought to achieve home rule by affecting a shift in the English public and parliamentary opinion.[53] How was this 'shift' to be achieved? It was to be achieved by creating first a new and harmonious era of co-operation between the different creeds and classes in Ireland.[54] Redmond believed that tension between southern Irishmen gave many British voters a reason to defeat home rule.[55] Sir Horace Plunkett, a

49 TWR to Hannay, date unknown but early 1905 (Hannay Papers Trinity College Dublin MSS 3544). **50** TWR to Hannay, 11 Jan. 1907 (Hannay Papers Trinity College Dublin MSS 3544). **51** *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 18 May 1907; also see *Freeman's Journal*, 18 May 1907; and the *Leader*, 11 and 25 May 1907. **52** TWR to the *Freeman's Journal*, 28 May 1907; also see TWR to *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28 May 1907. **53** Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland 1890–1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987). **54** Ibid. **55** Ibid., p. 25

unionist, asserted that the root of Ireland's problems was economic rather than political. He believed it was necessary to wean the Irish people from their obsession with politics to concentrate on their economic plight. In the late 1880s, Plunkett established the first co-operative creamery in Limerick. In 1894, he presided over the establishment of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (hereafter IAOS).

It is not known when or how or even why Rolleston became interested in the co-operative movement. In 1900, Rolleston published an article in which he outlined his vision of the role of organizations such as the Gaelic League, the IAOS, the Irish Industries Association (hereinafter IIA) and the Literary Society. He regarded these organizations as the embodiments of the true national spirit; they were practically the 'sole fosterers and guardians of the national idea'.[56] Rolleston pointed out that these movements ran counter to the trend of political nationalism, which he believed opposed any co-operation between home rulers and unionists; this was something 'to be denounced and smitten down. The nationalism of the spirit and the nationalism of contemporary party politics refuse to coalesce and harmonize.'[57] Rolleston's involvement was not initially with Plunkett's movement. In 1893, he was appointed managing director and secretary of the IIA. Lady Aberdeen, whose husband served as lord lieutenant of Ireland on two separate occasions, founded the IIA in 1886. The IIA was primarily concerned with handicrafts industry in Ireland – lace making and the manufacture of homespuns. Rolleston's position within IIA required him to spend much of his time travelling around Ireland, lecturing and encouraging the organization of industries suitable to each locality.[58]

In 1899, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act established a new department, which came into existence in 1900. But by then, the air of conciliation that had been palatable in Irish politics slowly dissipated, although it continued until the landlord conference in 1902, which resulted in the Wyndham Land Act of 1903. Four separate events – the 1798 Centenary celebrations, the Boer war, the formation of O'Brien's United Irish League and the re-unification of the Irish Parliamentary Party – revitalized Irish nationalism. A more hostile and suspicious approach in the manner of John Dillon replaced Redmond's conciliationist approach. Dillon was inimical to Plunkett's efforts, as he believed it was just another means of killing home rule by kindness. Rolleston was appointed Organiser of Lectures at the new department. His remit was similar to his position at the IIA. He organized lectures on various subjects relating to technical instruction throughout Ireland. His major contribution to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (hereafter DATI) was the organization of the Irish Historic Loan to the St Louis World Fair in 1904.

56 C.H. Rolleston, *T.W. Rolleston* (1939), p. 60. **57** Ibid. **58** Ibid., p. 58.

In 1908, Rolleston unwittingly played into the Irish Parliamentary Party's hands. In 1906, the Liberals were returned to office, and the Irish Parliamentary Party was determined to have Plunkett removed from the headship of the DATI. Plunkett eventually handed over office to T.W. Russell. In 1907, Plunkett resumed the presidency of the IAOS but relations remained strained between the two groups. Later that year, he gave a wide-ranging speech on the role of the IAOS and asked Rolleston to send copies of the speech to friends in America to solicit funds. Rolleston sent copies of the speech with a covering letter. As noted earlier, Rolleston had very little enthusiasm for the Irish Parliamentary Party. In 1890, he described them as 'this damnable gang of swindlers and murderers'. In his letter, Rolleston described Plunkett's speech as an attempt to organize Irish farmers to shake off the grip of the country publican and the gombeen man, who hitherto controlled the parliamentary representation of the country.[59] The letter found its way into the possession of John Redmond who published it in the *Freeman's Journal*. As far as Redmond was concerned, the letter was proof of a plot by the co-operative movement to usurp the position of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Rolleston accepted responsibility for the letter and the opinions expressed in it, claiming they were his and were not representative of the IAOS However, his letter ended any hope of reconciliation between the DATI and the IAOS It gave the DATI a reason to withdraw funds from the IAOS, which was now forced to rely entirely on its own resources.[60]

In 1909, Rolleston moved to London to take up a position as a reviewer of German literature for the *Times Literary Supplement*. He continued to take an interest in Ireland, but it was from a position of observation rather than participation.

For a variety of reasons, Rolleston has been ignored, but he was one of the very few who managed to engage in the revival in its different manifestations. He has been neglected for a variety of reasons. His imperialistic vision of Ireland in an 'Anglo-Celtic' empire did not sit easily with his earlier devotion to John O'Leary. Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin, repeatedly criticized Rolleston's conversion from nationalism to imperialism. In one article, Griffith wrote: 'I do most heartily congratulate him on his exit from Irish nationalism.'[61] Even Yeats dismissed Rolleston's nationalism as child's play: 'his nationalist convictions had never been more than the toys of a child and were put away when the bell rang for meals'.[62] In the aftermath of Parnell's death and the split in the Irish Parliamentary Party, Rolleston appealed to organizations like the National Literary Society, the Gaelic League, the IIA and the IAOS to fulfil the role of the Irish Parliamentary Party. He desired for these organizations to create harmony and co-operation between nationalists and unionists.

59 Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett: co-operation and politics – an Irish biography* (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986), p. 84. **60** West, *Plunkett* (1986), pp 83–4. **61** *United Irishman*, 24 Mar. 1900; also see *United Irishman*, 12 May, 9 June, 1 Sept. and 20 Oct. 1900, 19 Jan., 2 and 23 Feb. 1901 and 21 Jan. 1905 for further attacks on Rolleston. **62** Alldrit, *W.B. Yeats* (1997), p. 49.

As he saw it, they represented 'the true, genuine, and practical nationalism of the country'.[63] But the events of Easter week 1916 and the subsequent War of Independence meant that the contribution and role of figures such as Rolleston came to be neglected.

63 C.H. Rolleston, *T.W. Rolleston* (1939), p. 60.