

same cloth, is successfully passed in her study. The reader is convinced by her portrait of Hugh MacLennan who happily emerges as a humane humanist who cares passionately for literature, for his country and for human dignity. Those who have had the opportunity to meet MacLennan have found these qualities to be true to the original. The biography is also a tribute to a writer who persevered against the difficult odds in the 1940s and 50s of a country with an immature reading audience and publishing industry. It is a study of what it was to be a writer in Canada before the Canada Council, Expo '67 and Canadian literature in the classroom. It documents too the literary context of Canada for the writer from the early 1940s to the present: authors, editors, publishers, reviewers; the creative, intellectual and publishing climate. It provides notes on sources that will be valuable for further studies of Hugh MacLennan and includes a very useful index as well as several interesting pages of photographs.

While all the writers presented in these biographies, with the exception of Margaret Duley, would leave the Atlantic region to pursue their literary careers elsewhere, in Ontario, Quebec and the United States, their lives and their work are a testimony to the significance of the Atlantic region in the literary life of this country. Eastern Canada nurtured several important colonial literary movements as well as key figures in the Confederation period. Individual writers in the region continue to this day to offer strong and important voices. While the writers studied here may not have had the opportunity or the desire to remain in the region, they took with them the raw material of their later vision and expression: Roberts and Carman the classical training of the University of New Brunswick and a response to the Maritime landscape; E.J. Pratt the elemental world of rock and sea that would inspire his epic themes and leviathan characters; Margaret Duley the critical eye and wit sharpened in colonial St. John's; and Hugh MacLennan the strong moral vision of Scottish Cape Breton. It is appropriate that these important Atlantic Canadian literary figures should be the focus of recent scholarly enquiry.

CARRIE MACMILLAN

### The Irish in North America New Perspectives

ACCORDING TO AN OLD STORY, the basic differences among North Americans, Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics can be illustrated by their reactions to a door that opens the wrong way. The North American, imbued with a sense of initiative and getting things done, will find the necessary tools and fix it without delay. The Irish Protestant, dour and stoical, will put up with the inconvenience, since it is part of God's design to test strength of character. And the Irish

Catholic, not given to worry about such things, will simply point out that the door has always opened that way and carry on regardless. These are crude cultural stereotypes, no doubt. And yet the assumptions behind them have crept into much academic writing on each of these groups. There is almost an automatic connection made between the American way of life and dynamic individualism; Irish Protestants are often depicted as God-fearing, narrow-minded and hard-working; and Irish Catholics are frequently seen as easy-going and accepting of conditions around them. Although it may be granted that these traits are rooted in socio-economic conditions, it has also been argued that such cultural values have reinforced, influenced or even determined patterns of economic behaviour. In this view, North American entrepreneurial attitudes have been a major driving force behind economic progress, Irish Protestants' thrift and self-denial have helped them prosper, and the Irish Catholic peasant mentality has helped to perpetuate poverty.

Such arguments and assumptions have converged in the historiography of the Irish in North America. In general, cultural interpretations have prevailed; these have found their most sophisticated expression in the prize-winning work by Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985). The central challenge to this approach has come from the prolific pen of Donald Akenson, an historian of Ireland who has recently turned his attention to the diaspora. By emphasizing the importance of socio-economic factors and downplaying the significance of cultural values, Akenson has attempted to stand the traditional picture on its head. The emerging historiographical debate is important in two ways. Not only can it increase our understanding of Irish attitudes and experiences in the New World, but it can also throw much light on the larger issue of the role of culture in influencing economic behaviour.

Kerby Miller's book is a magnificent, monumental work. It is not so much a study of emigration as a new history of Ireland with emigration as the central theme. The research is impressive, and the argument is subtle, complex and nuanced. In the course of an extensive study of emigrants' letters, mainly written during the 19th century, Miller discovered that the notion of emigration-as-exile was of great importance. The Catholic Irish in particular tended to view emigration as the result of British oppression, Protestant Ascendancy or landlord tyranny, and saw themselves as passive victims of events beyond their control. But in reality, Miller argues, the vast majority of emigrants were not involuntary exiles; faced with dislocating socio-economic changes produced by modernization and Anglicization, they made rational decisions to leave and better themselves in North America. While recognizing that British influence shaped the general direction of Irish economic development, Miller points out that many of the causes of emigration were generated within the Catholic community itself, as Catholic graziers and large farmers strove to increase their profits at the expense of labourers, smallholders and non-inheriting children.

There was, in short, a wide gap between subjective belief and objective reality. To explain this discrepancy, Miller argues that perceptions of reality were mediated through a distinctive Irish Catholic worldview which devalued personal responsibility, individual action and ambition. Formed by complex interactions of culture, class and historical circumstances, this "culture of exile" had its roots in pre-Conquest Gaelic traditions, in the passive linguistic structure of the Irish language, and in social and religious organizations which were hierarchical, communal, familial and traditional. This worldview was sustained by a history of defeat and demoralization, and by socio-economic changes which reduced the scope of responsible choice for most rural dwellers. "In broadest terms", writes Miller, "much evidence indicates that, in contrast to the Protestants they encountered in Ireland and North America, the Catholic Irish were more communal than individualistic, more dependent than independent, more fatalistic than optimistic, more prone to accept conditions passively than to take initiatives for change, and more sensitive to the weight of tradition than to innovative possibilities for the future" (p. 107).

From this perspective, Miller examines the impact of the Irish Catholic worldview on Irish experiences at home and in North America. Within Ireland, he argues, the new post-Famine Catholic bourgeoisie of graziers and large farmers used traditional categories of thought to obscure internal tensions and to project actual or potential social unrest onto Britain. Miller points out that the Catholic nationalist and clerical middle classes benefitted from the way in which emigration facilitated the consolidation of holdings, reduced generational conflict over the inheritance of land and lessened the likelihood of agrarian violence. Not surprisingly, then, they refused to countenance radical policies such as land redistribution which might have stemmed the flood of emigration; these policies would have subverted the new social order on which the status and prosperity of the middle classes depended. At the same time, the middle classes faced acute political and psychological pressures which made it impossible for them to support emigration. Bourgeois nationalists needed the support of the disadvantaged elements of Catholic society, such as smallholders, labourers and non-inheriting children, who were threatened by economic displacement and emigration. And it was difficult for clerics to reconcile their image of Holy Ireland with the brute fact that vast numbers of people were leaving it. The tension was resolved when nationalists and clerics tapped into popular traditions which blamed all ills on Britain and which viewed emigration as exile. What may be called the "strategy of deflection" affirmed that emigration was forced on the innocent victims of Ireland by the ancient oppressor, and diverted lower-class discontent away from the Catholic middle classes and towards Perfidious Albion. In this way, Miller contends, traditional cultural values were employed to secure the hegemony of a new social class.

Within North America, Miller argues that the Irish Catholic worldview impeded the adjustment of Irish immigrants to the advanced capitalist society of

the United States. The Famine immigrants in particular, he maintains, were too poor, unskilled and temperamentally unprepared for material achievement and assimilation in the New World. They huddled together in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard rather than exploiting the opportunities for farming in the American west, and they preferred poverty and company in urban areas to affluence and isolation in the countryside. As a result, "in 1870 most Irish Americans remained mired in the lower classes" (p. 333). In this position, they experienced the full force of "No-Irish-Need-Apply" nativism, which only intensified their sense of exile, reinforced their feelings of Irishness and strengthened their attachment to Irish American nationalism. For many, Miller concludes, there was a powerful psychological need to remember Mother Ireland and free her from the chains of British imperialism. And behind it all lay the inescapable weight of cultural values: "Irish-American homesickness, alienation and nationalism were rooted ultimately in a traditional Irish Catholic worldview" (p. 556). The argument is stimulating, and the intellectual structure has an architectonic beauty. In some places, such as his description of the Famine, the "American Wake" and the trans-Atlantic voyage, Miller's writing is vivid, powerful and deeply moving. The book is rapidly establishing itself as a classic, and there is no doubt that all subsequent writings on the Irish in North America will have to address his assumptions and analysis. Precisely because the structure of the book is so impressive, however, it is essential that we pay careful attention to its foundations.

To begin with, one must question the significance of the exile motif in emigrants' letters. The motif was there, of course; Miller found references to it in over 5000 letters and memoirs. And yet he also found many other preoccupations in the letters, such as a quest for "independence" in the New World, and a sense of escaping the poverty of Ireland. All historical writing is selective, and one suspects that Miller has emphasized exile at the expense of other, equally important, themes. It is worth noting that a recent study of Irish emigrants' letters from Australia reveals a practical concern with the problems and prospects of farming rather than a sense of exile.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence in Miller's book that the exile motif was expressed in letters from Canada. Could it be that the sense of exile which he discovered had more to do with Irish experiences in the United States than with cultural factors stemming from the Old Country?

There are, in fact, some grounds for doubting Miller's explanatory framework of a Catholic Irish worldview characterized by communalism, dependence, fatalism, passivity and traditionalism. It should be stressed that Miller does not reify culture, and perceives a complex process of interaction between values, attitudes and beliefs on the one hand, and economic conditions, class relations

1 Patrick O'Farrell, *Letters From Irish Australia, 1825-1929* (Sydney, 1984).

and family structures on the other. But within this dialectic, culture is assigned a preponderant role. One sees this in his questionable assumption that Irish linguistic structures reflected and reinforced a fatalistic outlook on life, a large theoretical claim which many linguists would dispute. And one also sees it when considering the issue of violence in Irish society. Miller is aware of the endemic agrarian violence and the proliferation of secret societies in pre-Famine Ireland, but does not examine how such phenomena affect his interpretation of Catholic culture. The agricultural labourers and smallholders suffering from overpopulation, exploitation and evictions did not resign themselves to their fate. On the contrary, they fought long and hard to preserve their increasingly precarious position. True, their struggle was communal and traditional, but it cannot be characterized as the product of a dependent, fatalist or passive cultural outlook.

If Miller's cultural interpretation is open to question, further imponderables are introduced when he argues that the Catholic middle classes used the traditional worldview to blur the fact that they benefitted from emigration, and to pre-empt radical social policies like land redistribution which could have reduced the outflow of people, but which also threatened their own economic and social position. Much of his case rests on the inherently untestable counterfactual assumption that land redistribution was actually a viable means of alleviating the problem of emigration. Since it was not tried, we cannot know. Nor, for that matter, was there a powerful grass-roots demand for land redistribution. It might be argued that the lack of such a demand testifies to the effectiveness of the strategy of deflection, but this leads us into the realm of tautology: there was no strong pressure for land redistribution because of the success of the strategy of deflection; the strategy of deflection's success is demonstrated by the lack of strong pressure for land redistribution. Moreover, because any such strategy did not operate on a conscious level, it is impossible to prove or to disprove. In some respects, Miller has constructed a magnificent intellectual structure which is left floating in the air.

Bringing things back to the ground is one of the central tasks in Donald Akenson's work on the Irish in North America. Beginning with an important article written in 1982, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?", Akenson has worked through 19th century Canadian census data to test the view that cultural factors affected Irish Catholic adjustment to the New World and to revise many customary notions about the Irish in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, he found that in Canada the similarities between Irish Protestant and Catholic experiences were more important than the differences, that the overwhelming majority of Protestants and Catholics settled in rural rather than urban areas,

2 Donald H. Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?", *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 3 (1982), pp. 204-56.

and that farming was the chief occupation of Protestants and Catholics alike. Drawing on Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein's study of the 1871 Canadian census, Akenson emphasized that only 20 years after the Famine, Irish Catholic patterns of residency and occupation matched those of the Canadian population in general.<sup>3</sup> These conclusions contradicted Miller's assertions that the Catholic Irish in North America were technologically unprepared to farm and culturally predisposed to congregate in cities. Akenson's work indicated that any differences which may have existed between a rural Irish Catholic experience in Canada and an urban one in the United States was a product of conditions in the New World rather than cultural attributes transmitted from the Old. As he put it in *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984): "If there is any single lesson of this study that ought to be underlined, it is that the Irish-Catholic migrant to the New World was much quicker, more technologically adaptive, more economically alert, and much less circumscribed by putative cultural limits inherited from the Old Country than is usually believed" (p. 353).

The great strength of the *Irish in Ontario* is that it links larger issues concerning the Irish in North America with the particular operation of ethnic adaptation and acculturation on the ground in a specific setting, the eastern Ontario township of Leeds and Lansdowne. In his discussion of general themes, Akenson not only shows that the Irish in Ontario were a rural people, but also confirms earlier estimates that two-thirds of them were Protestant, and argues that the Famine did not radically alter the pattern or character of immigration into the province.<sup>4</sup> In his local study of Leeds and Lansdowne, Akenson attempts to place the particular experience of the Irish within the entire spectrum of possibilities which existed throughout Ontario. To do this, he examines closely the interaction between the host community and its Irish newcomers who began to arrive after 1815.

According to Akenson, Leeds and Lansdowne originated as a competitive, individualistic, face-to-face and essentially non-ideological society, in which concrete and immediate issues and interests were more important than abstract concepts and long-term considerations. During the War of 1812, for example, the inhabitants acted in a pragmatic rather than a principled manner, although they would subsequently develop a mythology of wartime patriotism to justify their privileged position in relation to later immigrants. Most of these later immigrants were Irish; in Leeds and Lansdowne, like British North America in general, the Irish became the single largest immigrant group. This set the stage

3 A. Gordon Darroch and Michael D. Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structure in Canada in 1871: the Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective", *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (1980), pp. 305-33.

4 C.J. Houston and W.J. Smyth, "The Irish Abroad: Better Questions through a Better Source, the Canadian Census", *Irish Geography*, 13 (1980), pp. 1-19.

for what Akenson calls the “local Irish revolution” (p. 139) which transformed the social, political and economic structure of the township. In social terms, Akenson argues, the Irish presence hastened the development of communal behaviour and conceptual thought in a hitherto atomistic society. This was partly because the Irish, through their sheer weight of numbers, swamped the earlier system of personal connections and individual contracts. But it also resulted from the immigrants’ strong collective consciousness, which forced the earlier settlers themselves to respond in a collective way. With the influx of the Irish, people began to think of themselves “as members of collectivities which existed irrespective of the membership of any specific individual” (p. 185). The Irish, in Akenson’s view, had precipitated not only a social but also an intellectual revolution.

Reflecting the provincial pattern, most of the Irish in Leeds and Lansdowne were Protestants. As hyper-loyal supporters of Crown and Empire, writes Akenson, they were able to subvert from within the myth of patriotic loyalty during the War of 1812 which earlier settlers used to distinguish themselves from the immigrants. Indeed, he shows that the Irish became a major force in local politics with remarkable rapidity. Their impact is illustrated by the career of Ogle Gowan, a Wexford Protestant who arrived in 1829, founded the Orange Order in British North America in 1830, and fought (literally) to become elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1834. Through a combination of relentless ambition, political cunning and a willingness to break heads, Gowan built on the growing Irish community to defeat the Reformers and turn the Tories into the junior partners in an informal alliance with the Irish. His success was symptomatic of the new political reality. “Dramatic figure though he was”, comments Akenson, “Ogle R. Gowan was less a cause of the rise of the Leeds county Irish than an effect” (p. 191).

On the economic front, Akenson’s study reveals that the Irish in Leeds and Lansdowne were adaptable, resourceful and reasonably prosperous. In fact, his analysis of the 1861 census yields surprising results: in Leeds township, Irish-born Catholics were better off than Irish-born Protestants, and the Irish-born in general were wealthier than the rest of the local farming population — a pattern which almost certainly reversed the usual order of prosperity in rural Ontario. The reasons for this situation in Leeds township remain unclear. Akenson speculates that the Irish-born may have been more ambitious and able than those who simply inherited their farms. But even if this was the case, it does not explain why such factors should be more important in Leeds township than elsewhere in Ontario, or why the local Irish-born Catholics did better than their Protestant counterparts. Whatever the reasons, though, it is clear that the Irish in this part of the province were in a healthy economic condition.

The relatively smooth adjustment of the Irish to their new environment was helped, in Akenson’s view, by the emergence during the mid 19th century of familiar social institutions in the province and the township. He shows that the

Anglican Church had strong links with the Church of Ireland, that Ontario's educational system followed the Irish model, and that the Orange Order facilitated the economic and social integration of Protestant immigrants into the local society. While there may have been latent Protestant-Catholic hostility, there was little or no sectarian violence; because the Catholics were a socially respectable and non-threatening minority, argues Akenson, the local Protestants left them alone. Most significantly, Akenson finds that in many respects conditions in Leeds and Lansdowne were similar to those prevailing throughout the province. Apart from the relative economic position of Irish-born Catholics, Irish-born Protestants and the rest of the township's farmers, the area was "very close to the provincial average in its distribution between urban and rural segments of the population, in its proportion of Irish-born, in the rural residence pattern of those of Irish descent, and in farming as the chief occupation of all those of Irish descent" (p. 338). The whole thrust of his analysis suggests that one of his central conclusions for Leeds and Lansdowne holds true for the Ontario Irish in general: "The Irish adapted to their new physical surroundings and assimilated with the existing society; but, because of their numerical preponderance and the singular institutional strengths of the Irish, the existing culture made an equally great adjustment. To a remarkable degree, it underwent assimilation to them" (p. 282).

It seems clear, then, that cultural characteristics were not an impediment to the acculturation and adaptation of the Irish in Canada. But while Akenson's analysis of the Irish is convincing, his description of the early 19th century society to which they came suffers from an excess of empiricism. In discussing the apparently atomistic and non-ideological society of Leeds and Lansdowne before 1815, he adopts a very narrow definition of ideology as "an articulate political viewpoint that both interprets the past and gives prescriptions for the future", dismisses attempts to discover underlying political and social attitudes as presentist, and asserts that because ideology as he defines it cannot explain social and economic behaviour in the township it is at best "only of antiquarian interest" (p. 97). Such an approach is very one-sided, and comes close to substituting socio-economic determinism for the kind of cultural determinism which he rightly rejects. It is true that an investigation of ideology broadly conceived as a set of semi-articulated beliefs and attitudes is susceptible to presentism, but this does not mean that such beliefs and attitudes did not exist or matter. It is also ironic that Akenson implicitly criticizes the history of ideas as elitist, but then bases his economic analysis of Leeds and Lansdowne on the experiences of three commercially successful figures in the area. And the political and social ideology of one of those figures, Joel Stone, is passed over in favour of a discussion of his various business dealings. Moreover, when Akenson does discuss the emergence of a local "patriotic mythology" after the War of 1812, he adopts the very approach which he has just warned us against. He provides no evidence that such a mythology took hold in Leeds and



Lansdowne or that it functioned as a justification of the earlier settlers' relatively privileged position. The point here is not whether Akenson's interpretation of the myth is right or wrong, but rather that the arguments which he employs to dismiss the importance of ideas before 1812 can also be used to dismiss his emphasis on ideas after 1812. In this sense, Akenson's empiricism boomerangs on him.

None of this, however, detracts from his general conclusions about the Ontario Irish, and it is these general conclusions which are revolutionizing Irish-American historiography. Building on his research for the *Irish in Ontario*, Akenson produced two more books which expanded upon his themes: *The Orangeman: The Life and Times of Ogle Gowan* (Toronto, James Lorimer, 1986), a fictionalized biography of the scurrilous and scandalous Ogle Gowan, and *Being Had: Historians, Evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit, P.D. Meany, 1985), a powerful attack on the orthodox version of the Irish in North America. Although they are very different, both books share a swashbuckling style and a wonderful irreverence for the kind of bland conformity which stifles so much historical writing.

*The Orangeman* is a vastly entertaining book about an irresistibly outrageous figure. As if by way of release from his rigorous analysis of 19th century Canadian census data, Akenson outlines the main contours of Gowan's career, and lets his imagination run riot with the details. "I have tried to make everything in this fictionalized biography consistent with the known facts", he writes, "but most of the dialogue, several of the settings and some of the interstitial events are fiction" (p. xii). On the grounds that biographical writing usually consists of informed guesses anyway, he sets out to "speculate sensibly about things, and...to have a little fun along the way" (p. xi). To help the reader sort out the fact from the fiction, Akenson includes an afterword discussing the sources on which the book is based.

Gowan quickly emerges as a hard-nosed man from a hard-nosed world. Akenson's description of his Irish background is unsentimental and insightful: the author brings out the ecumenical vindictiveness of the 1798 Rising, the ugliness of legal and illegal violence, the mixture of fear and arrogance in the Orange Order, and the similarities between Protestant and Catholic behaviour. Gowan's father had won notoriety in 1798 for his zeal in hounding, humiliating and hanging real or imagined Catholic rebels; we are introduced to him "pumping in and out" of his mistress while clutching a condom made of sheep's intestine. Out of such a union (sheep's intestine being less than totally effective), Ogle was born in 1803, and like his father combined a form of ultra-loyalism with an insatiable appetite for power, prestige and sex. His early years in Ireland were characterized by success and scandal — a pattern that was to repeat itself in Canada. In Dublin, Gowan became the editor of a stridently anti-Catholic newspaper, and clawed his way up the ranks of the Orange Order. But his private life ruined his career. As an illegitimate son, married to his stepsister's daughter,

he became embroiled in a squalid struggle against the legitimate children for the family fortune. The legitimate heirs bullied and badgered the dying father into writing a will favourable to them; the illegitimate ones, with Ogle at the centre, tried to reverse the result by fraud and forgery. This was too much for the Orange leaders. In a respectable, God-fearing, Papish-bashing institution like the Orange Order, bastardy, fraud, forgery and marriage verging on incest seemed faintly disreputable. Gowan had to go. He was not pulled to Canada by the prospect of expanding opportunities; he was pushed out of Ireland in disgrace.

Akenson had already dealt with Gowan's Canadian career in the *Irish in Ontario*; the treatment in the biography, however, is much more colourful, with detailed and imaginative descriptions of his political dirty tricks and sordid personal affairs. The Founding Father of Canadian Orangeism was a bad loser, a bully, an habitual liar and a child molester, with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. The peak of his career came during and shortly after the Rebellion of 1837, when, as Akenson puts it, "Ogle's personal advantage, his highest principles and his fantasy life all perfectly coincided" (p. 189). His loyalism blended with his self-interest, as he attempted to re-enact in the Farce of 1837 the same role that his father had played in the Tragedy of 1798, with American Rebels taking the place of Catholic Traitors. Loyalism has always thrived on identifiable enemies, and Gowan won considerable prestige as a staunch defender of Canada. During the 1840s and 1850s, however, his career and his health went into slow decline. As he tried to broaden his political base, many of his Orange supporters complained that he was going soft on Catholics. His disreputable Irish past kept catching up with him. A combination of the pox and the bottle sapped much of his energy. Towards the end of his life, he was tried for molesting two 12 year old girls, and was only acquitted when one of them, a key prosecution witness, mysteriously and conveniently disappeared for the duration of the trial. His career collapsed in disgrace. It was the least he deserved.

*The Orangeman* is a remarkable commentary on one aspect of 19th century Canadian political life. Gowan inhabited a grubby, dog-eat-dog world. If you could not buy votes, you broke heads to get them; the name of the game was power and patronage, and the Devil take the hindmost. And as Akenson wryly comments, "Gowan illustrates the unhappy fact that the origin of state power in this country is not found only in high philosophic notions, such as justice and natural law, but in the successful attempt of one group of Canadians to shaft another" (p. xii). Fair enough; but the cynicism in the book does tend to become overwhelming. Gowan's career may be conducive to a misanthropic view of life, but there is hardly a trace of tenderness displayed by any of the characters in the book. Moreover, it is not clear that when Gowan did adopt liberal positions — as he did on Responsible Government and the Clergy Reserves question — his motive was simply to get revenge on those who had passed him over for promotion, as Akenson suggests. The book is a good antidote against

interpretations of the Canadian identity which get lost in the stratosphere, provided we remember that Canadian traditions were more than the products of political mud-wrestling matches.

In *Being Had*, Akenson returns to the broader historiographical implications of his research on the North American Irish. There is an element of recycling in the book; three of the chapters previously appeared as articles, and this makes for a somewhat disjointed argumentative structure. But the power of Akenson's position remains undiminished; in an iconoclastic *tour de force* which is already sending shock waves throughout the Irish-American historical community, he argues that most writing on the subject has been characterized by sheer, unadulterated incompetence. Historians of the Irish in North America, he writes, "have been remarkably easily fooled and at a very low level of complexity... [They] have been lax in their standards of evidence and have framed their basic story of the Irish in the United States and in central Canada on a remarkable paucity of evidence and upon a gross misreading of what evidence they actually have found" (p. 189). As the most serious and sustained challenge yet made to the prevailing orthodoxies in Irish-American historiography, *Being Had* should be compulsory reading for students and teachers in the field.

Since Akenson's views on the Irish in Ontario repeat his earlier arguments, we shall focus here on two other important themes in the book: his attack on the interpretation of Irish Catholics in H. Clare Pentland's *Labour and Capital in Canada*, and his critique of Irish American historiography. Pentland in particular comes in for brutal handling; this intellectual forerunner of the new Canadian social history, argues Akenson, was a racist, a shoddy scholar and a gross cheat who simply "made up most of his important 'facts' and then used his racist concepts to 'explain' them.... What we have in Pentland's book is not history but social pathology" (p. 136). Akenson even compares the historical analysis of Pentland's *Labour and Capital* with that of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Both Hitler and Pentland, in Akenson's view, employed an "undocumented ethnic mastercog" (p. 115) to explain an historical phenomenon: Hitler required a racist stereotype of the Jews to explain Germany's decline; Pentland required a racist stereotype of the Irish Catholics to explain the emergence of the Canadian labour market.

To demonstrate the existence of a surplus labour force, Pentland had to show that Canada experienced a massive influx of unskilled immigrants who were unable or unwilling to find alternatives to low-paying labouring jobs in the cities. According to Pentland, the Catholic Irish fitted the bill: they apparently came in large numbers, and they were a primitive, superstitious people — suitable fodder for capitalist exploitation. Yet, as Akenson shows, Pentland did no research on the character and volume of Irish immigration, ignored important studies in the field, substituted assertions for analysis, and "simply made up major bodies of data" (p. 125). Had Pentland bothered to examine the evidence, Akenson

continues, he would have found that most Irish immigrants to Canada were Protestant, that Catholic immigrants were generally small tenant farmers rather than “half-tribesmen”, that the Irish Canadians in general were a rural people, and that there is no way that the Catholic Irish can be characterized as an urban proletariat. Pentland, then, stands condemned as an incompetent, dishonest and racist historian, whose influence must be expunged from the new Canadian social history.

What are we to make of this? There is no doubt that Pentland’s view of the Irish Catholics is crudely racist, and that some apparently progressive social historians have failed to challenge strongly that racism. But to bracket Pentland and Hitler together is grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented; the difference in the degree of racism is so great that the comparison stretches itself out of existence. There is also no doubt that the vast majority of Irish Catholics in Canada lived in the countryside and that their most common occupation was farming. But it is also true, as indeed Akenson himself points out in his *Irish in Ontario*, that the Irish formed the largest ethnic group in the cities of Ontario, and that Irish-born Catholics in places like Gananoque during the post-Famine period were over-represented among unskilled labourers. In this sense, at least, the Catholic Irish did contribute to the development of an urban labour market. Nevertheless, Pentland’s racial stereotyping must be repudiated. As Akenson argues, it is no coincidence that Pentland himself was from an Ulster-Scots ethnic background and that his views of the Catholics reflect that background; Pentland’s analysis tells us more about Irish Protestant attitudes than about Irish Catholic realities.

Just as *Being Had* attacks Pentland’s interpretation of the Irish in Canada, it also questions traditional notions about the Irish in the United States. Akenson outlines the generally-accepted view that the Irish Americans were predominantly a city people, that the key period of immigration lay between the Famine and World War I, that Protestant immigration was negligible after the Famine, and that to be an Irish American was to be an Irish Catholic. All these assumptions, he argues, are wrong. He points out that census data in the United States give no information about ethnicity or religious affiliation, and that the Irish Canadian experience demonstrates that the Irish were technologically and culturally capable of becoming successful farmers; the argument that the Irish were largely urban dwellers is thus unproven and unlikely. In fact, the American data that do exist show that in 1870 just over half the Irish-born immigrants did not live in cities; the figure is likely to be considerably higher for the Irish as an ethnic group. Instead of focusing on the 1845-1914 period, he argues that we should concentrate on the years from 1815, when large-scale Irish immigration began, to 1880, when the major components of the Irish in the United States had been established. Moreover, he believes that the size and significance of Irish Protestant immigration have been seriously underestimated, and speculates that within the stream of Protestant migration the Anglicans outnumbered the

Presbyterians. The Protestants should be put back into the picture, the notion that the Catholics clustered in cities must be revised, and a "set of new perspectives" (p. 46) must be developed for a new approach to the whole question of the Irish in the United States.

Among these new perspectives, Akenson stresses the importance of establishing a North American frame of reference. He reminds us that large numbers of pre-Famine Irish immigrants came to the United States via Canada, and that many people of Irish ethnicity participated in general population movements from Canada to the United States. Because of this, and because Canadian censuses shed more light on ethnicity and religion than do their American counterparts, it is essential that American historians remember Canada. In addition, Akenson calls for a simple but vitally important conceptual change: instead of studying the Irish in specific geo-political units, he writes, historians must "*focus on the migrants themselves*" (p. 67). They should develop the techniques of trans-Atlantic family reconstitution and draw on the methods of the "much-maligned genealogists" (pp. 34, 67) to identify links between place of origin, points of destination and subsequent settlement patterns. Only through such an approach, Akenson argues, will it be possible to answer fundamental questions about the nature of cultural transfer and the process of acculturation and adaptation in the New World.

While Akenson was making these recommendations, Bruce Elliott was already applying precisely such techniques to the movement of 775 Protestant families from North Tipperary to Canada between 1818 and 1855. His *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988) is characterized by meticulous research, an impressive grasp of details, and judicious generalizations about the Irish-Canadian experience. Above all, Elliott wants to know where the immigrants came from, when they arrived and what they wanted to achieve. From this perspective, he criticizes Akenson's *Irish in Ontario* for treating the Irish in Leeds and Lansdowne as "anonymous followers of...Ogle Gowan" (p. 6) and for attempting to measure their success in objective terms of their relative economic performance as an ethnic group. The principal criterion of success, Elliott argues, should be the extent to which the immigrants realized their individual objectives in crossing the Atlantic. And their main aim was to provide for the next generation; in this sense, migration can be understood as a "strategy of heirship" (p. 6). In taking this position, Elliott explicitly rejects Miller's argument that Protestant emigration was a refuge for the disinherited rather than a family economic strategy, and that chain migration was most closely associated with the poorest Catholic migrants. In contrast, Elliott found that the movement of Tipperary Protestants to Canada was "a classic example of chain migration based upon kinship" (p. 114) and that the best predictor of settlement patterns was the original location of the first significant groups of emigrants from the old country.

After analyzing the socio-economic structure of North Tipperary, with its large number of financially-precarious minor gentry, its pressure of population on land and its increasingly tense social relations, Elliott discusses the impact on the region of the post-Napoleonic War economic depression. Many small and middling Protestant farmers, squeezed by falling prices and rising rents, faced the choice of plunging into poverty in Ireland or acquiring readily-available land in North America. They had good reasons to go, and they had the resources to do it. The process really got underway in 1818, when Richard Talbot took advantage of a government-assisted emigration scheme to bring several dozen Protestant families to Canada; these families formed the nuclei of two Irish settlements in the Ottawa Valley and the area near London. This action set in motion a self-sustained movement of people from North Tipperary to both locations over the next four decades. Like the original settlers, most of those who followed came in family units, were fairly prosperous (although less so during the Famine), were Protestant and were determined to establish themselves on the land as fast as possible. Interestingly, the character of emigration was not radically altered during the traumatic Famine years, and it was not until the mid 1850s that the pattern began to change. A number of factors, ranging from increased opportunities for middle-class farmers in post-Famine Ireland to the diminishing prospects of acquiring land in Ontario, meant that such Protestant migration that did occur in North Tipperary was increasingly directed towards new frontiers in Australasia. Within Canada, the migrants and their descendants spread out into secondary settlements, and despite a significant urban pull in the London area, most of them remained a rural people. By the 1870s, the desire to provide their sons with land took many of the migrants into Manitoba; once again, the movement was based on kinship, and would remain so until the advent of cheap railway travel lessened the dependence on family connections and enabled more migrants to strike out on their own.

In the course of exploring migration patterns, Elliott's study throws some light on related historiographical issues. Historians investigating the long-term relative population decline of southern Irish Protestants, for example, will be interested to note that a combination of emigration and intermarriage virtually depopulated marginal Protestant communities in overwhelmingly Catholic districts of North Tipperary. Anyone concerned with explaining why Irish Protestants in Canada were more likely than Irish Catholics to settle in rural areas must take account of Elliott's view that the time of arrival was probably the crucial factor. "In both the London and Ottawa areas", he writes, "the Protestants began arriving earlier than the Catholics. The rapidity of early settlement on the best lands forced later arrivals, both Protestant and Catholic, to locate on poor soils" (p. 148). With fewer chances of successful careers as farmers, fewer Catholics stayed on the land; in 1871, 58.3 per cent of Irish Protestants in Canada were farmers, in comparison with 44.3 per cent of Irish Catholics. It is also significant that Elliott's analytic framework successfully

employs socio-economic rather than cultural explanations to understand the character of migration. The greater propensity of Protestants to emigrate was largely a function of their greater financial resources, and not because Catholics were culturally inhibited from leaving home. The extent to which migrants in Canada moved from rural to urban areas was determined by economic factors such as the availability, price and quality of land, and the opportunities for alternative employment in places like London and Ottawa. And the relatively small differences in occupational patterns between Protestants and Catholics can be explained without reference to cultural characteristics. Like Akenson's work, Elliott's analysis casts serious doubt on Miller's cultural model.

Nevertheless, it must also be said that Elliott's work lacks the imaginative power and broad range of *Emigrants and Exiles*. In focusing closely on his 775 families, Elliott sometimes blurs the background. For example, although he points out that "agrarian disturbances" were an important element in stimulating Protestant emigration, he fails to convey the sense of siege which many Protestants experienced; one gets glimpses of the fear, insecurity and sometimes terror felt by the Protestants, but the larger picture needs bringing out. Similarly, he makes some interesting observations about the transference of Protestant-Catholic tensions from North Tipperary to areas like Biddulph township near London, but this theme is not developed. Just as Elliott criticized Akenson for concentrating on the political, social and economic impact of the Irish in Leeds and Lansdowne without telling us much about the individual immigrants, he can be criticized for concentrating on the individual immigrants around London and Ottawa without telling us much about their political, social and economic impact.

Taken together, however, the work of Akenson and Elliott has broken important new ground, just as Miller's stimulating study has raised many issues about emigration which will repay further investigation. On the present showing, it seems clear that socio-economic factors, rather than Miller's controversial interpretation of Irish cultural characteristics, are the best guides to Protestant and Catholic patterns of residence, occupation and degree of occupational success. At the same time, any discussion of Irish-Canadian attitudes to education, religion and politics would be incomprehensible without reference to cultural transference from the Old Country. And in the course of nailing down myths about the Irish-Canadian experience, Akenson's research has revealed new historical problems which must now be tackled. For a start, it is imperative that historians do for the Maritimes what Akenson and Elliott have done for Ontario. Akenson's decision to focus on 19th century rural Ontario was perfectly sensible, given that most Irish immigrants settled there, and given that the Irish formed the largest single ethnic group in the province for much of the century. But it is important to remember that in 1871 people of Irish ethnicity comprised one-third of New Brunswick's population, one-quarter of Prince Edward Island's population, and 15 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia.

They are simply too important to be ignored. And any work on the subject must come to grips with the significant regional differences that existed; we need to know, for example, why Irish Catholics in the Maritimes were less likely than their counterparts in Ontario to take up farming as an occupation.

Second, although Akenson rightly stresses the similarities among Protestant and Catholic migrants, the differences which he delineates must also be explored more fully. To what extent was the over-representation of Irish Catholics in the Canadian urban labour force a product of changing patterns of migration after the Famine? Did the Orange Order give Protestants a significant edge over Catholics in getting onto the land? Is it generally true, as Elliott found in the London and Ottawa areas, that the Catholics arrived after the best soil had been taken? To test these hypotheses, more studies along the lines of *Irish Migrants in the Canadas* must be undertaken, and the difficult task of applying family reconstitution techniques to Catholic migration must be faced. Such methods may also throw light on the reasons why Irish Protestants formed roughly a 60 per cent majority of the Canadian Irish in the mid 19th century, while they were probably around a 20 per cent minority of the American Irish during the same period. It is possible that a Protestant preference (not to mention a Catholic reluctance) to live under the British flag may have been an important factor, and there are some fragments of evidence in Elliott's book (pp. 62, 64) which point in this direction. In the meantime, the question remains a matter of conjecture.

A third area of investigation concerns the relationship between Ireland and Quebec. Reading Miller's analysis of the way in which the Catholic Irish middle classes used nationalism to conceal internal social tensions, to externalize discontent by projecting it onto Britain, and to buttress their own political and social power, one is reminded of Fernand Ouellet's interpretation of the *patriot* movement in Lower Canada.<sup>5</sup> A comparative study of Ireland and Quebec would be fascinating and rewarding: in both cases, one finds strong links between Catholicism and national identity, a nationalist mystique centred on the faith, family and farm, and the problems of dealing with Anglo-Protestant power. It would also be interesting to examine the experiences of Irish migrants in 19th century Quebec, where they were the largest non-French ethnic group, and to discuss the political connections between Irish Canadians in the province and figures as different as the revolutionary Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan and the conservative Thomas D'Arcy McGee. Again, the field is wide open for research.

Finally, it is little short of scandalous that female migration from Ireland to Canada has been almost totally ignored. As in contemporary Northern Ireland, so much attention has been focused on Protestant-Catholic relations that the role of women has been pushed into the background. It is an odd coincidence

5 Fernand Ouellet, *Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism* (Toronto, 1980).



that all the recent studies of the Irish in Canada have been written by men, and that none of them has explored the experiences of women. This imbalance must be redressed.

Over a century has now elapsed since Nicholas Flood Davin's *The Irishman in Canada* became the only attempt at a general history of the subject.<sup>6</sup> By testing the hypotheses of Miller, adopting the new perspectives of Akenson, employing Elliott's methodology on a wider scale, and bringing women into the picture, historians will soon be in a position to write a much-needed modern comprehensive study of the Irish in Canada. Since they were the largest English-speaking ethnic group in the pre-Confederation period, such a study is long overdue.

DAVID A. WILSON

### Lifting the Mist: Recent Studies on the Scots and Irish

IN THE NOT SO DISTANT PAST, some historians have been in the habit of viewing the Scots and Irish immigration to this country in the light of folk memory and tradition. It was easy to accept the traditional views without much detailed investigation, and to interpret the social, cultural, and political adjustment of these "Celtic" peoples into our society with such traditions firmly in mind. Of primary importance was the view that these peoples were involuntary emigrants from the old country, torn from hearth and home by forces beyond their control, and cast ashore upon the forbidding coasts of North America. They were met by indifference at best, and bravely struggled against disadvantages not faced by other British immigrants. In the long run, the Scots and the Irish endured, and perhaps even prevailed, enriching our culture with a mystique which had eluded the American Loyalists who had preceded them, and which could never have been shared by the later "English" immigrants (who incidently were in very short supply, if we are to believe the literature, and even when identified, must be qualified, as in the case of the "Yorkshiremen" of Cumberland, Nova Scotia). Ask a person of Scots extraction and you often will be told that his earliest ancestor to cross the Atlantic "was run out for stealing sheep". Ask a person of Irish extraction, and you will be told tales of "The Famine". Ask any amateur historian of the Scots or the Irish (and a good many professional historians as well) and you will be presented with stock-in-trade stories of the Highland Clearances and of oppression by landlords in both Ireland and Scotland. Probe more deeply, and you will be told that the English preferred sheep to men in the Highland glens, and that Scots culture prospered in Cape Breton, the Island,

6 Nicholas Flood Davin, *The Irishman in Canada* (London, 1877).