

NSW CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE BOER WAR: FOR AND AGAINST

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On 21 October 1999, the NSW Legislative Assembly suspended standing and sessional orders to note the centenary of a debate, held from 17 to 19 October 1899, on the motion: 'This House is of the opinion that New South Wales should equip and despatch a military force for service with the Imperial Army in South Africa.' Following those three days of rancorous debate in 1899, a fulsomely amended motion was passed, ayes 78 noes 10, to send a contingent of troops to the Transvaal:

That this House desires to express its continued and unbounded loyalty to her gracious Majesty the Queen, and while regretting the necessity for the war now in progress in South Africa, desires to express its sympathy with her Majesty's Government in the difficulties that have arisen through their endeavours to secure the social and political rights of free men for all British subjects whose lawful occupations have made them residents of Boer territory, and is of opinion that New South Wales should equip and despatch a military force for service with the Imperial army in South Africa.¹

1 Hansard, NSWLA, 19/10/1899 (<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/hansard/pages/home.aspx?tab=Browse&s=1> [accessed 18/5/2017]). An earlier debate on the war had taken place on 16 October, when the senior debating club at Riverview College staged a major exchange on the topic 'That the present war with the Transvaal is, on the British side, a war of unjust aggression'. One speaker for the motion compared British behaviour in the Transvaal with the treatment of Ireland. Riverview debating allowed for interventions from the floor, and they were not lacking on this occasion with one old-boy boisterously supporting imperial policy. The Irish Jesuit rector 'brought affairs to a close for the night with some honeyed words'. The debate continued over two more nights, concluding with a vote of 31-20 for the negative, for the British (See Errol Lea-Scarlett, *Riverview: aspects of the story of Saint Ignatius College and its peninsula, 1836-1988*, Sydney 1989, 172-173).

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The first contingent was given a tumultuous farewell when it sailed from Sydney on 28 October.

During the 1999 centenary debate, the Labor Member for Liverpool, Paul Lynch, spoke of the opposition to the South African war both within the Parliament and in the community. He then ventured to quote from someone who was ‘hardly a friend of the Left and is hardly known as a raving revolutionary’, Patrick Francis Cardinal Moran, who had publicly stated: ‘This is a raid by capitalists on a self-governing country’, and ‘that one of the special purposes for which their volunteers had gone to South Africa was to assist in annexing certain goldfields that had become very attractive to their British friends.’²

Some of the quoted words of Moran’s first public criticism of the war and the sending of troops were spoken at the opening of a fund-raising Centenary Fair in the parish of Pymont on 6 November 1899. The local pastor elicited laughter in his address of welcome: ‘The Rev Father McIntyre said that they had been ambitious in their title by calling their fair the “Century Fair”, but as they were some centuries in debt (laughter) the title was appropriate enough, especially as they desired to raise some “centuries” by the effort (Laughter).’ The Cardinal, in his response, took up the theme of naming the event, stating that ‘he feared he must begin by dissenting from the pastor of this district’, and suggesting that, ‘taking into view the present state of feeling in the colony, they should have called it the “Fighting Fair” (Laughter)’. The ‘state of feeling’ was the jingoistic patriotism which had accompanied the departure of the Colony’s contingent for South Africa at the end of October. The Cardinal flippantly linked his opinion of the Boer War with the aims of the Century Fair: ‘One of the special purposes for which their volunteers had gone to South Africa was to annex certain goldfields that had become very dear to their British friends, so, he supposed the purpose of this bazaar or fair was to annex as much gold as possible ... (Laughter).’ He went on to state, concerning the Australian contingent, that ‘if any of the brave men had asked his opinion he would have advised them to stay at home (Applause)’.³

His Eminence nuanced his attitude in an interview with the jingoistic *Daily Telegraph*.⁴ The reporter confronted him with the very different

2 Hansard, NSWLA, 21/10/1999 (<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/hansard/pages/home.aspx?tab=Browse&s=1> [accessed 18/5/2017]).

3 *Catholic Press*, 11 November 1899.

4 *Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 1899.

attitude to the war expressed by his fellow cardinal, Herbert Vaughan of Westminster, brother of Moran's predecessor in Sydney, Roger Bede Vaughan. A few days before Christmas Cardinal Vaughan had sent a letter to his clergy instructing them that, in addition to offering prayers for the dead soldiers in the war, 'we should now offer public and united supplications for our Army, officers and men, and for speedy success to the British arms.'⁵ Asked directly whether his sympathies were with the British, Moran avoided a personal commitment by citing the presence of several Irish cousins in the British army in South Africa, one a VC recipient. The interviewer pressed further and Moran responded that he did 'not care to say a single word regarding the origin of the war' and that he would 'give expression to no wish whatever' regarding the outcome of the conflict. He concluded by wishing that all the volunteers would come back safely, and that he expected to be able to send a chaplain with the second contingent. Moran's responses were somewhat more cautious than his bold utterances at Pymont.

Sydney's Catholic newspapers, the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Catholic Press*, were critical of the war, the *Press* boldly so, the *Freeman's* more restrained. The difference in tone had been evident in reporting Sydney's farewell to the first contingent. The *Freeman's* editor wrote:

Whatever diversity of opinion may exist in this country upon the merits of the present war, or upon the advisability of sending Australian military assistance to the scene of strife, it cannot be denied that very large numbers of our fellow-citizens recognize a duty to the Empire fittingly discharged in the despatch of Australian volunteers ... God-speed and a safe return to the men who, rightly or wrongly, deem the moment seasonable to offer themselves as hostages for Australia's loyalty to the British flag.⁶

The *Press* displayed a decidedly different tone: 'Australia is reeling like a drunken man. England has accepted our offer to help in her war of aggression, and a few hundred misguided individuals are leaving our shores to shoot down a small band of farmers who are struggling to defend their homes and their country which they have fought for and won against tremendous odds. Hence the hysterical emotion of the community.'⁷

5 Vaughan letter of 20 December 1899 printed in *Freeman's Journal*, 10 February 1900.

6 *Freeman's Journal*, 4 November 1900.

7 *Catholic Press*, 4 November 1900.

At the end of August the *Press* had announced that it would be beginning a 'series of sketches of Irish poets and prose writers by the Rev Father Bunbury'.⁸ Joseph Bunbury was a graduate of the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome, where he was ordained priest in 1892. Later that year he arrived in Sydney and served as curate in various parishes; in 1895 he was called upon to produce the first number of the *Catholic Press*. From the beginning the paper was forthright in its espousal of Irish nationalist causes. After the arrival of the full-time lay editor, Bunbury continued as a regular contributing journalist. He began the new weekly series in September 1899 entitled, 'In an Irish Library'. By November the subjects of the articles were less about poets than Irish revolutionaries, beginning with three on John Mitchel. In the second of these Bunbury drew parallels between the grievances of the Irish and the Boers. The article carried an unambiguous subheading:

John Mitchell [sic]

No. II

The Days of Darkness

WHY IRISHMEN SYMPATHISE WITH THE BOERS⁹

He was scathing in his comments on the war and the Australian contingent:

Instead of spending millions in slaughtering a handful of honest Dutch farmers in the Transvaal, would it not show a far greater love of humanity and liberty were we to devote them towards the furtherance of a vigorous campaign against the influenza. Such a war would have on its side certainly the blessing of the 'god of battles', and of every intelligent humane man, but as it would require no 'parades' nor 'embarkations', no special correspondents nor big drums, nor flags, nor shouts, shrieks, huzzas, nor wild bouts of drink; there is no probability of its being entered upon.

He turned to sarcasm in the third article on Mitchel, comparing the Boer history to that of Ireland:

In the light of the present state of affairs in Africa, it is amusing to look back a few years over Irish history and to fill oneself with admiration at the benign manner in which England governed that country. No wonder they are indignant at the stupidity and ignorance of the Boers.

⁸ *Catholic Press*, 26 August 1899.

⁹ *Catholic Press*, 2 December 1899.

Had these Dutch farmers been progressive enough and civilized enough to adopt the British style of government in Ireland, and had they hanged or transported everyone that even whispered a word of protest against their authority, and kept in pay a large army of spies and informers, and given ‘don’t hesitate to shoot’ instructions to the police, England would naturally have extended to them the right hand of fellowship, and John Bull would have recognised in the Boer an esteemed, and affectionate brother.¹⁰

In subsequent articles Bunbury criticised fellow priests who argued in the press for support of the imperial troops in South Africa: ‘Have not Irishmen, and even an aged Irish priest in Australia, been found to be, after Chamberlain and Rhodes, the warmest supporters of the present disgraceful war of greed and cupidity in Africa? They allege that the Boers are ignorant, and block the triumphant chariot wheels of British civilisation.’¹¹

The ‘aged priest’ referred to was the feisty octogenarian Patrick Dunne, former Vicar-General of the Goulburn Diocese and retired parish priest of Albury.¹² He was a regular letter writer to colonial newspapers, arguing vigorously in favour of support of the British against the Boers, beginning with a letter to his local newspaper, the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*:

I am surprised that some of the Irishmen and Catholics in Australia allow themselves to be led astray by some of our Catholic newspapers, who ought to know better. Why sympathise with a semi-barbarous, corrupt and bigoted government such as the Transvaal? ... Irishmen and Catholics complain of the bigotry of Orangemen, yet they set them the example by expressing their sympathy with the Boers and against a Government under whose protection they live and enjoy all the political and religious freedom they can reasonably desire.¹³

The secular and Protestant press were delighted in finding an Irish priest articulating the criticisms that they were making against the Catholic

10 *Catholic Press*, 9 December 1899.

11 *Catholic Press*, 23 December 1899.

12 See T J Linane, ‘Dunne, Patrick (1818–1900)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dunne-patrick-3455/text5277>, published first in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 12 June 2017.

13 *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 17 November 1899.

supporters of the Boers.¹⁴ Dunne's letter was reprinted in metropolitan and provincial newspapers throughout Australia. He directed his criticisms particularly against the claim of the *Catholic Press* that the war was unjust. Writing to the *Freeman's Journal*, he set himself to refute 'the calumny which was published in your contemporary, the *Catholic Press*, a few months ago, that the action of the British Government going to war with the Boers was "unjust and therefore immoral, and that ninety per cent of the Irish in Australia sympathized with the Boers against England".' He wrote that 'this paper, which poses to be the "organ of the Catholics of Australia", and its directors being Catholic clergymen and laymen, gave our enemies the opportunity of branding the Irish in Australia as a disloyal body.'¹⁵ He extended his criticism to the 'irreconcilables' among the Irish politicians and implicitly to their clerical supporters: 'My impression is that the course which Mr Davitt and the other political leaders in Ireland are following in reference to the war in South Africa will throw back the chance of Home Rule or a Catholic University for the next 10 years ... I am, therefore, of opinion that it is impolitic for Irishmen and Catholics, either at home or in the colonies, to be proclaiming their sympathy with the Boers.'¹⁶

The voice of Patrick Dunne fell silent in July 1900 when he died at Albury at the age of 81. In his last letter to the *Freeman's Journal* in March he had contrasted the editorial attitudes of the two Sydney Catholic newspapers:

This is the last letter with which I will trouble you on the war ... The Freeman has acted fairly in opening its columns to a fair discussion of the subject, but has abstained from pronouncing judgment in favour of the Boers ... but I was dissatisfied with the Catholic Press for adopting and encouraging such strong anti-English opinions without sufficient grounds, thereby giving our enemies an opportunity of accusing the Irish-Australian Catholics of disloyalty.¹⁷

In the New Year, Bunbury savagely criticised a second priest's public stand on the war. He awkwardly interrupted the flow of his article on the Fenian, John Boyle O'Reilly, by recounting the postman's delivery one morning

14 'Here was the voice regional editors had been looking for: an Irish Catholic priest and an Irish Nationalist defending empire' (John McQuilton, *Australia's Communities and the Boer War*, 2016, 35).

15 *Freeman's Journal*, 27 January 1900.

16 *Catholic Press*, 10 February 1900.

17 *Freeman's Journal*, 31 March 1900.

of two newspapers from the Northern Rivers district of NSW ‘containing a report of a lecture a few weeks ago delivered on the South African war by Father Fagan of Coraki’, in the diocese of Grafton. To Fagan’s claim that whenever the British flag has been hoisted, order, law and comparative prosperity have followed, Bunbury replied:

The British flag has been hoisted for the moderately respectable period of seven centuries in Ireland, and our Irish cousins in America, anyhow, as well as the Irish people at home, have been able to discover no traces of the ‘security, order, law and comparative prosperity’ that Father Fagan asserts must ever follow in the footsteps of the conquering Britisher. If almost a continual famine, during even the present century, be ‘comparative prosperity’, the Irish have been enjoying that luxury in abundance, and if the most tyrannous coercion acts and packed juries have anything to do with ‘security, law and order’ then Ireland should be the most secure, law-abiding and orderly country in the world.¹⁸

John Robert Fagan was English, born of Irish parents. He entered the English Province of the Jesuits in 1880 at the age of 19. After novitiate at Roehampton, he went to France for his juniorate; he undertook philosophy studies in South Africa; his theological studies were undertaken in Belgium. Ordained in August 1892, for four years he ministered in the Jesuit Zambesi Mission. He left the Society in 1895 and, after work in the Westminster Archdiocese, he sailed to Australia in 1896 and joined the newly formed Grafton Diocese. This articulate and engaging priest became the much-quoted darling of the *Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*. While he was stationed at Coraki, a local trooper volunteered for active service in South Africa in October 1899. Fagan made his first public foray into Boer War controversy at the volunteer’s farewell. Speaking from his personal experience of the Boers, he begged to differ from a previous speaker who had said, like Cardinal Moran, that gold was the cause of the war: ‘They [the British] were fighting for reforms to which they were justly entitled; but the stiff-necked Boers were not likely to yield until the last extremity was reached.’ He spoke in support of the colonial contingent as a necessary expression of Australia’s solidarity with the Empire. He condemned ‘the rant and cant delivered in the NSW Parliament by a few members in regard to the unrighteousness of the war’, which showed they knew little about the situation. He, however, had lived in South Africa for

18 *Catholic Press*, 6 January 1900.

years and knew the Boer character thoroughly; he preferred ‘to follow statesmen like Salisbury, Rosebery, Chamberlain, etc, in preference to Holman’.¹⁹ William Holman was the Labor member for Grenfell, one the ten who voted against the sending of troops. In the heat of the Assembly debate, to the disgust of most members, Holman had blurted out, ‘I believe from the bottom of my heart that this is the most iniquitous, most immoral war ever waged with any race. I hope that England may be defeated’.²⁰

From November to February in the New Year, Fagan received invitations throughout the northern districts to address large gatherings of loyal citizens. His lectures were widely reprinted in newspapers across the colony of New South Wales and beyond. During his presentation at Ballina he addressed Irish opposition to the war:

Concerning those Irishmen who were disaffected towards England, they knew that Ireland had grievances against England, some of which were well grounded. He was born in England, but came from a family which he believed had suffered more from English misrule than any family in this district, but time, travel, and study had modified his views. Irishmen should be just. Here in Australia they lived under a flag which made no difference between creed or colour. If he had to choose between British and Boer, then give him the flag that upheld the life and property of its subjects, made no distinction between any race, and was a guarantee of peace, prosperity, and of no oppression.

Perhaps he had Joseph Bunbury and Tighe Ryan of the *Catholic Press* in mind when, in his lecture at Casino, he categorised opponents of the war, beginning with ‘people ... who are opposed to England always and in all things, and consequently also in the present crisis’: ‘I verily believe that if the Connaught Rangers, or the Grenadier Guards (if they had lived in those days) had charged up the hill of Calvary to rescue Our Lord from the hands of His enemies, these same people would still be found to criticise England’s conduct, even on that occasion. There is no reasoning with such people.’²¹

19 *Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 27 October 1899.

20 Bede Nairn, ‘Holman, William Arthur (1871–1934)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/holman-william-arthur-6713/text11589>, published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 19 May 2017.

21 From the *Coraki Herald* in the *Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser*, 15 February 1900.

Fagan's lecture circuit came to an abrupt end in February 1900, when the tide of the war had turned decidedly in favour of the British. Sydney's *Sunday Times* listed him and Patrick Dunne among those Catholics, at home and abroad, who emphatically expressed their empire loyalty against the 'few irreconcilables who ... persistently but vainly endeavour to persuade the public that they are the mouthpieces of Irishmen and Catholics':

[W]e have only to turn to the emphatic utterances of such men as Cardinal Vaughan, Bishop Gaughran of Kimberley, Bishop Turner of Dumfries and Galloway, or coming nearer home, of Cardinal Moran, Father Dunne of Albury, Father Fagan of the North Coast District, Mr R E O'Connor, Mr L F Heydon, the Hon E W O'Sullivan, and other representative Irishmen and Catholics to prove the utter falsity of such pretensions.²²

Despite regular bouts of sickness, Fagan lived to the age of 91, dying in the Brisbane Archdiocese in 1951. His tombstone records him as a member of the Society of Jesus: 'Rev Fr P Joannes Robertus Fagan, SJ'.²³

In May 1903 the Sydney *Evening News* carried the eye-catching headline:

A PRIEST'S SUICIDE.
RELIEVED OF HIS POSITION
ON THE GROUND OF HIS ECCENTRICITY ²⁴

The priest was Joseph Bunbury. The report reminded readers that in 1902 Bunbury had made controversial 'remarks at a Hibernian gathering on the question of Imperialism', a dinner at which Cardinal Moran presided. In fact, he had advocated a republican form of government for both Ireland and Australia, and had been publicly rebuked at the dinner by the Catholic Minister of Public Works and former editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, Edward O'Sullivan.²⁵

As a result of his controversial public interventions, including his pro-Boer writings, he had been re-assigned away from Sydney. Both Cardinal Moran and his coadjutor Michael Kelly were strongly opposed to any voices advocating a form of Irish self-government separate from the British

22 *Sunday Times*, 25 February 1900.

23 See Michael Head, 'A strange affair in a Jesuit plot', *Jesuit Life*, 41-46.

24 *Evening News*, 22 May 1903.

25 *Catholic Press* and *Freeman's Journal*, 1 March 1902.

Empire. Indeed, following the departure of Moran for Europe soon after the Hibernian banquet, it was Kelly who assigned Bunbury from suburban Sydney to Appin and then to Camden.

At the coroner's inquest Dean O'Haran, Cardinal Moran's private secretary, gave evidence that Bunbury had been 'relieved of his position as a priest on the ground of his eccentricity', and had been living for three weeks at the Lloyd Hotel, George Street North, where he was found dead.²⁶ The inference was that he was distressed at the re-assignments and was planning to abandon the mission, and that he had finally despaired. The tragedy received widespread reporting throughout Australia. *The Freeman's Journal* respectfully reflected on the pressures placed on a talented but vulnerable young Irish priest:

The tragic close of the Rev Joseph Bunbury's life on Thursday in last week caused a painful shock to the Catholic community, to whom both in city and country he was well known. He came to the Archdiocese of Sydney a young priest of brilliant parts, bringing to his work unbounded enthusiasm and the Celtic temperament – two qualities which in a priest promised a future of much service in the cause of religion. He saw great possibilities for Catholicity in this country, and perhaps he allowed his zeal for the quickening of Catholic progress in some respects to outpace his discretion. A nature such as his – and the remark is made in no censorious way – was probably impatient of that safe policy of 'festina lente' [hasten slowly] which has done so much for the Church in Australia; for at the back of his mind there were forces which brooked no delay. But these forces were lodged in a body never very robust, and mainly nerves, and the mental balance once lost, the evolution from eccentricity to the mania which produced last week's tragedy may easily be accounted for. But in remembrance of the brilliant early promise of Father Bunbury's life the manner of its close may be allowed to drop into oblivion; and very general, very sincere, will be the charitable aspiration – 'May he rest in peace!'²⁷

There was no editorial comment on Joseph Bunbury's death in the *Catholic Press*. It was in a letter from a priest-colleague, challenging the inquest's finding of suicide, that his journalistic career with the *Press* was remembered. Father Patrick O'Shea who had arrived in Sydney with

26 *Evening News*, 22 May 1903.

27 *Freeman's Journal*, 30 May 1903.

Bunbury in 1892 wrote of his friend: ‘The deceased priest, if I may be permitted to say so, was a journalist by instinct, his power as a leader-writer and caustic paragraphist being acknowledged by experienced pressmen to be up to a very high standard.’²⁸

The *Freeman’s Journal* had its own favourite priest-journalist, the Franciscan Patrick Fidelis Kavanagh, author of the acclaimed *Popular History of the Insurrection of 1798*, first published in 1870.²⁹ He ministered in Sydney from 1880 to 1885, based at the Waverley Friary. He had arrived in Australia with a reputation as a ‘rebel’, as he recounted in 1899: ‘In the beginning of the year 1880 I left Cork for the Australian mission. Doctor Vaughan was then Archbishop of Sydney, and my first visit was paid to him. He received me with great kindness, and during our conversation said: “I have heard that you are an Irish rebel, but do not think worse of you for that, for if I were an Irishman I might be a rebel, too”.’³⁰

Perhaps it was his rebellious reputation that led to his being sent to Australia, and also his being sent back to Ireland in 1885 at the beginning of the Moran regime. He became even more rebellious at the time of the Boer war: ‘He was the first person who from a public platform in Ireland denounced the enlistment of his fellow-countrymen in the British army on the grounds that unjust war was contrary to the law of God.’³¹ After his return to Ireland, Kavanagh was a regular contributor to Sydney’s *Freeman’s Journal* as its Irish correspondent, often introduced as ‘formerly of Waverley’. In 1896 the *Freeman’s* had printed Kavanagh’s earliest expression of support for the Boers, a poem entitled, ‘The Jameson Ride, a priest’s parody’:

O, long life and success to the straight-shooting Boers,
And may their fame never die while this world endures.
May all British marauders still shake in their shoes
When their rifles ring out o’er their veldts and karoos.³²

28 *Catholic Press*, 11 June 1903.

29 Anna Kinsella, ‘1798 claimed for Catholics: Father Kavanagh, Fenians and the Centenary celebrations’, in Daire Keogh & Nicholas Furlong (eds), *The Mighty Wave: the 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, Dublin 1998, 139-155.

30 P F Kavanagh, ‘People I have met’, *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 April 1899.

31 *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 November 1906.

32 *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 April 1896.

In the week leading up to the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer war on 11 October 1899, the Dublin *Freeman's Journal* reported that Kavanagh, 'the brilliant historian of the Irish insurrection one hundred years ago', had denounced Irishmen who were 'marching under the standard of the Great Pirate, the oppressor of weak nations, to devastate the lands and trample upon the liberties of the brave Boers'.³³ On the following Sunday, Irish recruits were condemned on large green posters plastered throughout Dublin: 'Enlisting in the English Army is Treason to Ireland'.³⁴ Kavanagh's green posters and handbills were still being distributed on the New Year. In February 1900, an Irish Unionist member of the Imperial Parliament asked the Attorney-General for Ireland whether he was aware of 'a green handbill circulated in Dublin addressed to Irish Roman Catholics, and headed "England's Robber War," in which it is stated, on the authority of the Rev Father Kavanagh, that every man who engages in such war if he dies in it must suffer the loss of his soul', and asked what was being done about the offence. The Unionist Attorney-General replied: 'The police have been instructed to seize and destroy the circulars when found. The matter is being carefully watched, but up to the present the Government have not considered it necessary to take further action.' The interjection of the nationalist Irish member, John Redmond, 'Is it not perfectly notorious in Dublin that the circular was got out by the Orange party?', received cheers from Irish Parliamentary Party members.³⁵

Kavanagh's attitude to the war was summarised in his letter published in the Sydney *Freeman's* on 24 February 1900:

The all-engrossing subject here (in Ireland) is the Boer war. The great majority of our people are enthusiastically in favour of the Boers. This feeling arises not only from hatred (I wish I could use another word – but truth will not permit me) of the power that has so long trampled on our rights and mocked at our just demands, but also from a conviction that the Boers' cause is the just one. My humble opinion is that the war is, on the part of England, a shockingly unjust one.³⁶

33 *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 3 October 1899.

34 See Donal P McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War*, Belfast 2003, 45.

35 Commons Sitting of Thursday, 15 February 1900 (House of Commons Hansard). Related News

36 *Freeman's Journal*, 24 February 1900.

The editor of the *Freeman's* did not publish Kavanagh's every utterance; there seemed to be a reluctance to reproduce some of his more extreme anti-English commentary, especially the condemnation of Irish enlistment in the British army.³⁷ It was left to the short-lived *Australian Nation* to publish what must be considered Kavanagh's most provocative article. The editor, Conlon O'Halloran, president of the Sydney branch of the United Irish League, in introducing Kavanagh's article, referred to Great Britain as 'the plague of races and the anathema or gorgon of liberty'. He also inserted attention-grabbing capitalised subtitles throughout the article:

ENGLAND'S IRISH HIRELINGS
TO ENLIST IN THE WAR AGAINST THE BOERS IS TO DESERVE
THE CURSES OF FREEMEN
AN IRISH PRIEST'S SOLEMN WARNING
ENGLAND FAWNS UPON THE STRONG AND OPPRESSES THE
WEAK
ENGLAND WAGING A WAR OF MURDER, BECAUSE IT IS UNJUST
IT IS A SIN TO ENLIST IN AN UNJUST WAR³⁸

In an article headlined 'Romanist Loyalty!' the *Methodist* newspaper drew attention to Kavanagh's article. It sounded an alarm for all loyal Protestants: 'If Irish Romanists are fed with disloyal sentiment in Popish newspapers as they are now being fed the time will come, and not many years hence, when we or our sons will have to fight for our lives and liberties.'³⁹ The context of the article was a controversial libel case.

In the Illawarra region, south of Sydney, a parish priest and his curate had gone to court to assert their Empire loyalty. Both Irish and both members

37 C N Connolly states that the *Freeman's Journal* was 'never disloyal in its opposition to the war' (C N Connolly, 'Class, birthplace, loyalty: Australian attitudes to the Boer War', *Historical Studies*, 71(1978), 224).

38 *Australian Nation*, 2 June 1900. Patrick Fidelis Kavanagh died in 1918 at the age of 80. The old irreconcilable collapsed after having left his sick-bed in Wexford to vote in the crucial election of 18 December 1918, which resulted in the Sinn Fein party winning a resounding majority of the Irish seats in the Westminster Parliament. The elected members refused to take their seats in London and instead chose to sit in Dublin as the parliament of the Irish Republic.

39 *The Methodist*, 16 June 1900.

of the Nowra Civilian Rifle Club, each considered himself to have been libelled in a local newspaper in February 1900, each claiming to be the 'gentleman of the cloth' mentioned in a letter to the editor of the *Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser*. The editorial heading for the letter, signed 'Pan-Britannic', was 'Rebels in our Midst'. The letter went straight to the theme: 'It behoves Nowra to ask herself how she stands at the present time from a patriotic point of view.' The author claimed that treason was being mouthed in Nowra and he proceeded to unfold the evidence, citing a recent seditious comment by a Nowra clergyman: 'It is true that a gentleman of the cloth at a recent sports gathering wished it were British me[n] and not insensate targets he was aiming at.' He added a dismissive comment on the anonymous clergyman's shooting skills: 'In his present state of not hitting the mark aimed at, they would probably be safe enough.' This slighting remark could have been taken as proof that it was the Parish Priest who made the alleged seditious comment, because in the 24 January edition of the *Shoalhaven Telegraph* the scores in quarterly handicap prize shooting were published: the curate received a respectable total of 39, while the pastor was second last with just 20.⁴⁰

That a Roman Catholic priest was being quoted was indicated by the suggestion that the seditious clergyman should imitate the patriotic example of Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster.⁴¹ The descriptors 'Irish', 'Roman Catholic', 'clergyman', 'shooter' pointed to one of Nowra's priests, and both chose to sue for libel. James Gunning, pastor, and James Dalton, curate, brought separate cases of libel against the newspaper's editor to be heard sequentially in the Supreme Court in Sydney on 7 June 1900. Each was claiming £1000 in damages as a result of the publication of the offending letter. The prosecution brought forward as witnesses four local Nowra citizens, two Catholic and two Protestant, to attest that, from their reading of the letter, they had understood Father Gunning and/or Father Dalton to be the target/s of the accusation of sedition. The defence questioned Father Gunning, attempting to establish some sort of conspiracy between the two priests for financial gain. The main thrust of the defence argument was that the letter was an innocent exercise in jocularly, and that the phrase 'British me' was not a printer's mistake for 'British men'. In summing up, Mr Justice Cohen dismissed any notion of jocularly and stressed the seriousness of the letter and its allegations. His words gave confidence to

40 *Shoalhaven Telegraph*, 24 January 1900.

41 *Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser*, 3 February 1900.

the plaintiff and his many clerical supporters in court that the jury would find in his favour. However, the jurymen, who had been much entertained by the defence barrister's banter, returned a verdict for the defendant after just a few minutes.⁴² A disbelieving *Freeman's* journalist reported that the shocked judge, on hearing the verdict, asked the jury foreman: 'For the defendant?' A supporter of Father Gunning was quoted in the *Journal*: 'What a pity that his name isn't John Bull or Sandy Macpherson, and that he isn't a Protestant parson instead of an Irish priest. What thumping damages he'd have got!'⁴³ The judge then proceeded to open the curate's case. However, an adjournment was sought, James Dalton having suddenly become indisposed. The next day his case was withdrawn.⁴⁴

In December 1900 'loyal Protestants' shifted focus from the disloyalty of Catholics to the public scandal arising from Cardinal Moran's private secretary, Monsignor Denis O'Haran, cited as co-respondent in a divorce case. Bitter Protestant-Catholic feuding was whipped up during the three months of the Coningham case involving two trials and ending with the jury finding against the plaintiff.⁴⁵

In the meantime the South African war had moved beyond battles into a 'scorched earth' phase, with the British burning homesteads, destroying crops, slaughtering livestock and interning civilians in makeshift camps, where thousands perished of disease and starvation. The reporting of these atrocities by the correspondents of the *Catholic Press*, chaplain Patrick

42 *Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser*, 9 June 1900.

43 *Freeman's Journal*, 16 June 1900.

44 Both priests, out of pocket for legal expenses, were back in Nowra to receive their allocated handicaps for the 'fourth quarterly shooting' to be held in July; parish priest and curate received the same handicap. Both were transferred from Nowra in the New Year (*Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser*, 23 June 1900).

45 On the Coningham case see: Zero, *The Secret History of the Coningham Case*, Sydney 1901; Herbert M Moran, *Viewless Winds*, London 1939, 321ff; Edmund Campion, *Rockchoppers. Growing up Catholic in Australia*, Ringwood 1982, 79-82; P Ayres, *Prince of the Church. Patrick Francis Moran, 1830-1911*, Sydney 2007, 205-228; A E Cunningham, *The Price of a Wife? The priest and the divorce trial*, Sydney 2013; ; C F Fowler, *150 Years on Pymont Peninsula*, Adelaide 2017, 265-281.

Timoney⁴⁶ and nurse Agnes MacReady (pen-name: 'Arah-Luen')⁴⁷ and others, gradually led to a shift away from the uncritical jingoistic support of the Imperial venture.

Dr 'Paddy' Moran, who in 1900, as a first year medical student, had joined an anti-war league, in his 1939 memoir recalled his Church's attitude to the war: 'Nearly all the Irish clergy were still sitting on the unfertilised eggs of stale grievances, but they hatched nothing.'⁴⁸

The war ended with the surrender of the Boers in May 1902.

46 See Elizabeth Johnston, 'Francis Timoney the Bushman's priest', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 16(1994-95), 39-53.

47 See Jeannine Baker, *Australian Women War Reporters. Boer War to Vietnam*, Sydney 2014, 9-19.

48 Herbert M Moran, *Viewless Winds*, London 1939, 28.