

DISSENTING VOICES

**REDISCOVERING THE IRISH PROGRESSIVE
PRESBYTERIAN TRADITION**

**PROFILES OF 300 PROGRESSIVE PRESBYTERIANS OVER
FOUR CENTURIES**

Did you ever see mushrooms in a dunghill? Then you have seen what our new race of lords and earls resemble. They have rotten roots, flimsy stems and spongy heads. JAMES PORTER

O what a happy country we had before men turned their thoughts to thinking! Catholics thought of nothing but just getting leave to live, and working for their meat; Presbyterians thought of nothing but wrangling about religion and grumbling about their Tythes; and Protéstants thought of nothing but doing and saying what their betters bid them ... O how times are changed, and all for the worse! JAMES PORTER

As a people, we were excluded from any share in framing the laws by which we were governed. The higher ranks (in which there never was, nor never will be a majority of honest-principled men) usurped the exclusive exercise of the privilege, as well as many other rights, by force, fraud and fiction. By force the poor were subdued, and dispossessed of their interests in the soil; by fiction the titles of the spoilers were established; and by fraud on the productive industry of future generations, the usurpation was continued. JEMMY HOPE

Never were partiality and injustice more conspicuous on earth than they had been in the land of our nativity ... Not a small part, but three-fourths of its inhabitants, the great body of the people, have been reduced to the most abject and humiliating servitude, excluded from every office, honour or trust and emolument of the state. WILLIAM STEEL DICKSON

ROGER COURTNEY

The stereotypical belief that there are two religions in Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, whose highly-charged fault lines have led to confrontation, fear and misunderstanding, has ignored the strong, vibrant and often courageous dissenting tradition. This book is a long overdue account of the lives of some 300 Presbyterians who over the last 400 years have exemplified many of the admirable characteristics of that tradition.

The early days of their persecution, principally by the Established (Protestant!) Church, did not deflect from their independent thinking, their respect for the practice of other religions and basic humanitarianism. In the eighteenth century, their emphasis on the value of education gave them the ability to articulate their views. It also equipped their migration across the Atlantic and their intellectual and practical contribution to the establishment of the world's first democracy.

The leadership role of radical Presbyterians in the formation and development of the Society of United Irishmen, with its inbuilt respect for their Catholic 'brethren', re-emerged in the following century. And their involvement in the tenant-right campaign, the revival of the Irish language, and the rise of the labour and trade union movements continued their libertarian ideals. In the recent past they have been foremost among those who have taken a courageous stand in the ongoing, often faltering, peace and reconciliation process.

The lives charted in this book are about more than just the contribution of fascinating individuals to our history; they also amply demonstrate the integrity and conviction of those 'dissenting voices'.

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