

“The Dictatorship of Dr Cooke”:

Henry Cooke’s Tory Domination of Irish Presbyterianism Reconsidered

By Daniel Ritchie

The ecclesiastical historian Finlay Holmes described the Revd Dr Henry Cooke (1788–1868) as a “Presbyterian Champion of trinitarian orthodoxy and political parson.”¹ This description reminds us of the significance of Cooke both for his role in purging the Synod of Ulster from Arianism in 1829 and in championing the cause of the Conservative or Tory party in Ulster. Despite Cooke’s importance in ensuring the triumph of evangelicalism within the Synod of Ulster, which would later lead to the renewal of full subscription to the Westminster Confession in 1836, and union with the Secession Synod to form the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (hereafter, PCI) in 1840, his political views were not always appreciated by his fellow orthodox Presbyterians.²

One of the pitfalls of historical writing is falling into the word-concept fallacy, that is, assuming that the usage of terms in different historical eras is identical to their contemporary meaning. Thus it is essential that we understand that the terms Conservative and Liberal, when used with reference to Irish Presbyterians in the nineteenth century, do not mean what they currently mean in modern politics—and especially not in the politics of the modern United States. Nor is it correct to identify the labels Tory and Whig in the nineteenth century with their seventeenth-century usage. The terms were originally used as insults: Whigs were militant Scottish Presbyterians, while Tories were Irish robbers.³ Consequently, it was easy for Presbyterian opponents of Cooke to appeal to their historical link with Whiggery and dismiss his political creed as aberrant.⁴ Professor William Dool Killen, for instance, claimed that “a Tory Presbyterian is a kind of ecclesiastical and political contradiction . . . something like snow in summer, or rain in harvest. . . . A Scotch Whig used to be just another name for a true blue Presbyterian.”⁵

By the early nineteenth century, however, the term

Tory in British politics was applied to defenders of established institutions and especially the Church of England. The British Whigs were advocates of greater civil and religious liberty and a commitment to parliamentary reform, which resulted in the Great Reform Act of 1832 (a measure that increased the electorate in England by forty-five percent and created parliamentary seats in urban centres such as Birmingham and Manchester).⁶ Subsequently, the Whigs and the Radicals, who

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1. See his entry on Cooke in S. J. Connolly, ed., *Oxford Companion to Irish History* (2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121.

2. Andrew R. Holmes, *The Irish Presbyterian Mind: Conservative Theology, Evangelical Experience, and Modern Criticism, 1830–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 42. The term Presbyterian Church is being used here to describe the body of mainstream Presbyterians in Ireland. Prior to 1840, this reference was to the Presbyterians who were under the General Synod of Ulster. After the union with the Seceders in 1840, the mainstream Presbyterian group was the Presbyterian Church in Ireland under the General Assembly.

3. Michael J. Turner, *British Politics in an Age of Reform* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), ix.

4. Andrew R. Holmes, “Covenanter Politics: Evangelicalism, Political Liberalism and Ulster Presbyterians, 1798–1914,” *English Historical Review*, 125, 513 (April 2010), 364; Andrew R. Holmes, “Presbyterians, Loyalty, and Orangeism in Nineteenth-Century Ulster,” in *Loyalty and the Formation of the British World 1775–1914*, eds Allan Blackstock and Frank O’Gorman (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 125–44.

5. *Banner of Ulster*, 19 November 1868.

6. Michael J. Turner, “Political Leadership and Political Parties, 1800–46,” in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 128–32. For the Great Reform Act, see Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003), 136–37; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 420–38.

were more overtly antagonistic to the privileged position of both the landed aristocracy and the Church of England, increasingly converged around the common name of Liberals.⁷ Hence, Liberalism was so attractive to nineteenth-century British Nonconformists because the Liberal Party had inherited the Whig advocacy of civil and religious liberty, and hoped that the Liberals would abolish their grievances.⁸ One point that is crucial to remember about British Liberalism in this era is that it was deeply antagonistic to Roman Catholicism, as is evinced by the Liberal Prime Minister, Lord John Russell's response to the Papal Aggression in 1850 and by W. E. Gladstone's subsequent criticism of the declaration of Papal infallibility in 1870, which he believed to be incongruous with British national sovereignty.⁹

In December 1834, the Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, issued the Tamworth Manifesto, which laid down the foundation principles for the modern Conservative Party. Peel accepted the Reform Bill as "a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question", and Peel committed himself to "a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper combining, with the firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances." The Conservative Party of Peel was not that of reactionary Toryism, but one of moderate and careful progress in opposition to

radical turbulence.¹⁰ This point is crucial for understanding the politics of Peel's admirer, Henry Cooke. When speaking at Hillsborough in 1834, Cooke set out his vision of Conservatism that was similar to that of Peel's. He listed the following principles of a Conservative: "to protect no abuse than can be proved; to resist reckless innovation, not rational reform; to sacrifice no honest interest to hungry clamour; to yield no principle to time-serving expediency; and to stand by religion in opposition to every form of infidelity."¹¹

Peel's moderate, reformist Conservatism was criticised by more purist Tories, including the later Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, for being insufficiently resolute in defending the ancient institutions of the crown, the House of Lords, and the established church. In *Coningsby* (1844), Disraeli criticised the Tamworth Manifesto as "an attempt to construct a party without principles" that was not really equipped to conserve the prerogatives of the crown, the House of Lords, or the Church of England. Disraeli thought that such "Conservatism assumes in theory that everything established should be maintained; but adopts in practice that everything that is established is indefensible." Instead, all it was doing was bringing about a temporary pause in radical agitation.¹² Owing to Peel's clash with Queen Victoria over the so-called Bedchamber Crisis of 1839, in *Sybil* (1845) Disraeli wrote that "Sir Robert Peel is not the leader of the Tory party."¹³ Notwithstanding the concerns of the likes of Disraeli with Peel's departures from traditional Toryism, the party label Conservative had displaced that of Tory by the mid-1830s, though the two terms were often used interchangeably, as they still are today in British politics.¹⁴

In nineteenth-century Ulster, the Conservative Party represented those who identified most closely with the rights of Irish landed property and maintaining the privileged status of the established Church of Ireland. The Liberal Party, by way of contrast, represented the non-conformist interest, the urban middle-class, and the rights of tenant farmers in opposition to landlords. The majority of Ulster Presbyterian ministers supported the Liberal Party, but the majority of Presbyterian laymen who had the vote in this era voted for the Conservative Party (albeit such voting took place under a very limited electoral franchise). Henry Cooke, as a decided Conservative, was determined to establish a close working relationship between his fellow Presbyterians and the Church of Ireland in opposition to militant Roman Catholicism (buoyed by Daniel O'Connell's successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation, which the British parliament conceded in 1829), Irish nationalism's

7. G. R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886–1929* (2nd edn, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 10–25; Black and MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 152–53.

8. David W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 8–9; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989; London: Routledge, 1993), 136–37.

9. Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: The Historical Perspective, 1610–1970* (2nd edn, Belfast: Athol Books, 1994), 122; John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 243–46; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865–1898* (St Ives: Allen Lane, 1999) 148–51; David W. Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 229–30; Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 10.

10. Robert Peel, *The Address of the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Bart., To the Electors of the Borough of Tamworth* (London: Cookes and Olliver, 1835), 6–7.

11. Henry Cooke, *Authentic Report of the Speech of Henry Cooke, D.D. at the Great Protestant Meeting, Hillsborough* (Belfast: Stuart & Gregg, 1834), 15.

12. Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby; or, The New Generation* (Leipzig: Bernh, 1844), Book II.V, 91.

13. Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (3 vols, London: Henry Colburn, 1845), ii, 306–08; cf. Hilton, *Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People*, 500–01.

14. T. A. Jenkins, *Disraeli and Victorian Conservatism* (London: MacMillan, 1996), p. viii, 22–25.

desire for a repeal of the union with Britain, and political radicalism.¹⁵

Writing in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* a few years after Cooke's death, the Revd Professor Richard Smyth, who was later the Liberal Member of Parliament for Derry (1874–78), stated that "there remains the outstanding and solid fact that Dr Cooke's position as a Calvinistic polemic and ecclesiastical reformer has made his life the common property of the British and American Churches."¹⁶ Smyth's admiration for Cooke's theological orthodoxy could not mask his disdain for the latter's political opinions. Indeed, Smyth went so far as to maintain that "Dr Cooke's real life-work began and ended with the purgation of the Synod of Ulster from the leaven of Arianism. But for this great achievement it would scarcely have been worth while to write his life at all."¹⁷ In the opinion of the Presbyterian ecclesiastical historian the Revd W. T. Latimer (1842–1919), writing a generation after Cooke's decease, the Irish Presbyterian Church went through a period that he describes as "the dictatorship of Dr Cooke." Latimer also implies that Cooke's Toryism inspired his ecclesiastical policies.¹⁸

Latimer's analysis was not unique, as some of Henry Cooke's contemporaries viewed him as a power-hungry individual who was bent on domination.¹⁹ More recently, the historian Roy Foster has claimed that "Cooke's ascendancy indicated that Ulster had little use for political and theological liberalism."²⁰ The late religious historian Nigel Yates also claimed that "from about 1830 until his death in 1868, the dominant voice of Irish Presbyterians ... was that of Henry Cooke." Professor Yates did not believe that Cooke's campaign against the Arians was motivated primarily by theology. Instead, he asserted that "It was not Arianism that Cooke opposed but rather the political outlook that led towards Arianism.... He wanted to move the Presbyterian clergy from the Whig to the Tory camp." He also claimed that Presbyterian attitudes to the question of the Whig government's proposals for National Education in Ireland "were determined largely by the vociferous opposition of the Revd Henry Cooke who had gained effective control over the Synod of Ulster by 1830."²¹

Conversely, the Irish historian S. J. Connolly maintains that it is doubtful whether or not there was any such connection between a politically conservative outlook and Old Light theological views or between New Light theology and political Liberalism.²² Likewise, the late political historian Frank Wright also maintained that the "evangelical revival of the 1820s and 1830s had many advocates who were political Liberals."²³ This essay argues that the analyses offered by Professors

Connolly and Wright are essentially correct and that Cooke did not exercise a Tory dictatorship over the Presbyterian Church. It does so by examining the secondary literature on Cooke and Irish Presbyterianism and by drawing attention to previously underutilised primary sources.

The above assertions concerning a link between Cooke's theology and his Conservative politics are not entirely devoid of substance, however. We should remember that it was Cooke's stated aim when speaking at a Protestant demonstration at Hillsborough, County Down, in 1834 was to wed the Presbyterian Church to the Conservative Party.²⁴ In what was probably Cooke's

15. Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 341; Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: The Historical Perspective, 1610–1970* (2nd edn, Belfast: Athol Books, 1994), 122; Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* (Belfast: W. & G. Baird, 1985), 105–07; Alvin Jackson, "Loyalists and Unionists," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50–51; Patrick Maume, introduction to William McComb, *The Repealer Repulsed*, ed. Patrick Maume (1841; Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003), viii–xix. For Presbyterian voting patterns, see K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland 1832–1885* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 265–72.

16. Richard Smyth, "Life and times of Dr Henry Cooke," *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 21, 80 (April 1872), 209; G. C. Boase, "Smyth, Richard (1826–1878)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25957> (accessed 15 May 2019).

17. Smyth, "Life and Times," 210.

18. William Thomas Latimer, *A History of the Irish Presbyterians* (2nd edn, Belfast: William Mullan, 1902), 445–70; see 445, 450, 452, 457, 458, 461 for specific examples of this notion. For more on W. T. Latimer and his influence on Irish Presbyterian historiography, see Linde Lunney, "Latimer, William Thomas," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://dib-cambridge-org.queens.ezpi.qub.ac.uk> (accessed 15 May 2019).

19. *Londonderry Standard*, 4 February 1848; Finlay Holmes, *Henry Cooke* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1981), 188. The *Northern Whig*, a newspaper known for its political and theological liberalism, branded Cooke as "the dictator of the so-called Synod of Ulster," and condemned him as "an itinerant champion of bigotry, intolerance, religious monopoly, the fomenter of discord and dissension" *Northern Whig*, 9 February 1837; cf. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 133; John Bew, *The Glory of Being Britons: Civic Unionism in Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 77; A. A. Campbell, *Belfast Newspapers, Past and Present* (Belfast: W. G. Baird, 1921), 7.

20. Roy F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 303.

21. Nigel Yates, *The Religious Condition of Ireland 1770–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56, 125–26, 129, 265–66.

22. S. J. Connolly, "Mass Politics and Sectarian Conflict, 1823–30," in *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland Under the Union, 1801–70*, ed. William E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 77.

23. Frank Wright, *Two Lands on One Soil: Ulster Politics before Home Rule* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), 65.

24. In his speech at Hillsborough in 1834, Cooke stated his views

last letter, written less than two weeks before his death in December 1868, he reminded the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (James Hamilton) of “the services which during a long life I have been enabled to render to the Conservative party.” Cooke recommended that his son-in-law, the Revd Dr Josias Leslie Porter, replace him as the General Assembly’s *Regium Donum* agent. He informed the Duke of Abercorn that “Dr Porter holds those constitutional principles for which I have always contended. He has shown himself both able and willing to defend and promote them.... I believe that his appointment as my successor would give great satisfaction to the Conservative party in Belfast and throughout Ulster.”²⁵ Evidently, the promotion of Conservative politics was a major concern of Cooke’s until the end of his life.

Cooke remained committed to the Conservative Party even when it was seemingly acting against Presbyterian interests. For instance, Cooke disagreed with the Conservative Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, on the controversy surrounding state intrusion within the established Church of Scotland, which eventually led to the Disruption and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843.²⁶ Nonetheless, in March 1842 he told Peel that it was his “sincere desire to keep the Presbyterian people on the side of a Conservative Government, & to see that Government prosperously contained in

with respect to the major British political parties: “I repudiate the name of Whig. Neither am I a Tory; for though as the Whigs have grown worse, Tories have grown better – yet have they some things about them, as a political party, I dare not adopt or approve ... But whilst I reject alike the name of “Whig or Tory,” I decidedly avow myself a CONSERVATIVE.” “Great Protestant Down Meeting,” *Irish Protestant*, 1, 9, (January 1835), 142.

25. Henry Cooke to Lord Lieutenant, 1 December 1868 (National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, CSORP/1869/18139).

26. For the Scottish Disruption in its wider context, see John Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 209–11; Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 292–312, 348–62.

27. Henry Cooke to Robert Peel, 4 March 1842 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40503, ff 245–50).

28. Henry Cooke to Robert Peel, 15 January 1842 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40500, ff 112–21).

29. Robert Peel to James Emerson Tennent, October 1842 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Emerson Tennent Papers, D2922/A/29/5).

30. Fergus O’Ferrall, “Daniel O’Connell and Henry Cooke: The Conflict of Civil and Religious Liberty in Modern Ireland,” *Irish Review*, 1 (1986), 24.

31. Andrew R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief & Practice, 1770–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

32. Jonathan J. Wright, *The “Natural Leaders” and their World: Politics, Culture and Society in Belfast, c. 1801–1832* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 9–10.

your hands.”²⁷ Cooke also told Peel that “I have, ever since your accession, endeavoured to stand between your government & all public clamour, and have been liable in this endeavour to receive some of the blows otherwise intended for you.”²⁸ For Peel’s part, when discussing the dispute with the Scottish non-intrusionists, he told James Emerson Tennent that “I am equally gratified by the confidence in me which Dr Cooke has been good enough publicly to express and by his wise counsel to the Presbyterians of the North of Ireland to forbear from active demonstrations.”²⁹

The question, though, is whether or not Cooke was successful in wedding Presbyterianism and Toryism. The purpose of this historiographical essay is to determine whether or not Latimer’s claim (cited above) may be sustained by the facts. Since Presbyterians are often thought to have gone from radicals to conservatives in the decades following the 1798 rebellion, answering this question is fundamental to understanding Presbyterian political identity in the nineteenth century.³⁰ In answering this question, we should not underestimate Cooke’s importance to nineteenth-century Ulster Presbyterianism. Andrew R. Holmes, the leading authority on Irish Presbyterian history, reminds us that Cooke was “the most prominent Presbyterian of the nineteenth century” and “the figurehead of the evangelical movement” within the Synod of Ulster prior to the Arian schism.³¹ The historian Jonathan J. Wright has recently stated that the dominant theme in the existing historiography of nineteenth-century Ulster Presbyterianism concerns the rise of Cooke and the related issues of the rise of theological orthodoxy and the withdrawal of the Remonstrants (Arians and other non-subscribers) from the Synod of Ulster.³² Given the centrality of Cooke to Ulster Presbyterianism, the historiographical question of his supposed Tory dictatorship of the Presbyterian Church is one worth investigating. Although Latimer began his chapter in the aftermath of Cooke’s victory over the Arians in 1829 and ends with the union of the General Synod of Ulster with the Seceders to form the PCI in 1840, giving a full answer to this historiographical question necessitates a broadening of the time frame to before and after these dates.

In order to establish the validity or otherwise of Latimer’s thesis, it is essential to determine whether or not Cooke’s campaign against Arianism (1821–29) was politically motivated. If it was, then the dictatorship thesis appears plausible because then Cooke would have pursued this separation with the intention of converting Presbyterians to political Conservatism. Contrary to Latimer’s claim that the period of Cooke’s reign “as

an absolute dictator" ended with the union, his biographer Finlay Holmes argues that Cooke's era of prestige and influence in Presbyterian Ulster ended in 1852 with the savage criticism he had received on the part of Presbyterian supporters of tenant right for his part in lending weight to the Conservatives during the general election of that year.³³

In order to avoid giving a truncated answer to the historiographical question, it is necessary to cover events between 1821 and 1852 in our analysis. Accordingly, this essay shall examine Cooke's motives in combating Arianism, his campaigns against the Belfast Academical Institution (Inst), Catholic Emancipation, and National Education, his advocacy of pan-Protestantism, his repulse of Daniel O'Connell's Repeal campaign, his views on the Tenant Right movement and the strength of Presbyterian Liberalism.³⁴ Owing to the limited success Cooke achieved in imposing his political views on the Presbyterian Church, it will be argued that the dictatorship thesis has not been adequately proven.

I.

Cooke's victory in the Arian controversy raises the question of whether or not his crusade was, as the historian John Jamieson suggests, a pretext for bringing the Synod of Ulster within the pale of political conservatism.³⁵ There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest Cooke that was politically motivated. Cooke was on good terms with Arians in the early years of his ministry. For instance, in 1810 Cooke did not protest over the Synod of Ulster's reinstatement of a Unitarian, the Revd Joseph Ker of Ballee.³⁶ Hence, Jamieson argued that it was Cooke's later fear that the Arians would convert Presbyterians to political radicalism that caused him to campaign against this heresy.³⁷

This conclusion is not pure conjecture, as Cooke recognised a link between heterodoxy and radicalism. When speaking before a parliamentary committee in March 1825 (chaired by Viscount Palmerston), Cooke denied that the Arians in Ulster "teach any dangerous political creed." Still, he maintained that Arianism undermined biblical authority and argued that "the man who weakens the authority of Scripture, shakes to their foundation the pillars of civil society."³⁸ Furthermore, the Unitarian missionary John Smethurst, Cooke's adversary at Killyleagh in 1821, was thought to have held revolutionary political opinions which "imbibed the spirit of '98."³⁹ And so Cooke may have concluded that there was a psychological link between theological liberalism and political radicalism. The importance of psychology should not be underestimated, especially

since the 1798 rebellion, which Cooke despised, involved bloodshed and violence on a massive scale.⁴⁰ If Cooke

33. Latimer, *History*, 470; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 183, 187.

34. Since the question relates to a dictatorship in the interests of conservative politics, in the period after the Arian controversy we have chosen to focus primarily on socio-political controversies rather than ecclesiastical matters such as confessional subscription and the union of synods. Of course, this distinction is not an absolute one.

35. John Jamieson, "The Influence of the Rev. Henry Cooke on the Political life of Ulster" (M.A. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 1950), 78. This was also the view of contemporaries such as the Revd William Porter. Peter Brooke, "Controversies in Ulster Presbyterianism, 1790–1836" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1980), 142–43; R. F. G. Holmes, "Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Nationalism," in *Studies in Church History 18: Religion and National Identity*, ed. Stuart Mews (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1982), 543.

36. Robert Allen, "The Principle of Non-Subscription to Creeds and Confessions of Faith as Exemplified in Irish Presbyterian History," 2 vols. Ph.D. diss. (Queen's University Belfast, 1944), ii, 557; Jamieson, "Henry Cooke," 82; John M. Barkley, "The Arian Schism in Ireland, 1830," *Studies in Church History 9: Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, ed. Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 333. This tolerance of Arians existed in spite of the fact that Cooke appears to have always been an evangelical himself; cf. James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, ed. William Dool Killen (3 vols, 2 edn, London: Whittaker and Co., 1853), iii, 473. This idea is Professor Killen's, not Dr Reid's, as it occurs in the section where Killen is the continuator.

37. Jamieson, "Henry Cooke," 78–79; R. F. G. Holmes, "Controversy and Schism in the Synod of Ulster in the 1820s," in *Challenge & Conflict: Essays in Irish Presbyterian History and Doctrine*, ed. J. L. M. Haire (Antrim: W. G. Baird, 1981), 125.

38. *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland ... 1825*, p. 357, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 944; John Jamieson, *The History of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution 1810–1960* (Belfast: William Mullan, 1959), 43.

39. Josias Leslie Porter, *The Life & Times of Henry Cooke* (2nd edn London: John Murray, 1871), 59; Barkley, "Arian Schism," 323–24. Indeed, Cooke was later to denounce him for concluding his lectures "with a few strokes against the tyranny and oppression of the government." Henry Cooke, *Illustration and Defence of the Revd Mr Cooke's Evidence before the Select Committees of Parliament, Relative to the Probable Effects of Arian Principles, maintained by some of the Professors in the Belfast Academical Institution* (Belfast: A. Mackay, 1825), 13.

40. Cooke claimed that it was the violence of 1798 which made him a political conservative, "It was then I learned my political principles . . . Impressions were left on my mind which I have never forgotten, and which I never wished to forget." Porter concludes from this that, "His political creed was learned at an early period, and [Cooke's] mind and heart were so deeply imbued with it that it was never forgotten, never changed." Quoted in Porter, *Life & Times*, 14. For the violence of the 1798 Rebellion, see Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789–2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41–48. Interestingly, the minister that baptised Cooke, the Revd John Glendy of Maghera, was implicated in the 1798 Rebellion and fled to America (see Porter, *Life & Times*, 12). In 1806, Glendy was chosen as a chaplain to the House of Representatives, and in 1815 and 1816 he acted as a chaplain to the Senate of the United States. Both Thomas B. Balch and Thomas Witherow claimed that Thomas Jefferson, James

saw a link between heterodoxy and political radicalism—which he did—then it is not totally unreasonable to suggest that a fear that Arianism would lead to revolutionary politics was an important factor in inspiring his crusade.

As minister of First Killyleagh (1818–29), moreover, Cooke came under the influence of a politically conservative and evangelical ruling elder, Captain Sydney Hamilton Rowan, who was determined to eradicate Arianism from the Synod of Ulster.⁴¹ While difficult to prove conclusively, Rowan may have convinced Cooke that heterodoxy was a socially subversive force.⁴² Since J. L. Porter suggested that Rowan exercised a profound influence over Cooke, both theologically and politically, it seems plausible that Rowan helped Cooke to see a link between heresy and political radicalism.⁴³ Yet this acknowledgement does not justify the historian John Barkley's conclusion that "the evidence is rather against [Cooke's] primary motive being theological."⁴⁴ If Cooke believed that heretical theology undergirded revolutionary politics, his primary motive would still have been theological, as bad theology was at the root of bad politics—the latter being an outgrowth of the former. It is also clear from Cooke's speeches in the

Synod during the Arian controversy that theological concerns were paramount. He repeatedly offered biblical and doctrinal reasons why it was the duty of orthodox ministers to rid the Synod of a heresy that was destructive to the gospel.⁴⁵

John Jamieson's thesis, that Cooke opposed Arianism to rid the Synod of Ulster of political Liberals, is overly reductionist.⁴⁶ For instance, William Bruce's appointment to Inst in 1821 as professor of Latin and Greek was seen as a sop to political conservatives: Cooke nonetheless opposed it for theological reasons, as Bruce was an Arian.⁴⁷ Additionally, other Arians, such as Dr Robert Black, were Tories in their politics.⁴⁸ Thus, religious heterodoxy did not equate with political Liberalism, nor did orthodoxy equate with Toryism. The denial of many cardinal doctrines by the Arians had eventually convinced Cooke that Arians and Old Lights could no longer remain in the same church.⁴⁹ Importantly, in a context of increasing evangelicalism, Cooke viewed the Arians' heterodoxy on the Trinity and Christ's person as undermining the basis of Christian salvation.⁵⁰ The Arians were arguably the aggressors in the conflict, as it was Smethurst's Unitarian crusade which provoked Cooke to oppose Arianism.⁵¹ Also, Cooke feared that the Arians

Monroe, James Madison, and John Quincy Adams were among Glendy's personal friends. See William McMillan, "Presbyterian Ministers and the Ulster Rising," in *Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter: The Clergy and 1798*, ed. Liam Swords (Blackrock: Columba Press, 1997), 85; W. Desmond Bailie, *A History of the Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1610–1982* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1982), 620; [Thomas Holmes Walker], "John Glendy, of Maghera, Co. Derry, Presbyterian Minister and Patriot, 1798," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 13, no. 3 (August 1907), 101–05; Thomas Witherow, *Historical and Literary Memorials of Presbyterianism in Ireland. (1731–1800.) Second Series* (London: William Mullin and Son, 1880), 313–15; Thomas B. Balch, "John Glendy, D.D.," in *Annals of the American Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five. With Historical Introductions*, ed. William Buell Sprague (9 vols, New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1858), iv, 229–32.

41. Porter, *Life & Times*, 56–57; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 19–21; Andrew Boyd, *Montgomery and the Black Man: Religion and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ulster* (Blackrock: Columba Press, 2006), 17.

42. Although there was not an immediate change in Cooke's conduct towards the heterodox, as he swapped pulpits with the New Light William Glendy as late as 1821, it is interesting that Smethurst's lecture at Killyleagh in autumn 1821 caused Rowan to reply, "These are not the doctrines our minister teaches." Cooke responded to Smethurst the following Sabbath, and then followed the Unitarian missionary throughout Ulster in an attempt to counter-act his influence. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 21.

43. Porter, *Life & Times*, 56.

44. Barkley, "Arian Schism," 335.

45. Henry Cooke, *Authentic Report of the Speech of the Rev. Henry*

Cooke, Delivered at the General Synod of Ulster, July, 1828 ([Belfast]: Guardian Office, 1828), 9–12.

46. Jamieson, "Henry Cooke," 78–79.

47. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 22–25; cf. R. G. Crawford, "The Second Subscription Controversy and the Personalities of the Non-Subscribers," in *Challenge & Conflict: Essays in Irish Presbyterian History and Doctrine*, ed. J. L. M. Haire (Antrim: W. G. Baird, 1981), 101–02.

48. For more on Black, see Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, 82–83, 95–97, 99; Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, 109, 112–13, 122–23; Holmes, *Shaping*, 259; Allen, "Principle of Non-Subscription," ii, 533; Reid, *History*, iii, 444, 461–62, 465.

49. Cooke, *Illustration and Defence*, 8–11; Cooke, *General Synod of Ulster*, 10–11; Robert Allen, "Henry Montgomery, 1788–1865," in *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of James Eadie Todd*, eds H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody, and D. B. Quinn (London: Muller, 1949), 268–69. Cooke even went so far as to tell his fellow Old Light Presbyterians that "an Arian does not believe in the same Jehovah with you." Since, in his view, the two systems were different religions, Cooke was being consistent in demanding separation. Cooke, *Illustration and Defence*, 20.

50. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 193; David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740–1890* (London: Routledge, 1992), 75.

51. Robert L. W. McCollum, "John Paul and his Contribution to the Shaping of Presbyterianism in the Nineteenth Century" (M.Th. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 1992), 6; John Paul, "Review of a Speech by the Rev. Dr Montgomery of Belfast, and the Doctrine of the Unitarians proved to be Unfavourable to the Right of Private Judgment, to Liberty and Charity, to the Investigation of Truth, and the Practice of Virtue," in *The Works of the Late Rev. John Paul, D.D.*, ed. Stewart Bates (Belfast: Shepherd and Aitchison, 1855), 484.

would exclude evangelicals from the Synod of Ulster, as they had done in Geneva's Protestant churches.⁵² These factors appear to lend support to the view that Cooke was primarily motivated by theology, not because he thought the exclusion of the Arians would turn the Synod of Ulster into a Tory bastion.

In fact, the historian Gerald Hall has recently suggested that the departure of the Remonstrants weakened Cooke politically. He argues that the Arians "provided Cooke with a stick with which to threaten the rest of the synod. Any disagreement with Cooke could bring insinuations of heterodoxy. After the departure of the Non-subscribers, Cooke's stick was gone."⁵³ Additionally, if Cooke was chiefly motivated by politics, then why did he not separate from the Presbyterian evangelicals who were political Liberals, which he could have done by joining the more congenial environment of the established Church of Ireland? If Cooke was primarily motivated by politics, then theological or ecclesiological differences with Anglicans should not have been an obstacle to Cooke joining with fellow political Conservatives in the establishment.⁵⁴ While it is impossible for us to know for certain what Cooke's motives were, it seems highly unsafe to dogmatically conclude that he was chiefly motivated by politics.⁵⁵

II.

From its opening in 1814, the Belfast Academical Institution was a thorn in the flesh to political Conservatives owing to the presence of radicals such as William Drennan and William Tennent on its governing body, and especially since the drinking of seditious toasts in 1816.⁵⁶ Although he later became a Conservative ally of Cooke's, in 1831 William Tennent's son-in-law, James Emerson Tennent (who had married his daughter the previous year), complained about the damage that had been done to Inst "by giving that fiend Cooke an opportunity of quoting [John] Edgar's opinion of its heterodox & dangerous lectures."⁵⁷ Despite its political Liberalism, Cooke was not one of Inst's early opponents.⁵⁸ When Robert Black sought to stop the Synod from appointing a divinity professor at Inst in 1816, he was powerfully opposed by Cooke among others.⁵⁹

Still, the appointment of the Arian William Bruce to the chair of Greek and Hebrew in 1821 led Cooke to re-evaluate his opinions.⁶⁰ Cooke linked Bruce's appointment with Smethurst's Unitarian mission, claiming that Bruce had introduced Smethurst to various Ulster pulpits.⁶¹ Far from exercising dictatorial influence over his brethren at the 1822 Synod, Cooke's attempt to get them to condemn Bruce's appointment ended in

failure.⁶² Moreover, Cooke's comments before a Royal Commission in 1825 provoked uproar, as he claimed Inst was becoming "a great seminary of Arianism."⁶³ Even the Seceders, Old Lights, and the usually pro-Cooke *Belfast News-Letter* opposed this insinuation.⁶⁴ It is also noteworthy that in 1826 Cooke was colluding with the Archbishop of Armagh, John George Beresford for a Presbyterian theological professor at a proposed new university in Armagh. Significantly, Beresford told Henry Goulburn, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, that he should regard "Mr Cook's [*sic*] letter as strictly confidential as the avowal of such sentiments as he has expressed would be injurious to him with many persons among the Presbyterians."⁶⁵ Goulburn was sympathetic

52. Cooke, *Illustration and Defence*, 37–38.

53. Gerald R. Hall, *Ulster Liberalism, 1778–1876: The Middle Path* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 82.

54. Not long before his death, Cooke said, "I could never agree with the government or forms of the Church of England." Henry Cooke, *To the Protestant Electors of Ireland* (Belfast, 1868).

55. Holmes, "Controversy and Schism," 128.

56. Wright, *Natural Leaders*, 27, 46, 67, 85–87, 160–61; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 11–12.

57. James Emerson [Tennent] to Robert James Tennent, 13 and 18 January 1831 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Tennent Papers, D1748/G/661/97). John Edgar was the Secession Synod's professor of theology since 1826. See Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, 50. For the relationship between William Tennent and James Emerson, who subsequently adopted his wife's surname, and Emerson's earlier reformist politics before his conversion to conservatism, see Jonathan J. Wright, "'The Perverted Graduates of Oxford': Priestcraft, 'Political Popery' and the Transnational Anti-Catholicism of Sir James Emerson Tennent," in *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, ed. Niall Whelehan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 130–31; Wright, *Natural Leaders*, 131–32; cf. Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, 130.

58. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 15.

59. *Belfast News-Letter*, 2 July 1816. Cooke later said, "I was among the earliest friends of the Belfast Institution" and had "remained so without a shadow of change till 1821." Cooke, *Illustration and Defence*, 12.

60. Porter, *Life & Times*, 12.

61. Cooke, *Illustration and Defence*, 13. Robert Allen argues that "Smethurst was a Socinian and was therefore persona non grata to some of the Arian leaders of the Presbytery of Antrim, who declined to permit him to preach in their pulpits." Allen, "Principle of Non-Subscription," ii, 527.

62. J. R. Leebody, "Henry Cooke and Arianism in the Irish Church," *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, 2 (April 1872), 217; Boyd, *Montgomery and the Black Man*, 21–22.

63. *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the State of Ireland, more particularly with Reference to the Circumstances which may have led to Disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 18 February–21 March, 1825*, p. 219, H.C. 1825 (181), ix, 248; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 35.

64. *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 April 1825; Jamieson, *Royal Belfast Academical Institution*, 39–43; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 37.

65. John George Beresford to Henry Goulburn, 13 February 1826 (Robinson Library, Armagh, Correspondence of John George Beresford, vol. x, f. 58).

to this idea, but stated that “if the desire of such a system was only entertained by a limited number of the Presbyterian body, its advantage would appear to me more questionable.”⁶⁶

In July 1825, Cooke wrote to the Home Secretary, Robert Peel on the evils of Inst. Cooke told Peel that “Experience has established the Institution as an adequate literary seminary—but has raised many suspicions, & much decided opposition upon grounds partly political, but chiefly religious.” While recognising a political element to his opposition to Inst, Cooke still claimed that “The introduction of Arian Professors has been the immediate cause of suspicion & opposition on the part of the Synod.” Cooke expressed a desire to see a government-endowed Presbyterian college established in Ulster. He did not wish to see such an institution established merely for theological reasons. Instead, Cooke informed Peel that such a policy would also be in the best interests of the government:

I am convinced, a Presbyterian college in some chief town of Ulster would lay the people and ministers under deep obligations to government, and increase that

66. Henry Goulburn to John George Beresford, 18 July 1826 (Robinson Library, Armagh, Correspondence of John George Beresford, vol. x, f. 59).

67. Henry Cooke to Robert Peel, 20 July 1825 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40380, ff 147–52).

68. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 40, 206.

69. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 69. For the most recent discussions of the controversy surrounding Ferrie, see Daniel Ritchie, *Isaac Nelson: Radical Abolitionist, Evangelical Presbyterian, and Irish Nationalist* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 22–28; Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, 132–35; Andrew R. Holmes, “From Francis Hutcheson to James McCosh: Irish Presbyterians and Defining the Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century,” *History of European Ideas*, 40, 5 (2014), 622–43.

70. Henry Cooke to Thomas Chalmers, 9 April 1829 (New College Library, Edinburgh University, Chalmers Papers, CHA.4.119.40).

71. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 126; Henry Cooke to James Emerson Tennent, 4 March 1835 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40416, ff 113–16).

72. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 125; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 246; *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 September 1834; [William Bruce], “A Letter to a Literary Lady,” *Bible Christian*, 2, 6 (July 1831), 241–50; [William Bruce], “Second Letter to a Literary Lady,” *Bible Christian*, 2, 7 (August 1831), 289–95; [William Bruce], “Third Letter to a Literary Lady,” *Bible Christian*, 2, 8 (September 1831), 369–77. James McKnight identified Bruce as the author of these articles. Although an orthodox Presbyterian, McKnight was not a supporter of Cooke and even disliked how he conducted the Arian controversy. See *Extracts from Original Letters of James McKnight, LL.D., Litterateur and Land Reformer, Editor of “Belfast News-Letter,” and “Londonderry Standard.”* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1916), 6, 7.

73. Jamieson, “Henry Cooke,” 96; Cooke to Tennent, 4 March 1835.

spirit of loyalty pervading the whole Presbyterian body. Having turned my attention to this object, I am convinced, that a sum for six to ten thousand for buildings and from nine to fifteen hundred a year for endowments, would be found amply sufficient.”⁶⁷

Clearly, there was a political motivation underlying Cooke’s attacks on the Belfast Academical Institution, even if his concerns were primarily theological. We should, nevertheless, be wary of taking the above comments too much at face value. After all, Cooke was writing to Peel at the time. It is probable that he was overemphasising the political dimension for the benefit of the politician. Finlay Holmes, though, reminds us that had this letter “been made public it is likely that his [Cooke’s] influence in the synod would have been destroyed.”⁶⁸

A fresh opportunity to attack the Institution presented itself with the appointment of John Ferrie to the chair of moral philosophy, which was an issue that dominated the 1829 Synod meeting at Lurgan. Yet it is important to note that it was the moderate evangelical James Carlile, rather than Cooke, who was initially the chief aggressor.⁶⁹ Carlile was the candidate for the chair whom Cooke supported. He told Thomas Chalmers, the leading evangelical in the Church of Scotland, that “I have no doubt” that Carlile was “highly esteemed by you both as a Christian, & a man of talents and learning.”⁷⁰

Suspicions that Ferrie’s philosophy would logically lead to atheism and scepticism led to the Synod of Ulster withdrawing students from his class. It must be emphasised that this time it was not Cooke, but the Reformed Presbyterian and Secession synods who took the initiative in attacking Ferrie’s teaching.⁷¹ Concerns about Ferrie’s teaching were even expressed by the Arian, William Bruce in the Unitarian *Bible Christian* magazine for savouring too much of Idealism in opposition to Common Sense Realism. And James McKnight also raised such apprehensions about Ferrie in the *Belfast News-Letter*.⁷² So, even though the Synod of Ulster’s students were moved to a class in Cooke’s May Street Church, it is a mistake to see this incident, as John Jamieson did, as a sign of Cooke’s dictatorship.⁷³ Clearly, some of those who had previously opposed Cooke’s policy towards Inst agreed with him on this point.

Still, it would be wrong to deny completely that there was a political dimension to Cooke’s opposition to Ferrie. Cooke privately told James Emerson Tennent in March 1835 that “The College was endowed for the Presbyterians, & we are turned out, & ever will be, by the pestilent heresies in Religion & Politics that it

seems destined to engender & pour over the land.” This comment indicates that Cooke was concerned about more than just the theology of Inſt, and he expressed his conviction that “the beſt thing Government could do, would be to enable us to eſtabliſh a Rival to the Inſtitution.”⁷⁴ The eventual breach between Inſt and the Presbyterian Church over the appointment of Arian divinity professors in 1841 was a triumph for Cooke.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, this development ſhould not be interpreted as evidence of a conservative dictatorship, as moſt Presbyterians who agreed with him on Inſt did not embrace his politics.⁷⁶

III.

Deſpite his victory over the Arians in 1829, Cooke had little ſuſſeſs in getting the Synod of Ulſter to oppoſe the granting of Catholic Emancipation in the ſame year. Ulſter Presbyterians had long ſupported emancipation, with the Synod of Ulſter expreſſing its approbation for the Catholic Relief Act (Ireland) in 1793 and called for an end to political diſabilities on account of religion in 1813.⁷⁷ Finlay Holmes argued that Cooke did not fundamentally diſagree and that he was in favour of emancipation, ſo long as it did not denigrate the Proteſtant character of the ſtate.⁷⁸ Not all of his contemporaries viewed Cooke’s attitude in ſuch a charitable light. The clerk of the Synod of Ulſter, William Porter, for inſtance, claimed that his ſupport for emancipation was the real cauſe of Cooke’s antagoniſm to his Arianism.⁷⁹ Yet Cooke remained aloof from the ultra-Proteſtant anti-emancipation agitation, a fact which challenges the portrayal of Cooke as a baſe ſervant of Proteſtant aſcendancy intereſts.⁸⁰

Cooke’s oppoſition to the eventual introduction of emancipation was probably more a reſult of it being perceived as a conceſſion to Daniel O’Connell’s agitation, which was viewed as threatening the peace of the country.⁸¹ In particular, Cooke appears to have been concerned about the role of peaſants in the emancipation campaign, thinking that this could become a means of reſtoring forfeited eſtates into Roman Catholic hands.⁸² Far from exerciſing dictatorial power over the General Synod of Ulſter, when Cooke and Robert Stewart mounted a belated campaign to rouse the Synod to reſiſt emancipation and protect the Proteſtant character of the British ſtate, they were completely unſuſſeſſful. Such was Cooke’s weakneſs that his oppoſition to emancipation was ineffectiſe even within his own Dromore Preſbytery.⁸³ This point demonſtrates that Henry Montgomery’s claim that Cooke had united “evangelicaliſm with Orangeiſm” is fundamentally flawed.⁸⁴ Cooke was

not fully ſubſervient to the aſcendancy oppoſition to emancipation and the orthodox in the Synod of Ulſter did not all follow his political agenda.

Cooke’s oppoſition to the Whig government’s National Education ſyſtem could plauſibly be regarded as evidence of his dictatorship, as the Synod of Ulſter voted in favour of his poſition in 1832 and 1834.⁸⁵ In 1831 the government, through the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Edward Stanley, eſtabliſhed the Board of Commiſſioners for National Education in Ireland. An annual parliamentary grant funded the board, which ſupported locally run ſchools that were intended to be non-denominational but with the provision that the children could receive religious inſtruction from a clergyman of their own denomination outside the hours of ſecular teaching.⁸⁶

74. Cooke to Tennent, 4 March 1835; cf. Henry Cooke to Robert Peel, 20 July 1825 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40380, ff 147–52); Henry Cooke to Robert Peel, 24 January 1845 (British Library, London, Peel Papers, Add MS 40558, ff 130–37).

75. Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, 127.

76. The professors were Henry Montgomery and John Scott Porter, who were appointed on behalf of the Association of Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians. Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, 142; Finlay Holmes, “Porter, John Scott (1801–1880),” From the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22573> (accessed 4 December 2017).

77. *Records of the General Synod of Ulster, from 1691 to 1820* (3 vols, Belfast: Archer and Sons, 1898), iii, 156–57, 396–97; Holmes, “Ulster Presbyterians,” 543.

78. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 35.

79. “Proceedings of the General Presbyterian Synod of Ulster,” *Congregational Magazine*, 10, 34 (October 1827), 565–67; Holmes, “Controversy and Schism,” 125.

80. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 65.

81. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 35, 63; Jamieson, “Henry Cooke,” 63–66. Writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, John George Beresford (the Archbishop of Armagh) ſaid that Daniel O’Connell was out to eſtabliſh a “virtual aſcendancy for Popery” through emancipation, though Beresford did not object to conditional emancipation. John George Beresford to William Howley, 10 February 1829 (Representative Church Body Library, Dublin, Beresford Papers, MS 178/56). Beresford’s outlook appears ſimilar to that of Cooke.

82. Brooke, “Controversies,” 167.

83. *Northern Whig*, 2 April 1829; Holmes, “Ulster Presbyterians,” 543; Finlay Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Blackrock: Columba Press, 2000), 94.

84. Henry Montgomery, “Outlines of the History of Presbyterianism in Ireland. II,” *Irish Unitarian Magazine*, 2, 11 (November 1847), 360. For an analysis of this theſis, ſee Holmes, “Presbyterians, Loyalty, and Orangeiſm,” 125–44.

85. *Minutes of a General Synod, held at Monaghan, 1832* (Belfast: William McComb, 1832), 32–33; *Minutes of a General Synod, held at Derry, 1834* (Belfast: T. Mairs, 1834), 24–26.

86. Brown, *National Churches*, 155–59; Yates, *Religious Condition of Ireland*, 55–56; Donald Harman Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815–1922. An International*

Some orthodox Presbyterians such as James Carlile supported the government's system of National Education, and he sat as one of the Commissioners on the Board of Education and wrote to Thomas Chalmers in

Perspectiue (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), 119–21; Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, 139; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 95–96. We should also note that the idea of non-denominational education also caused members of the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy, especially Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam, to reject the National Education system. See S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780–1845* (1982; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 101.

87. Minutes of the Commissioners of the National Board of Education, vol. 1, 10 April 1832 (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ms. 5529, ff 59–61); James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 7 April 1832 (New College Library, Edinburgh, Chalmers Papers, CHA.4.175.9); James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 29 May 1832 (New College Library, Edinburgh University, Chalmers Papers, CHA.4.175.17); J. Stewart to Edward J. Littleton, 20 September 1833 (National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, CSORP/1833/6487); John Coolahan, "The Daring First Decade of the Board of National Education, 1831–1841," *Irish Journal of Education*, 17, 1 (1983), 39.

88. James B. Rentoul and Thomas Thomson to E. G. Stanley, 14 November 1832 (National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, CSORP/1832/5722).

89. "New System of National Education," *Orthodox Presbyterian*, 3, 26 (November 1831), 37–48; "New System of National Education. Report and Bill," *Orthodox Presbyterian*, 3, 26 (November 1831), 65–67; "New System of National Education—The Experiment," *Orthodox Presbyterian*, 3, 27 (December 1831), 73–83; "National Education," *Orthodox Presbyterian*, 3, 30 (March 1832), 181–94; "New System of National Education," *Orthodox Presbyterian*, 3, 31 (April 1832), 217–28. For details on the editorship of the *Orthodox Presbyterian*, see Henry Cooke to John Lee, 24 March 1832 (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Lee Papers, MS3450, ff 244–45).

90. Latimer, *History*, 449–55.

91. Henry Cooke to Thomas Chalmers, 10 April 1832 (New College Library, Edinburgh University, Chalmers Papers, CHA.4.177.5); Henry Cooke, *National Education. A Sermon, Preached in the Presbyterian Church, May-Street, Belfast, upon Sunday, the 15th January, 1832* (Belfast: William McComb, 1832), 28; Henry Cooke, *Speech at the Great Protestant Meeting*, 3–4, 12–13; cf. Akenson, *Small Differences*, 120–21.

92. Cooke, *National Education*, 33. The Remonstrant Synod supported the National Education system. See Minutes of the Commissioners of the National Board of Education, vol. 1, 4 September 1834 (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ms. 5529, f. 226).

93. Henry Cooke to John Lee, 4 May 1832 (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Lee Papers, MS3450, ff 260–61); cf. Cooke to Chalmers, 10 April 1832.

94. *Minutes of a General Synod, held at Monaghan, 1832* (Belfast: William McComb, 1832), 32–33; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 97.

95. Latimer, *History*, 450–51.

96. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 112; Reid, *History*, iii, 498. The motion in 1834, to withdraw completely from dealings with the National Board of Education, was only passed by a very small margin with a majority of ministers voting against Cooke. 56 ministers and 25 ruling elders voted against applying for aid from the funds for National Education, while 62 ministers and 12 ruling elders sided with James Carlile. *Minutes of a General Synod, held at Derry, 1834*, 24–26. Once their principle demands were met, the system was basically adopted by the Irish Presbyterian Church in 1840. For a summary of this subject, see Holmes, *Shaping*, 268–69.

its defence.⁸⁷ The Seceders also were favourable to the scheme, but informed the government that "we can not conscientiously countenance a system of education, which does not make provision for a sufficient daily reading of the Scriptures, in schools, by children, whose Parents, and Guardians are desirous they should do so."⁸⁸ Cooke, by way of contrast, vehemently opposed it. In the November 1831 edition of *The Orthodox Presbyterian*, a periodical that Cooke edited along with James Seaton Reid and James Morgan, an article appeared denouncing the plans for National Education and it was followed by further articles in subsequent issues.⁸⁹ Commenting on these events seventy years later, Latimer believed that Cooke and his fellow Conservatives were willing to oppose anything, so long as it would weaken the power of a government that had attacked aristocratic privileges.⁹⁰

Yet such a judgment is too severe because Cooke had reason to attack the system. For instance, he was opposed to scripture extracts, which the government approved, being read in the schools.⁹¹ Cooke argued that allowing scripture to be "mutilated" so that only select portions were read, essentially distorted its meaning and encouraged the spread of "Popery, Unitarianism, and every possible form of apostacy and infidelity."⁹² He also told Dr John Lee of Edinburgh that the National Board of Education was unacceptable because "it created an unpresbyterial prelacy over religious instruction, to which, as Presbyterians we could not possibly submit." While Cooke had serious religious objections to the scheme, his claim that "opposition to the government scheme was not political" should not be taken at face value. Indeed, just after making that remark, he told Lee that "the supporters of the supreme acts with a few exceptions, were ... Radicals—Levellers—& every form of Infidels."⁹³ Thus, it is fair to conclude that he had both religious and political objections to National Education.

It is too simplistic, however, to conclude that Cooke's views were dominant. First, the attendance at the Cookstown Synod in 1832 was very low, with only twenty-seven ministers and twenty elders present.⁹⁴ A better-attended Synod may not have been swayed by Cooke. Second, according to Latimer's account, many ministers of the Synod of Ulster thought that the new system, with some adjustments, would improve educational standards in Ireland.⁹⁵ Third, at the Synod of Ulster in 1834, when Cooke proposed amendments to John Barnett's motion that ministers should put their schools under the board, he had to rely on the votes of ruling elders as the majority of ministers opposed him.⁹⁶

Also, Latimer's contention that Presbyterian

opponents of National Education were under the influence of the Orange Society is too facile.⁹⁷ In opposition to such contemporary assertions, Cooke told Lee “As to Orange antipathy—our ministers feel it not. There is not an Orangeman in the body.”⁹⁸ Even if we do not take Cooke’s denials at face value, we must remember that other Presbyterian opponents of the system, such as the Revd Dr John Brown of Ahagadowey, were Whigs in their politics.⁹⁹ Consequently, it appears that Cooke did not exercise a Tory dictatorship over fellow Presbyterians when opposing National Education, since those with different political views were also opposed to at least some aspects of it.

IV.

In light of the later pan-Protestant opposition to Irish home rule, it would be easy to conclude with the historian Fergus O’Ferrall that Cooke succeeded in getting Presbyterians and Irish Anglicans to unite against a common enemy.¹⁰⁰ To do so, however, is to commit the ahistorical mistake of reading history backwards. Speaking at Hillsborough in 1834, in light of a perceived attack on the Established Church through the Irish Church Temporalities Act (1833), which sought to cut the number of Irish bishops from twenty-two to ten and reduce the Church of Ireland’s income, Cooke reasoned that, since their common Protestantism was in danger, Presbyterians and Anglicans should be prepared to co-operate in matters of mutual interest.¹⁰¹ On that occasion, Cooke said “I publish the banns of a sacred marriage of Christian forbearance where they differ, of Christian love where they agree, and of Christian co-operation in all matters where their common safety is concerned.”¹⁰² He was careful to explicitly assert his Presbyterian identity, as he claimed that he defended the Anglican Church as a descendant of the “English and Scottish Puritans, in the line both of religion and politics.” All he was doing was calling on Presbyterian and Anglicans to unite against a common foe as they did during the Glorious Revolution.¹⁰³

Yet Cooke failed to convince all his fellow Irish Presbyterians.¹⁰⁴ The Revd Daniel Gunn Browne even accused him of betraying Presbyterianism and forgetting that prelacy was an aberrant form of Protestantism and how Episcopalians had persecuted their covenanting forebears.¹⁰⁵ Hence, for Browne, any suggestion of co-operation between these groups was absurd.¹⁰⁶ Andrew R. Holmes has recently argued that “it was Prelatic persecution in the seventeenth century that informed the Presbyterian critique of Cooke’s policy.”¹⁰⁷ This argument was a straw-man, however, as Cooke was not

calling for Presbyterian co-operation with the descendants Laudian prelacy or of those who persecuted the Scottish Covenanters but with their fellow Reformed evangelicals in the Church of Ireland.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, far from being a dictator, Cooke’s influence could not extend so far as to heal the wounds of a long history of Anglican-Presbyterian conflict.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, a bitter controversy between Anglicans and Presbyterians at Derry in 1838–39 seemed to highlight further the divergence between the denominations.¹¹⁰ This reassertion of Presbyterian identity in the controversy helped to cement the union between the Synod of Ulster and the Seceders in 1840, which, although supported by Cooke, did not lead to the co-operation between Presbyterians and Anglicans which he desired.¹¹¹ The later rise of Pan-Protestantism was facilitated by events such as the 1859 revival and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869–71. Its emergence may

97. Latimer, *History*, 452.

98. Henry Cooke to John Lee, 24 March 1832 (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Lee Papers, MS3450, ff 244–45); cf. Holmes, “Presbyterians, Loyalty and Orangeism,” 126.

99. Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, 107.

100. O’Ferrall, “Daniel O’Connell and Henry Cooke,” 24.

101. “Great Protestant Down Meeting,” 129–51; Porter, *Life & Times*, 277; cf. Sean Connolly, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1985), 32. Even when speaking at state intrusion into ministerial appointments in the Church of Scotland in 1840, Cooke leaped to the defence of the Churches of England and Ireland. See *Sympathy of Irish Presbyterians with the Church of Scotland, Speeches Delivered at the Great Non-Intrusion Meeting, held in the Presbyterian Church, May-Street, Belfast, on Wednesday Evening, 1840 on the Invaded Rights of the Church and People of Scotland* (Belfast: William McComb, 1840), 19–20. For the Irish Church Temporalities Act, see Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom 1815–1914* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 82; Brown, *National Churches*, 161–65.

102. Cooke, *Speech at the Great Protestant Meeting*, 18.

103. Cooke, *Speech at the Great Protestant Meeting*, 3, 6–7, 9.

104. Wright, *Two Lands*, 66–67.

105. [Daniel Gunn Browne], *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Coalition between Presbytery and Prelacy* (Londonderry: The Journal Office, 1834), 5–7.

106. [Daniel Gunn Browne], *The Second Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Union of Prelacy and Presbytery* (Londonderry: The Journal Office, 1835), 4–11; Latimer, *History*, 457–58.

107. Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, 91.

108. Porter, *Life & Times*, 276.

109. For his part in Hillsborough he was denounced as the “Rev. dictator” in *Londonderry Journal*, 11 November 1834; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 116.

110. Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, 92–96. Among the antagonists, on the Presbyterian side, were opponents of Cooke’s politics such as A. P. Goudy and W. D. Killen. See Latimer, *History*, 460; William Dool Killen, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 81–87.

111. Latimer, *History*, 463.

be viewed as a partial victory for Cooke, even if it was not the marriage with the established church that he had proposed.¹¹²

Conversely, it is questionable whether Cooke's own theological trajectory was conducive to Protestant unity, as his adoption of confessional subscription in 1835–36, restored communion with the Church of Scotland (which the Scottish establishment had broken in 1799),¹¹³ and support for exclusive psalmody in 1840 arguably further emphasised intra-Protestant divisions.¹¹⁴ In 1837, he wrote to Thomas Chalmers to complain of James Carlile's opposition to subscription. Cooke also

sought clarification as to how the Church of Scotland interpreted the Westminster Confession's teaching on six-day creation, explaining that his Presbytery had refused to ordain a candidate owing to scruples about this part of the Confession.¹¹⁵ Even a politically Liberal critic such as Richard Smyth granted that Cooke was both zealous and sincere in his veneration for the Westminster Confession:

But if ever a man was justified in being keenly sensitive to the honour of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that man was Henry Cooke. He had waged a long and arduous war for that venerable document. It was identified alike with his conflicts and his triumphs. He had studied its doctrines until they had become a part of his better being. For him it was no mere conglomerate of dogmas, heavy and hard; but rather a fountain of living waters, fresh and bountiful as the grace of that Divine Redeemer whom it placed upon the throne.¹¹⁶

If Cooke's ecclesiastical policy was motivated primarily by Toryism and not by genuine zeal for theological orthodoxy, these were strange positions to adopt.

Cooke's repulse of Daniel O'Connell's agitation for Repeal of the parliamentary union between Ireland and Britain from Belfast in 1841 meant that he reached the pinnacle of his popularity among Ulster Protestants. However, it is a mistake to over-emphasise this point as Repeal was opposed by all shades of northern Protestant opinion—including political Liberals and Unitarians.¹¹⁷ They feared that O'Connell was out to establish a Roman Catholic ascendancy, and believed that Ulster's economic prosperity was contingent upon the union.¹¹⁸ These arguments are significant in terms of Ulster Protestant identity, as they would form the pillars of later unionist polemics against Irish home rule.¹¹⁹ The general acceptance of Cooke's opposition to Repeal does not prove that Ulster Presbyterians had become political Conservatives. Instead, the politically Liberal among them believed that the aims of the United Irish movement (in terms of civic republicanism) had been largely fulfilled in the union and that a reversion to an ascendancy parliament, albeit of a different creed, would be a retrograde step.¹²⁰

Cooke was clearly not exercising a dictatorial influence over the Presbyterian Church when he opposed Repeal but was merely reflecting the views of the vast majority of his co-religionists who did not fully embrace his political outlook on other matters.¹²¹ Writing to O'Connell's associate W. J. O'Neill Daunt many years later in 1864, it is interesting to note that the

112. Cooke, *Speech at the Great Protestant Meeting*, 18. Even Cooke's call for Presbyterians to leap to the defence of the Church of Ireland on the eve of disestablishment fell on deaf ears, see Cooke, *Protestant Electors*; cf. Holmes, "Presbyterians, Loyalty and Orangeism," 141–42.

113. Henry Cooke, *An Authentic Report of the Speech of the Rev. Henry Cooke, D.D., Delivered at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Upon the Occasion of the Renewal of Ministerial Communion between that Venerable Body and the General Synod of Ulster* (Belfast: William McComb, 1836), 12; Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, 48–49; Holmes, "Controversy and Schism," 117; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 129; Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, 118; Reid, *History*, iii, 502–03.

114. Cooke had previously published a pamphlet in favour of paraphrases in 1821, but later changed his position. Henry Cooke, *Vindication of Scripture Paraphrases* (Belfast: Alex Mayne, 1821); cf. Holmes, *Shaping*, 118, 124; Henry Cooke's preface to *The True Psalmody; or, The Bible Psalms the Church's Only Manual of Praise* (Belfast: James Johnston, 1861).

115. Henry Cooke to Thomas Chalmers, 6 April 1837 (New College Library, Edinburgh University, Chalmers Papers, CHA.4.261.61).

116. Smyth, "Life and Times," 234–35.

117. Boyd, *Montgomery and the Black Man*, 44–46; Allen, "Henry Montgomery," 255–56; Holmes, "Ulster Presbyterians," 543; *Northern Whig*, 7 January 1841. We should note, however, that the Scottish Voluntarist, Dr John Ritchie, who had clashed with Cooke in March 1836 on the question of the establishment principle, wrote to O'Connell to empathise with him after Cooke's repulse. Ritchie alludes to Cooke's support from the "Orange Boys" on that occasion. See John Ritchie to Daniel O'Connell, 23 January 1841 (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, O'Connell Papers, Ms.13,649/6); *The Voluntaries in Belfast. Report of the Discussion on Civil Establishments of Religion, Held in Belfast, on the Evenings of 16th and 17th March, 1836, between the Rev. J. Ritchie, D.D., Edinburgh; Rev. J. Alexander, Belfast; Rev. Mr. McIlwaine, Ohio, America; Rev. Hugh McIntyre, Loan-Ends; and the Rev. H. Cooke, D.D. L.L.D., Belfast* (4th edn, Belfast: William McComb, 1837).

118. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 147–48.

119. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 208.

120. Ian R. McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 228–29.

121. R. F. G. Holmes, "The General Assembly and Politics," in *The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1840–1990: A Celebration of Irish Presbyterian Witness during a Century and a Half*, eds R. F. G. Holmes and R. Buick Knox (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1990), 167.

Presbyterian Irish nationalist, John Martin, viewed both Cooke and Montgomery as equally unionist in their politics. Concerning the Ulster Presbyterians, Martin said that "Dr Cooke is their leader & master, and he is intensely pro-English. Dr Montgomery, the leading minister of the Unitarians (who though so few in number are yet important from wealth and intelligence) is also intensely pro-English."¹²²

V.

If Cooke exercised a dictatorial influence over the Presbyterian Church in the interests of Tory politics, then he was an impotent despot when it came to Tenant Right. Cooke was not entirely opposed to the concept of Tenant Right, which was a demand for the three-fs of fair rent, the fixity of tenure, and freedom of sale on the part of tenant farmers.¹²³ As with Henry Montgomery, he was in favour of a moderate definition of Tenant Right but was concerned that the views of more advanced Tenant Right advocates were undermining private property.¹²⁴ Indeed, it should be remembered that when the 1847 General Assembly, in its address to the Lord Lieutenant, called for the Ulster Custom (another term for Tenant Right) to be "universally extended and legally confirmed," James McKnight thanked Cooke for his part in the protest.¹²⁵ Cooke nonetheless completely failed to stop the advanced Tenant Right views being accepted among his ministerial colleagues.¹²⁶

At the Synod of Belfast in 1850, Cooke went so far as to denounce the "perfect communist interpretations" of his fellow Presbyterian ministers, and accused the Revd John Rogers of having "Socialism preached in the Synod."¹²⁷ Richard Smyth later criticised Cooke for his stance on this issue, believing it was incongruous with the property rights of the poor. He maintained that Cooke "never identified himself with the hard struggles of the tenant-farmers of Ulster to emancipate themselves from a thralldom which was as inimical to their rights of property as it was destructive of their liberties."¹²⁸ Still, Cooke was prepared to join a deputation to the government on behalf of Tenant Right, so long as they repudiated personal attacks on landlords and communist doctrines.¹²⁹ Thus Jamieson goes too far when he claims that Cooke's Toryism meant all his sympathies lay with the upper classes.¹³⁰

Far from dominating the views of the PCI on this issue, Cooke was an aberration from the Presbyterian norm. This point is evinced by McKnight's comment, in light of the General Assembly's support for advanced Tenant Right in 1850, that "Our church is now in her natural position," which was that of a guardian "on behalf

of the poor man's rights, in opposition to the rich man's tyranny."¹³¹ Regardless of whether or not this radicalism was the Presbyterian Church's natural position, it was certainly not the position of Cooke, which further serves to highlight his inability to dominate the Presbyterian Church on political questions.¹³²

Speaking in relation to the general election of 1852, Cooke expressed his concerns that co-operation between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics on the Tenant Right question through the League of the North and South would lead to another 1798.¹³³ He said, "Yes! we that remain remember '98. It is true, these days are gone by; but should the lesson, therefore, be forgotten? And should I not warn my brethren, whether lay or clerical, that as similar causes produce similar effects, the ominous combinations of '52 can produce no other than the destructive miseries of '98."¹³⁴

Notwithstanding such dire warnings, Cooke's position was a minority one among the ministers of the Irish Presbyterian Church. Cooke had welcomed the union of the Seceders with the Synod of Ulster in 1840 in the hope that it would increase the political strength of Presbyterianism in Ireland.¹³⁵ Unfortunately for him, it did not lead them to adopt Conservative politics. The

122. John Martin to W. J. O'Neill Daunt, 2 April 1864 (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, O'Neill Daunt Papers, Ms.10,507/11).

123. Henry Cooke, *Speech Delivered by the Rev. H. Cooke, D.D., LL.D., At the Nomination of Geo. Macartney, Esq. and Capt. Pakenham, at the Court-House, Belfast, on the 21st July, 1852* (Belfast: W. G. Agnew, 1852), 14–15; Holmes, "General Assembly," 168; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 176.

124. Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 354–55; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 181–82; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 156; Allen, "Henry Montgomery," 267; Wright, *Two Lands*, 167–68; *Banner of Ulster*, 18 November 1851.

125. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 176–78. For more on McKnight's views, see Martin W. Dowling, *Tenant Right and Agrarian Society in Ulster 1600–1870* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 294–95.

126. *Northern Whig*, 2 October 1847; *Londonderry Standard*, 8 October 1847; Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 353–55; Holmes, "Presbyterians, Loyalty and Orangeism," 134; J. Ernest Davey, *The Story of a Hundred Years: An Account of the Irish Presbyterian Church from the Formation of the General Assembly to the Present Time* (Belfast: W. & G. Baird, 1940), 60.

127. *Banner of Ulster*, 17 May 1850; *Londonderry Standard*, 23 May 1850.

128. Smyth, "Life and Times," 211.

129. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 77.

130. Jamieson, "Henry Cooke," 33.

131. *Banner of Ulster*, 16 July 1850; Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, 130.

132. Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 354–56; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 155; Davey, *Hundred Years*, 12.

133. For the League of the North and South, see Wright, *Two Lands*, 165–207.

134. Cooke, *Speech Delivered at the Nomination*, 11.

135. Holmes, "General Assembly," 167.

Banner of Ulster newspaper, which was one of the fruits of the union, was established in 1842 to counter Cooke's influence on political issues by advocating a distinctive Presbyterian politics. Although it was independent of all parties, the *Banner of Ulster* supported the Liberals rather than Cooke's Conservatives. In the north-west of Ulster, the *Londonderry Standard* also existed as a mouthpiece for political Liberalism.¹³⁶

136. Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 352–53; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 126–35; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 13; W. Desmond Bailie, "The First General Assembly and the steps Leading to its Formation," in *The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1840–1990: A Celebration of Irish Presbyterian Witness during a Century and a Half*, eds R. F. G. Holmes and R. Buick Knox (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1990), 15.

137. Henry Cooke to Earl of Hillsborough, [June 1843] (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Downshire Papers, D671/C/12/856); Henry Cooke to C. Blackwood, 9 May 1844 (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Cooke Papers); Henry Cooke, *Presbyterian Marriages. Authentic Report of the Rev. Dr. Cooke's Speech, at the Special Meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Held in May-Street Church, on Thursday, 10th March, 1842, on the Subject of Mixed Marriages* (Belfast: William McComb, 1842), 3; Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 350–51; Wright, *Two Lands*, 135, 156; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 83–87, 135, 146–47, 151; Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 152; Reid, *History*, iii, 510.

138. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, i (1843), 224; Holmes, "Presbyterians, Loyalty and Orangeism," 133–34; Holmes, "General Assembly," 167; Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, 105.

139. Holmes, *Shaping*, 40.

140. A. P. Goudy, *Right versus Might; or, Irish Presbyterian Politics Discussed. In Five Letters* (Londonderry: The Standard Office, 1852), 4. Goudy asserted that most Presbyterians "utterly condemn the political doctrines with which the rev. gentleman is identified." *Ibid.*, 20. Cooke's relationship with Goudy was so poor that he refused to give a lecture in Strabane on account of the antagonism between them over the Magee Controversy. See Henry Cooke to Richard Dill, 14 December 1854 (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Cooke Papers). This particularly bitter dispute arose after the death of Martha Magee in June 1846, as she left a bequest of £20,000 for the endowment of a Presbyterian arts and divinity college. Cooke and others wished to use the money to fund a theological college associated with the secular Queen's College in Belfast. The trustees of the Magee bequest resisted this effort to use the money for a purely theological college and insisted it be used to fund a complete literary and scientific Presbyterian college. In 1851, the Court of Chancery found in favour of the trustees. See Ritchie, *Isaac Nelson*, 32–34; Eugene Dunphy, "No Surrender! The Magee College Controversy," *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, 43 (2019), 1–18; R. F. G. Holmes, *Magee 1865–1965: The Evolution of the Magee College* (Belfast: B.N.L. Printing Co., 1965), 11–19.

141. Connolly, *Religion and Society*, 34.

142. Gary Peatling, "Whatever Happened to Presbyterian Radicalism? The Ulster Presbyterian Liberal Press in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Politics and Power in Victorian Ireland*, eds Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 162.

143. O'Ferrall, "Daniel O'Connell and Henry Cooke," 24; cf. Connolly, *Religion and Society*, 34.

Further evidence that the union had failed to get Presbyterians to support Cooke's politics is seen in the General Assembly's political resolution of 1843. This move took place in a context which increasingly suggested Cooke's political analysis was not conducive to Presbyterian interests. The two key issues for Presbyterians were the questioning of the legality of Presbyterian marriages and the non-intrusion controversy in the Church of Scotland prior to the Disruption of 1843.¹³⁷ Hence the resolution that Presbyterians should vote for candidates who would "most effectively secure a full and adequate representation of the principles and interests of Presbyterianism in the British legislature" was interpreted by Cooke as an attack on his politics, leading him to absent himself from the Assembly until 1847.¹³⁸

Whether or not Cooke had pretensions to dictatorship, this incident reveals that he was unable to dominate the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's supreme court. It also shows us that Presbyterian identity, far from being divorced from Liberal politics, was largely tied to said Liberalism during Cooke's lifetime.¹³⁹ Indeed, Cooke's views were held in such disdain that the Revd Dr Alexander Porter Goudy of Strabane asked "is this man a Presbyterian at all?," as Presbyterians were historically identified with the Whig interest.¹⁴⁰ In the end, what drove Ulster Presbyterians away from the Liberals was Gladstone's conversion to Irish home rule in 1885–86.¹⁴¹ Moreover, this departure from supporting the Liberal party was in the context of a unionist coalition; they did not reject political Liberalism as an ideology.¹⁴² This subsequent rejection of the Liberal party has deceived historians such as Fergus O'Ferrall into thinking that Cooke's earlier espousal of Conservatism was typical of his Presbyterian contemporaries, when, in reality, Cooke was unable to dominate the supreme judicatory of the PCI on political questions.¹⁴³

VI.

This historiographical essay has argued that the dictatorship thesis cannot be sustained. Whether Cooke's anti-Arian campaign was chiefly motivated by politics is a difficult question to answer. If, as suggested, Cooke saw a psychological link between Arianism and political radicalism, it would not necessarily undermine the view that Cooke's chief motivation was theological. Indeed, Cooke's anti-Arianism was indicative of increasing conservatism in Cooke's theological thinking. We should recognise along with Finlay Holmes that theological questions "do not take place in a spiritual vacuum," as they are often complicated by other

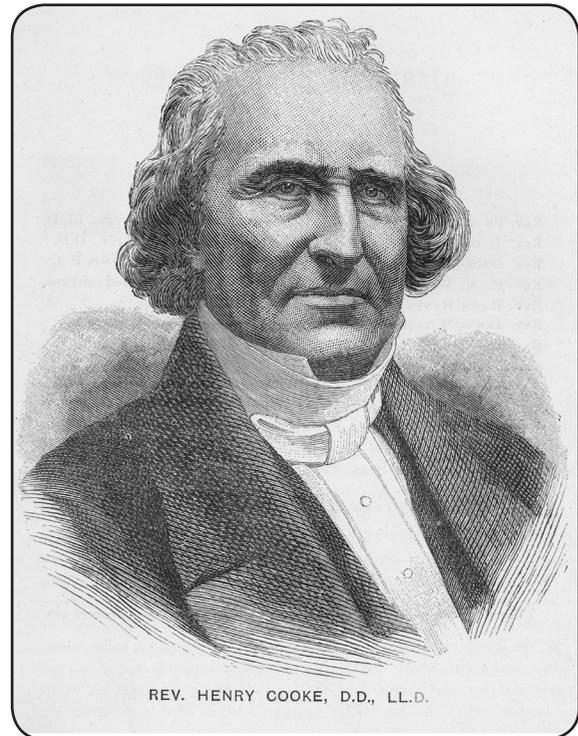
factors.¹⁴⁴ And it is a false dichotomy to set politics and theology in opposition to each other, as religious and political interests were “torturously intertwined in nineteenth-century Irish life.”¹⁴⁵

Additionally, Cooke was not wholly successful in his crusade against Belfast Inst. When the breach between the church and Inst did come about it was not a result of Presbyterians converting to Toryism, as even political Liberals supported the separation. Moreover, his belated campaign against Catholic Emancipation is evidence of weakness, not dominance. Cooke’s victory in the Synod of Ulster on National Education was a narrow one, in which he was supported by some political Liberals. Also, his efforts to bring about a marriage between the Presbyterians and Irish Anglicanism in the interests of pan-Protestantism were rebuffed by the majority of his ministerial colleagues, whom he could not persuade to forsake the Whigs.

Cooke’s successful repulse of O’Connell’s Repeal campaign provides no support for the dictatorship thesis, as O’Connell was opposed by Presbyterians of all theological and political varieties. Indeed, the persistence of Presbyterian Liberalism, particularly in the Tenant Right movement, shows us that while Presbyterians identified themselves as unionists, they did not become Conservatives in Cooke’s lifetime. Their commitment to so-called Covenanter politics meant that they aligned themselves with the Whig/Liberal political tradition, with some even questioning Cooke’s Presbyterianism due to his political heterodoxy. Thus David Hempton and Myrtle Hill are correct to dismiss the supposed conversion of Presbyterians from radicalism to Conservatism as “a dangerous oversimplification.”¹⁴⁶ As he understood it, Cooke’s Conservatism was not anti-Presbyterian Toryism. Cooke believed that he stood in the same political tradition as the Covenanters.¹⁴⁷ We should also keep in mind that Cooke was no die-hard reactionary. His political creed was the reformist Conservatism of Robert Peel’s Tamworth Manifesto.¹⁴⁸

Cooke’s failure to dominate other Presbyterians does not mean that he did not aspire to such domination, and it must be recognised that his “ecclesiastical behaviour was often politically conditioned.”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, his political conditioning and Finlay Holmes’ observation that Cooke was a “domineering ecclesiastic, who often served to behave more like a proud prelate than a humble presbyter,” is partly substantiated by his four-year absence from the General Assembly (1843–47).¹⁵⁰ In the context of nineteenth-century Romanticism and Carlylean hero-worship, moreover, it is possible that Cooke’s supporters thought of him almost as one of

the “great men.”¹⁵¹ This suggestion that is not as far-fetched as it first sounds when one considers J. L. Porter’s hagiography of Cooke, which his fellow Presbyterian J. R. Leebody described as falling into “a form of idolatry.”¹⁵² Nonetheless, whether he desired to or not, Cooke was not able to exercise a dictatorial influence over his church. And thus the historian Ian McBride is correct to conclude that “Cooke’s ascendancy has been much exaggerated.”¹⁵³ ■



Rev. Henry Cooke, D.D., LL.D. (1788–1868). From, *The Cooke Centenary. Commemorative Addresses Illustrative of the Life, Character, and Distinguished Public Services of The Rev. Henry Cooke, D.D., LL.D. on the Centenary of his birth, 11th May, 1888* (Belfast: W. Mullan & Son, 1888).

144. Holmes, “Controversy and Schism,” 123–24.

145. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 207.

146. Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, 69.

147. Henry Cooke, *A Letter from the Rev. Dr Cooke, Belfast, to the Rev. Dr Ritchie, Edinburgh, in Answer to Dr Ritchie’s Challenge* (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, [1836]), 7.

148. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 115, 117, 205; cf. Brown, *National Churches*, 197.

149. Barkley, “Arian Schism,” 338.

150. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 208. J. R. Leebody concurred with this assessment, claiming that “In the Church Courts he was at times impatient of contradiction, inclined to be dictatorial, and unnecessarily severe in debate.” Leebody, “Henry Cooke,” 230.

151. Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, 204.

152. Leebody, “Henry Cooke,” 231.

153. McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 216.