

# **Four Irish Catholic Generals in Victoria's Army**

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## Introduction

It is an increasingly well known fact that Irish Catholics supplied a disproportionate number of the rank and file of the British Army for many decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> By the 1830s the British Army boasted roughly as many Irishmen (42.2%) of all religious stripes (of whom roughly four-fifths might be estimated to be Catholics) as Englishmen (43.7%). Indeed, when speaking of his campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula during the 1800s and 1810s, the Duke of Wellington estimated that as many of half the soldiers under his command during the Peninsular War were Irish. However, closer examination has revealed the less well appreciated fact that despite their significant over-representation in the rank and file, Irish Catholics remained considerably under-represented as members of the officer corps. Indeed in 1830, when Catholics made up roughly one third of the total army strength, they made up just 2% of the entire officer corps.<sup>2</sup> By 1860 that number had grown to just 4%, and that figure does not appear to have been surpassed by the close of the century. By contrast, census data suggests Ireland's Catholic population, as a proportion of the total UK population, moved from circa 24% in 1831 to 8% in 1901. Even if one ignores the contributions of English Catholic generals and holds that the entire body of the army's Catholic generals were Irish, such figures would still indicate a considerable under-representation of Irish Catholics. This poses a significant question as to whether or not any of these men managed to reach the highest ranks of the officer corps, namely by becoming general officers.

If we turn to consider the total number of Field Marshals, Generals, Lieutenant-Generals and Major-Generals at the end of the period in question, one cannot help but observe the paucity of Irish Catholics, regardless of the individual success of these men. Of 58 (non-honorary) Field Marshals and Generals and Lieutenant-Generals in 1899, there counted not one Irish Catholic. Of 122 Major-Generals only three can be counted. By 1909, a decade later, those numbers would remain unchanged, with Irish Catholics once more numbering just three (Garrett O'Moore Creagh, Matthew James Tierney Ingram and Sir Bryan Mahon) out of 130 general officers.<sup>3</sup> One important distinction however, is that by this point, two of the three

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<sup>1</sup> Karsten, P. (1983) 'Irish Soldiers in the British Army: Suborned or Subordinate?' in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Autumn) pp31-64

<sup>2</sup> Fontana, V. (2002) 'Some aspects of Roman Catholic service in the land forces of the British crown, c. 1750 to c. 1820' Unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Social, Literary and Historical Studies, University of Portsmouth, March 2002

<sup>3</sup> Both 1899 and 1909 totals adjusted to ignore honorary foreign appointees

served as full Generals. Over the course of the First World War, Sir William Bernard Hickie and Edward Bulfin appear to be the only notable examples of Irish Catholics serving as generals, though rigorous research might produce more examples.

Examination of the army list from the period 1829 to 1899 reveals a small number of Irish Catholics who achieved the rank of major-general or higher. If we exclude those who received such rank as an honorary award upon their retirement, and those who earned their status as part of one of the army's many support services, then we are left with a select group of just four officers who rise to prominence in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. These four officers – Martin Dillon, William Francis Butler, Thomas Kelly-Kenny and Cornelius Francis Clery – achieved high rank in the closing decades of the Victorian era and featured in many of the 'little wars' of the period. Despite this, they remain relatively unknown, even amongst scholars of Irish military history, and so a brief overview of their service is necessary.

The first of these men, William Francis Butler, was easily the most famous of the four and is the only one to be subject to recent scholarly interest.<sup>4</sup> Having joined the army in 1858, Butler spent many years languishing as a junior officer of the 69<sup>th</sup> (South Lincolnshire) Regiment of Foot. However, in a stroke of good fortune, Butler struck up a relationship with one of the army's rising stars, Garnet Wolseley, and parlayed this relationship into a role in several of Wolseley's campaigns. He would become a Major-General in 1892 and a Lieutenant-General in 1899. Nevertheless, despite a prolific record of military service (including campaigns in both West and South Africa, Egypt and Canada) and publishing, Butler's career came to an ignominious end in South Africa, on the eve of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Boer War, following a dispute with High Commissioner Sir Alfred Milner.

Martin Dillon entered military service with the 98<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot in 1843. Like Butler, he spent a considerable length of time amongst the junior officer ranks, but soon earned distinction whilst stationed in British India. Dillon participated in the Anglo-Sikh War, the

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<sup>4</sup> Butler, in addition to his own autobiography published in 1910 has been the subject of two biographical studies, firstly by Edward McCourt in 1967 and secondly Martin Ryan in 2003.

forcing of the Kohat Pass and various actions in the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Further campaigning in China and Ethiopia, as well as a cordial relationship with the Duke of Cambridge and Lord Roberts, appear to have assured Dillon's rise; first to the rank of Major-General in 1878, Lieutenant-General in 1887 and full General in 1892, before his retirement in 1893.

Thomas Kelly-Kenny obtained his first commission in 1858 and soon saw service with the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Queen's Royal) Regiment of Foot in the various actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Chinese (or 'Opium') War. Earning praise for his staff work and his performance as a junior quartermaster whilst in India, he was subsequently assigned to command the transport train of the Ethiopian expedition. After inheriting a considerable fortune, Kelly-Kenny briefly considered a political career but instead continued in army service, holding a succession of appointments in Great Britain, becoming Major-General in 1897 and Lieutenant-General in 1899. 1899 also saw Kelly-Kenny receive command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Boer War, a role in which he performed capably. He was eventually promoted to full General in 1905 and retired two years later.

Lastly, the career of Cornelius Francis Clery (who preferred to be known as just Francis Clery) began in 1858 with a number of mundane garrison postings with the 32<sup>nd</sup> (Cornwall) Regiment of Foot (Light Infantry), in far flung locales such as Gibraltar and Mauritius. Clery's 'big break' arrived with his admission to the Army Staff College at Camberley in 1870, and subsequently his appointment in 1872 as 'Professor of Tactics' for the Cadets College at Sandhurst. Clery would write *Minor Tactics*, a text which was to become required reading at Sandhurst for the next quarter century. This would be followed by several appointments to serve in Africa (including the ill-fated First Invasion of Zululand in 1879) prior to a return to Sandhurst and, eventually, promotion to the rank of Major-General in 1894. Despite a period of illness, Clery was assigned to command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Boer War; however he would retire from the service shortly after the conclusion of the 'set-piece' phase of the war had concluded in 1901.

The assembled group of individuals is broadly comparable; all were born (indeed if we exclude Martin Dillon all were born within a three year period), served, retired and indeed died within a few years of one another (excluding Cornelius Clery, all died within a four year period from 1910 to 1914), all served within the line infantry or the staff corps of the British Army, and, naturally, all were Irish Catholic Generals in the British Army. Through an exercise of collective biography it is hoped that it will begin to be possible to explain the overarching trends behind their careers, what they shared with their fellow Irish Catholic officers and what they did not, ultimately in order to provide an answer to both their own advancement and the consequent languishing of most Irish Catholics at the lower echelons. Through an examination of these selected individuals it becomes possible to engage in useful comparative observations, noting what facets of their life were common and which were individual and personal. By understanding why they succeeded it might be possible to grasp why so many of their co-religionists and fellow-countrymen did not.

The apparent success of these men begs the question of how they, and by extension the religious and cultural group they represented, were placed within the structure of the Army. Naturally, as these men's careers traversed the abolition of advancement by purchase, it would be wise for us to recall briefly the distinctions in circumstance this created. Prior to the Royal Warrant of 1871, an officer with requisite funds, seniority and sufficient years of service, could purchase an advancement in rank should a suitable vacancy arise. By contrast, promotion during the period after the abolition of purchase had many of the styles (if not forms) of merit surrounding it. Limited forms of examination were instituted for promotion to the ranks of Lieutenant and Captain, yet these were largely unchallenging or passable with the liberal use of cramming and rote learning.<sup>5</sup> Examination was also not competitive, and the practice was used merely to establish an officer's eligibility for advancement, rather than determine his skill relative to his peers. Merit was theoretically assessed by a bevy of confidential reports compiled in July, done regimentally and hierarchically, which was supposed to assess who would fill vacancies and secure advancement.<sup>6</sup> This state of affairs arose in the aftermath of the aforementioned abolition of purchase in 1871, despite the reservations of the Commander in Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, who protested that he could

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<sup>5</sup> Spiers, E. (1992) *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p108

<sup>6</sup> Erickson, A.B. (1959) 'Abolition of Purchase in the British Army' in *Military Affairs*, Vol. 23 No.2 (Summer 1959) p76

not be expected to adjudicate over more than six thousand confidential reports per year.<sup>7</sup> The Duke of Cambridge was not enthused by the various reforming efforts of Garnet Wolseley and others. As a result, for many of the decades of nominal promotion by merit, it might be more accurate to speak of a process of promotion by adulterated seniority – impacted upon by factors such as length of service, wealth, family background, military skill and patronage.

### **Length of Service**

As such, in order to properly compare these men with their religious and national bedfellows, we must establish in broad terms, the characteristics which defined most general officers during the period, in order to discern what distinctions if any, emerged between these Irish Catholic generals and the wider body of general officers. If we turn to consider the foremost of these categories; that of length of service and seniority, it is possible to observe several discrepancies. At the outset, it remains clear that the success of these four men by 1899 is representative more of an aberration than a general practice. In 1899 Butler, Clery and Kelly-Kenny ranked as Major-Generals on the Army list, 3 men out of 122. These men had each served 41 years under arms, comparing somewhat unfavourably with the average length of service amongst Major-Generals of just below 40 years.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a cursory examination of the rank of Lieutenant-General demonstrates further incongruities; of the 37 Lieutenant-Generals on the staff in 1899, 17 had received their promotions to Colonel at the same time or after William Francis Butler in 1882. Another four had even reached the rank of Colonel in 1884, at the same time as Francis Clery. Whilst these discrepancies alone are only marginal – the fact that all three men appear to have suffered from of them is unusual.

The logical explanation for such a discrepancy would of course be that the men in question simply had not the military experience of those who obtained promotion in advance of them; however this does not appear to hold true. Whilst most of those officers who had reached the rank of Lieutenant-General did so with a body of military experience largely comparable to any Irish Catholic general officer, some managed to reach high rank without any apparent experience of campaigning at all, as in the case of Lieutenant-General Nathaniel Stevenson.

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<sup>7</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p109

<sup>8</sup> Ascertained from statistical analysis of the 1899 Officers List

Others, such as John Plumtre Carr Glyn (another scion of the Wolseley Ring), first commissioned roughly the same time as Butler, reached the rank of Lieutenant-General despite having not seen active campaigning since the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. By contrast only Martin Dillon appears to have achieved advancement in rank in advance of this average, becoming a Major-General after just 35 years of service. Yet even Dillon appears to have suffered disproportionately in his further advancement, reaching the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1887, despite the routine promotion of other officers several years his junior in length of service.

### **Money and Land**

In the absence of a purely military explanation for the disproportionate position of the four men, it behoves us to consider other factors, such as their backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, the family history of the men is reflective of the demographics which furnished the British Army with most of its officers; namely the landed or mercantile classes. Francis Clery, the son of a Cork merchant, clearly represents the latter grouping, and being the only example of his class (though Kelly-Kenny had mercantile and landed relatives) as well as the most junior of the four men, is indicative of the difficulty that middle-class Catholic Ireland had in providing men for the officer corps. It should be recalled at this point that military service during this period was an expensive matter, particularly in ‘fashionable’ regiments, and frequently demanded that officers have a private income in addition to their army pay in order that they could live the ‘lifestyle’ that was expected of them. Whilst the Penal Laws had left the medical and mercantile trades open to Catholics, and Emancipation had opened new venues such as the practice of law and politics, the emergence of a Catholic middle class was an ongoing process. Much of this new class was drawn from the formerly landed Catholic gentry.<sup>9</sup> Such individuals, seeking a new economic safe harbour in the middling classes, were not yet capable of sustaining the military careers of younger sons. Even by 1911, Irish Catholics would continue to exist as an under-represented element within the middle classes, only coming close to representing the religious demographics of the island in the most modest of middle class occupations such as teacher or journalist.<sup>10</sup> Clery appears to have

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<sup>9</sup> See Wall, M. (1958) ‘The Rise of a Catholic Middle Class in Eighteenth Century Ireland’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 42 (Sep., 1958), p104 and McBride, I. (2009) *Eighteenth Century Ireland: Isle of Slaves*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, pp126-127

<sup>10</sup> Boyce, D.G. (2005) *Nineteenth Century Ireland: The Search for Stability*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, p266

been drawn from a better endowed family of Catholic middle class – certainly sufficient to afford several ‘steps’ of promotion by purchase. The distinction between middle class and upper middle class may well be an underrated element in explaining the discrepancy of Irish Catholics in British service, where in Ireland the latter continued to be dominated by the Irish Protestant community.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to Clery, William Francis Butler was the son of a lesser landholder, whilst Thomas Kelly-Kenny and Martin Dillon had boasted landowners amongst the closest elements of their extended families. Nevertheless it must be emphasised once more that these were not the wealthiest of landowners; Thomas Kelly-Kenny’s rather unusual circumstances of inheriting an enormous landed estate worth just under one thousand pounds a year, would have been a particular boon to a young officer. By contrast, Butler and Dillon do not appear to have profited particularly from their landed connections, and both men advanced slowly during the period of promotion by purchase. More generally, the ability of Catholic Ireland to sustain landed families of sufficient wealth to afford military careers was not yet possible; by 1778 Catholics owned only five percent of the land of Ireland.<sup>12</sup> This percentage would increase across the nineteenth century, including the movement of successful members of the mercantile elite into the landed gentry. By contrast, in 1870 Catholics were by one estimate, thought to make up forty percent of all landlords, however this number does not convey the tendency of Catholic landowners to be found at the lower end of the scale in regards estate size and wealth.<sup>13</sup> By reference, a mere 1.5% of landlords (or 302 individuals) owned roughly one third of Irish land. In looking at this same grouping of the 300 largest landowners, Fergus Campbell’s recent study of major Irish landlords (those possessing estates in excess of 10,000 acres) in 1881, revealed just 7.5% to be Catholic.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, even by 1926, ownership of the largest class of farms (those in excess of 200 acres) in what then constituted the Irish Free

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this and the evolution of the Irish Catholic middle class during this period see Campbell, F. (2009) *Irish Establishment: 1874-1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>12</sup> McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, p216 – It should be noted that recent scholarship has explored the role of collusion in producing a figure that was in practice, considerably higher.

<sup>13</sup> Winstanley, M.J. ( 1984) *Ireland and the Land Question: 1800-1922*, London: Methuen, p11

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, *The Irish Establishment*, p20 – Although Campbell could only identify the religious affiliation of 266 out of 291 individuals studied, projecting the existing figures onto the total would suggest at most roughly twenty-one Irish Catholic families belonging to this highest grouping.



State was still 27.5% in the hands of non-Catholic ownerships, who themselves made up just 7.2% of all farmers.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, of 80% of landlords controlled a little less than 20% of the land, or roughly 250 acres each.<sup>16</sup> If we employ the figures reached by W.E. Vaughan regarding the receipt of agricultural incomes in 1865,<sup>17</sup> suggesting a return to landlords of 14.7 million pounds per 19 million acres of agricultural land,<sup>18</sup> one is left with an average return of 15 shillings per acre per year. For an average holding of 250 acres, this suggests an annual income of just less than £190 pounds per year. For an infantry officer who might be expected to spend between £150 and £200 per year, the income from 250 acres of land in Ireland might just be sufficient when combined with army pay, but this is before we consider the reality that such landlords were unlikely to be able to devote the entirety of their incomes to the upkeep of soldiering sons. Even if an officer came into an estate at a young age, such inheritances frequently involved significant expenses of their own, ranging from family maintenance to estate management. Furthermore, the official remuneration for officers did not provide much incentive either; the Royal Warrant of 1870 denominated a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant's pay as 6 shillings and 6 pence per day for officers serving in the line infantry, totalling just over two pounds per week or one hundred and twenty pounds a year.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, a Church Parson could expect an income of one hundred and forty pounds per year and would need not concern himself with the demands of maintaining the 'appropriate' lifestyle of an officers, nor 'fitting out' costs of new officers, let alone the price of purchasing any commissions. Securing a clerkship could provide a man of some education with even better financial prospects, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Clerkship paying between £300 and £500 per year – roughly twice the sum of an army Captain.<sup>20</sup> Given such circumstances, it is difficult to see how Catholic permeation of the lowest echelons of the landed class could be said to provide it with any improved means for furnishing the officer class.

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<sup>15</sup> Ó Gráda, C. (2004) 'Irish Agriculture after the Land War', *Centre for Economic Research: Working Paper Series*, April 2004, UCD, Table 6.3

<sup>16</sup> Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question*, p11

<sup>17</sup> Vaughan, W.E. (1994) *Landlords & Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p8, Table 1

<sup>18</sup> Guinnane, T. & Miller, R. (1997) 'The Limits to Land Reform in Ireland, 1870-1909' in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 45 No. 3 (April 1997), p595

<sup>19</sup> *Royal Warrant for the Pay and Promotion, Non-Effective Pay, and Allowances of Her Majesty's British Forces service elsewhere than in India* – Dated 27<sup>th</sup> December 1870

<sup>20</sup> Harries-Jenkins, G. (1997) *The Army in Victorian Society*, London: Routledge, p87

More broadly, we must consider the implications of increased Catholic landownership more deeply than just the overall percentage of land owned. If we examine the Land Acts of the later nineteenth century, one cannot ignore the tendency of such laws to propagate a distribution of existing estates, rather than the transfer of landed power from a largely Anglo-Irish Protestant elite to an Irish-Catholic one. Indeed, Thomas Kelly-Kenny was in later years a participant in this process, seeing his estates broken up by the Congested Districts Board in 1909. The emergence of a new norm of tenant farmer in the countryside may have redressed economic and political grievances, but could provide little in the way of men with the necessary economic status to enter the British officer class. The significance of this last point cannot be overstated, as across the period in question the British Army was roughly half officered by men of this landed class, ranging from 53% of the officer corps in 1830s to the still imposing figure of 41% in 1912.<sup>21</sup> Given these facts, it is less difficult to understand how Catholic Ireland would have struggled to provide officers of a landed background.

### **Family Connection and Education**

One important factor which all the men in question appear to have benefitted from (with the possible exception of Clery) is the possession of a family connection with the military service. During this period it was not unusual for British Army officers to hail from a family tradition of military service (sometimes with sons serving in the regiments that their fathers had served in). This could provide prospective officers with familial links to the military, access a body of military experience, as well as a network of connections and contacts. This has proven to be the case with other Irish Catholic officers including Garrett O'Moore Creagh whose father was a Royal Navy Captain, Thaddeus Richard Ryan whose father in law was a Captain in the East India Company, and J.P. Redmond whose father was a patron of the Militia and grand-father one of the few Catholic members of the Wexford Yeomanry that aided the suppression of the 1798 rebellion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Razzell, P.E. (1963) 'Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army: 1758-1962' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 14 No.3 (Sept 1963) p248

<sup>22</sup> McConnel, J. (2013) 'A Soldier of the Queen: General J.P. Redmond' in *History Ireland*, Vol. 21 No. 6 (November/December 2013)

This same principle applies to the men under examination here; William Butler, despite his father's misgivings, had the benefit of an uncle who had undertaken a military career and ensured he was aware of the difficulties he would face in securing advancement owing to his religion. Meanwhile, much of Martin Dillon's early life appears to have been formed in part around the different postings of his officer father, Captain Andrew Dillon. On the other hand, Thomas Kelly-Kenny benefitted the connections and largesse of two uncles in military service, particularly that of Mathias Kenny. It is relevant to note that Mathias Kenny's service was not as a line officer but as a regimental surgeon; examination of officer lists during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century suggests that this type of service was a common means for Catholics to enter the officer corps, most likely to the existence of the medical professional as one of the few middle class fields of occupation not closed to Catholics under the Penal Laws.<sup>23</sup> Only Francis Clery does not appear to have been without a family tradition of military service. However, it remains eminently plausible that his father James would have developed no small number of contacts in the military service, in the course of his duties as a 'wine and gunpowder' merchant. Nevertheless, in all the cases listed, it would appear crucial to the officers in question, that they possess at least some manner of family military experience or connection, most likely for the purposes of overcoming the initial difficulty of obtaining entry to a profession still marked by social prejudices.

Whilst traversing the issue of these men's family background in upbringing, it would also be wise to consider what schooling they benefited from. It is noteworthy that none of the men under examination attended a formal military training institution prior to their commissioning. Whilst this was not especially unusual for British Army officers of the mid-Victorian period, we should recall that all of the officers (with the exception of Dillon who cannot be confirmed) boasted attendance at some manner of second level educational institute and do not appear to have suffered in their career for the fact that these institutions tended to be run by the Jesuit Order. On the matter of education the elementary point we must keep in mind is that admission to the officer corps was delineated by *some* form of higher education. In Great Britain this was usually associated with the system of Public Schools. Even with the abolition of promotion by purchase, an army career would still demand significant outlay (Ciaran O'Neill has estimated the sum at £1,100 pounds for a secondary education and

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<sup>23</sup> O'Connor, S. (2014) *Irish Officers in the British Forces, 1922-45*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p86

training at Sandhurst by the 1870s) and was without much prospect of a significant return except at the higher levels of the officer corps (where most officers let alone Irish Catholic ones would not end up).<sup>24</sup> Given such circumstances it is not difficult to imagine many potential officers instead opting for more profitable careers in civilian life. And once more we must bear in mind the difficulties faced by Catholic Ireland in providing a body of population capable of paying not just for a potential officers' education, but in supporting him through the early years of his career. Given such difficulties, Edward Spiers' discovery of only five Catholics in the eight Guards Battalions of the British Army, those most prestigious and expensive units of the Army (both in terms of purchase price and expected lifestyle), during the 1855-67 period, is by no means surprising.<sup>25</sup>

### **Military Skill and Patronage**

Lastly, we must consider if it was perhaps simply the issue of competency which distinguished these officers from their fellow Irish Catholics, by turning once more to look at their military careers. The most obvious supposition would be that all four men possessed an exceptional level of skill which permitted their advancement. This should not be viewed simply through the prism of technical skill or competency as tends to be the case in modern armies. Rather, for an officer in British Army of the Victorian Era, cultivation of important personal relationships and dexterous management of the media could prove just as crucial for an officer's advancement. When examining army confidential reports from the period, one can occasionally find officers castigated for being so despised by their fellows. With such considerations in mind, let us turn to examine the four men in question.

As established previously, all four became general officers with a considerable body of military experience under their belt. All boasted some experience of campaigning, though in the case of Butler and Clery this was deferred for some years; Dillion served in the Indian Mutiny and beyond, Butler in Canada, Western and Southern Africa as well as Egypt; Clery in South Africa, Egypt and Sudan; whilst Kelly-Kenny fought in China, Abyssinia and South Africa. All served on (ultimately) successful campaigns and all punctuated these campaigns

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<sup>24</sup> O'Neill, C. (2014) *Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility and the Irish Catholic Elite 1850-1900*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p126

<sup>25</sup> Spiers, E. (1980) *The Army and Society: 1815-1914*, London: Longman, p298

with a body of staff work. However, these accomplishments in and of themselves do not explain the success of these men; clearly they were not the only Irish Catholic officers to serve on campaign, as men like Andrew Browne and Maurice Moore attest to, yet neither of these men reached the rank of general officer. By comparison, as mentioned above, it was possible for officers of no combat experience, to proceed up the ranks with greater alacrity than any of these men. Was military skill then a necessity but not a guarantor of advancement for Irish Catholic officers?

In addition to this measure of military acumen, perhaps of more significance was the ability of all four, during in their prosecution of low level campaigns, to attract the interest of patrons and superiors who could provide tracks for further advancement. Butler, Kelly-Kenny and Dillon were all repeatedly employed as logisticians, orchestrating campaigns in Africa, Ethiopia and India respectively. In-fact it would be staff work and administration that would come to define their careers, rather than a glory on the front-lines. Butler remained primarily at the rear during his first tour in Egypt, Kelly-Kenny and Clery only commanded front-line units at the end of their careers whilst Dillon would never have the duty of doing so (at least not in wartime). Broadly characterized, this cadre of Irish Catholic officers spent much of their careers in administrative and support position which might involve combat, rather than being employed as commanders of combat units.

On further examination, one cannot help but notice that all four men in addition to boasting a body of considerable combat experience also boasted patrons of varying degrees of influence. This may well have been a product of a conscious effort at forging personal relationships with superior officers as a means of advancement. In any case it certainly appears to be something which distinguishes these men from their less successful fellows; Martin Dillon, (perhaps owing to a lack of reforming zeal) attracted the patronage of the Duke of Cambridge and wrote favourably about Lord Roberts, Butler whilst serving in Canada clumsily but determinedly cultivated a connection with Garnet Wolseley (despite Wolseley's readily apparent antipathy for Ireland), Francis Clery with his connection to Redvers Buller appears

to have operated on the outskirts of the Wolseley Ring,<sup>26</sup> whilst Thomas-Kelly Kenny (and Butler to a lesser degree) boasted a sufficiently strong relationship with Edward VII that he was able to persist in his position as Adjutant-General to the forces in the early years of the 1900s, despite the opposition of the now ascendant Lord Roberts.

However this apparent aptitude for securing appropriate patrons does not appear to have presented itself in isolation – all four men displayed a notable proclivity for marking a stir in the course of their careers. Butler achieved fame not just for his service but due to a healthy penchant for writing, including fiction, biography and accounts of his service. Thomas Kelly-Kenny advanced rapidly through the purchase system while it endured becoming Captain with just eight years of service (Dillon had to wait twelve years, Butler thirteen) and secured a number of administrative positions early in his career. Dillon achieved preferment through early distinction in India, including the Siege of Cawnpore which saw him sustain no less than two wounds from bayonets and one from a sword. Meanwhile, Cornelius Francis Clery made his mark early in his career as a tactician and educator, literally writing the book on infantry tactics for the next quarter century. In addition to this body of work, he also established something of a reputation as a dandy in the service, with one ‘Tommy’ describing him as ‘a queer looking bloke with a puzzle beard and blue whiskers.’<sup>27</sup> One might suspect that such energetic displays reflected a singular determination amongst the men to advance regardless of what disadvantages they faced, and in this task they certainly managed to surmount any lingering anti-Catholic prejudice which may have impeded them.

## **Conclusion**

In examining the implications of these collective motives on the advancement of the four men, it is striking to note that all four men appeared to labour under not just the disadvantage of their faith but also of difficulties that any officer might find troublesome to surmount; Dillon does not appear to have been possessed of the financial resources required (perhaps

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<sup>26</sup> The ‘Wolseley Ring’ is the name given to the cadre of officers who surrounded Sir Garnet on his rise through the ranks. The Wolseley Ring was one of two such organizations prevalent in the British Army during the close of the nineteenth century, with the other major such grouping being the ‘Roberts Ring’ of Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts. The two groups were alternatively known as the ‘Africans’ and the ‘Indians’ due to their respective areas of campaigning; Wolseley in various parts of Africa and Roberts across British India.

<sup>27</sup> Monckton, W.J.P [ed] (1900) *Black and White Budget*, Vol. 2, London: Black and White Publishing Co, p5

occasioning his service in India which was a popular destination for officers with limited pecuniary means); Butler similarly makes plain his early financial struggles; Clery appears to have entered the military service a scion of the middle class without any verifiable military connection whilst Kelly-Kenny appears, in spite of his later inheritance, to have been drawn from that same class. In addition to this, all four laboured under the burden of practising the Catholic faith in a military class which, research suggests, still possessed some of the prejudices which would have in the previous century precluded the men from military office outright. Nevertheless, all four men achieved what most of their Irish Catholic peers in the officer corps would not, becoming general Officers of various statures, albeit taking slightly longer to do so than many of their English and Scottish counterparts.

In terms of wealth, it is interesting to note that whilst Kelly-Kenny and Clery came from reasonably wealthy backgrounds, the former rose higher than the latter, with Clery not exceeding the rank of Major-General whereas Kelly-Kenny became a full General. The distinction of the two men was of course whilst Kelly-Kenny (eventually) drew from landed wealth, Clery's family fortune was that of the middle-class merchant. Similarly, Martin Dillon was drawn from the lesser landed gentry and though lacking the wealth of Clery, nevertheless managed to parlay his position to that of full General also. Even William Butler, who, despite the acrimonious end to his career, reached the rank of Lieutenant-General, was a bona-fide member of the landed gentry, certainly more so than Dillon. Once again, this is not a novel conclusion as the continued importance of the landed gentry in providing the upper echelons of the British Army's officer corps during this period has been well documented. Nevertheless, the differences in success strongly suggest that for Irish Catholics, possession of landed wealth was an almost essential element in doing well as a general officer, and highly desirable if merely seeking to enter that class.

In a very similar vein stands the question of family connection; it is unsurprising that, once three of the four men boasted military connections within their family, whereas in the case of Clery we can only infer such a relationship. The precise nature of this relationship does not actually appear to have impacted on the future of the officers very much and seems primarily to have been valuable in getting an officer an entry to the officer corps. Whilst Butler could boast a Major within his family, Dillon's own father was a Major, and Kelly-Kenny had an

uncle who served as a military surgeon, none of the men appear to have obtained particularly enviable first postings as a result of these connections, let alone further advancement. Nor does the absence of a family connection appear to have hindered Clery in contributing enormously to the army's training and education. The family connections, rather than background, were not of decisive importance

In terms of military service, naturally the most obvious variable to consider is the military skill of the men, both on the battlefield and off it. As established previously, all four men had active military careers, ranging from Dillon's early displays of gallantry and later administrative acumen (and special competence in logistics and transport, understated but necessary skills, seem to be common to most of the Irish Catholic generals) to Butler's apparent ubiquity across the American and African continents. On balance, the experience of the four men was easily the equal of most of their fellow Generals and in some cases, far in excess of some of them. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of Clery, one cannot reasonably assume this to be a decisive factor in their advancement – they were experienced officers, but not so dramatically more so than their fellow officers as to merit promotion by that right alone; such experience was (normally) a prerequisite of obtaining senior command, but did not assure it. Clery may well be the exception to this case, being not just experienced on campaigns but also having made those aforementioned contributions to army training.

However, one cannot help but note that the route of advancement which all four men held in common; namely as staff officers rather than regimental ones. Although this was by no means an unusual method for an officer to advance into the body of general officers, it is striking that not one of the of the Irish Catholic generals under examination reached high rank through regimental command, a path taken by officers such as Charles Brownlow or Andrew Wauchope. Whether this reflects an inability of Irish Catholics to do well within regiments (which the success of men such as Maurice Moore and Andrew Browne would discount) or a similar paucity of Irish Catholics in regimental commands deserving of promotion, remains unclear.



That leaves us to consider the question of patronage; we must at this point be careful not to regard this as somehow grubby or improper, as this study has had as its objective the question of how Irish Catholics fared relatively *within* the British Army, with all the peculiarities and oddities which that military force featured in the nineteenth century. In this one sphere, all four men appear to have possessed sufficiently powerful patrons as to render any possible disadvantage of faith eminently surmountable. It was these connections, Dillon with the Duke of Cambridge, Butler and Clery (the latter to a lesser degree) with Garnet Wolseley, and Kelly-Kenny with the Royal Family, which provided these men with a means for advancement and opportunity. Such patronage could provide great means of advancement, but was no guarantee of an officer's ascendancy as Butler and indeed Redvers Buller would discover. When we consider the power that these patrons held, the Duke of Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief for several decades in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Wolseley as one of the army's two great minds during the same period, and the Royal Family's intimate involvement with the pageantry of government, it is perhaps not surprising that men benefitting from such patronage would be able to overcome any religious or ethnic stigma.

Perhaps the only truly satisfactory answer is to attribute the eventual success of these four men, (and consequently the failure of so many like them) to the combination of these factors. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine any of these men rising quite so high without each possessing the abilities and facing the circumstances that they did. Whilst background and wealth permitted them to be officers, talent and skill permitted them to perform sufficiently well to attract the patronage required to become Catholic Ireland's most senior members of the British Army. Having broadly charted this path by which so few could do so well, it now becomes possible to consider in a wider sense, the overall nature of the Irish Catholic element in the officer corps during this period.

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