

About The Book

Sceim na gCeardchumann, an independent educational, social and cultural association which promotes a knowledge of the language and history of Ireland among trade unionists, decided to mark the bicentenary of James Hope's birth (25 August, 1764) by commissioning and publishing this study of the great United Irish organiser's life, times and ideas.

The Templepatrick-born weaver commanded the famous Spartan Band under Henry Joy McCracken at the Battle of Antrim in June, 1798, and organised the workers of Dublin behind Robert Emmet in 1803. But it is as a social thinker that the name of this Ulster Presbyterian Republican and early trade unionist deserves to be remembered in Dublin, Belfast and indeed all parts of Ireland.

"Let us look to a higher motive than praise or profit—to promote truth, and labour together as Irishmen, bound by the love of country, which is a stronger tie than any human obligation," said Jemmy Hope summing up his life's work.

It is a good summary of a good life.

About The Author

The author, a Dublin journalist, writes on Irish social and political questions. He published a short study of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen in 1963. He has written a number of pamphlets on partition and its effect on the economic and political life of the nation.

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE



JEMMY HOPE

by Sean Cronin

The United Irishman who was to 1798 and 1803 what James Fintan Lalor was to 1848 and James Connolly was to 1916

Foreword

When the Volunteers of 1782 won for Henry Grattan the measure of legislative independence that he valued he lauded them as "The armed property of the nation". Later, when they removed the crown from their uniform buttons and supported Tone's campaign for "The Rights of Man in Ireland—the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers in this island", he denounced them as "The armed beggary of the nation".

The play of social forces so sharply stated by Grattan was understood better, perhaps, by Jemmy Hope than by any of his contemporaries who have left their views on record. His vision was clear, and from his viewpoint on life he had no escape.

Even before the rising Jemmy Hope had forebodings. When, on its eve, the merchant-class leadership of the Northern United Irishmen collapsed, he understood—as Fintan Lalor understood the failure in 1848, and as Connolly would have understood the failure of our own day if he had survived it.

We are inclined to speak too glibly of "Betrayals". Different viewpoints make for different real objectives, and fine phrases are subject to reinterpretation. In our own day we have seen the rulers of the Twenty-six County state (under any name) evolve what a disappointed Indian ambassador called "A kind of nationalism that is not anti-imperialist".

It is good to see a renewed interest in the play of forces that went to the making—and the breaking—of so many efforts for national independence. It is high time that something of the clear vision of the leader of McCracken's "Spartan Band" should be brought to bear on the "Green Paint" politics of to-day.

—GEORGE GILMORE

Acknowledgement

The publishers wish to acknowledge their gratitude to the author, the cover designer, Brian Murphy, and to George Gilmore who provided the foreword. All three gave their services without reward as a token of respect for the memory and ideals of Jemmy Hope.

The Cradle of Liberty

THE most radical movement in Irish history was the United Irish Society which based itself on no tradition but the right of people to liberty and thus created a tradition of its own. Undoubtedly the most radical United Irishman was Jemmy Hope, a weaver from Templepatrick, Co. Antrim. He fought in 1798 with Henry Joy McCracken and in 1803 with Thomas Russell and Robert Emmet and lived to the age of 83.

Without Jemmy Hope's help, Dr. R. R. Madden could not have compiled his massive "Lives of the United Irishmen." Madden met the old revolutionary in 1845, found him bent with the weight of years, living in near-poverty, but still "utterly fearless, inflexible and incorruptible," his intellect clear and vigorous.

In the depth of winter they visited the site of the Battle of Antrim where Hope's "Spartan Band" achieved renown. The old United Irishman had an iron constitution. "To no man would be indebted for his opinions or his comforts," said Madden.

Jemmy Hope is buried at Molusk in his native parish of Templepatrick and a slab over his grave bears the following inscription:

ERECTED
to the memory of
JAMES HOPE
who was born in 1764, and died in 1847,
one of nature's noblest works
an honest man.
Steadfast in faith and always hopeful
in the Divine protection.
In the best years of his country's history
a soldier in her cause,
and in the worst of times still faithful to it;
ever true to himself and to those
who trusted in him, he remained to the last
unchanged and unchangeable
in his fidelity

James Hope represented what was finest in the northern rank and file of the United Irishmen—Presbyterian small farmers, tradesmen and labourers for the most part. We learn something of their motivation through the narrative Hope wrote for Dr. Madden. "When I speak of myself," he explains, "I mean the survivors of the working classes, who struggled from 1794 to 1806 . . ."

Jemmy Hope was self-educated. He put his thoughts on paper. He was often critical of a leadership he felt abandoned the people at a decisive hour. Men who held responsible positions within the movement had demanded reform and threatened rebellion but shrank from the spectre of revolution. Jemmy Hope understood why. But in compensation there were the master-spirits, the great revolutionaries:

Neilson, McCracken, Russell and Emmet were the leading men in that struggle, with whom I was in closest intimacy. They were men—Irishmen—than whom I have met none more true—than whom none could be more true.

Again he wrote “. . . none of our leaders seemed to me perfectly acquainted with the main cause of social derangement, if I except Neilson, McCracken, Russell and Emmet. It was my settled opinion that the condition of the labouring class was the fundamental question at issue between the rulers and the people.”

When Jemmy Hope was growing to manhood manufacture in Ulster was in the cottage industry stage. Arthur Young, who toured Ireland in the 1770s, described the people of the north-east as “half-farmers, half-manufacturers.” Weavers in the linen industry earned from 1/- to 1/5 a day at a time when the wage of labourers was only 6d. a day. Although the weavers did not work all the year round, they were better off than those who depended entirely on the land for a living and their wives often earned between threepence and fourpence a day for spinning.

It is a common fallacy to trace the present political character of the North to the plantation of Ulster. Antrim and Down of course were not included in the plantation at all. Many of the Presbyterian settlers in these two counties fled from political and religious persecution in Scotland. More than 50,000 arrived after the Treaty of Limerick. There has been historically a great deal of movement back and forth between Scotland and Ulster; it did not begin in the 16th century nor end with the 17th. Thousands of Huguenots came from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and many settled in Lisburn where they developed the linen trade.

Northern tenants combined against their landlords and won the concession called “Ulster custom” which gave the occupier fixity of tenure while he held a lease. When the landlords refused to renew leases except at exorbitant rents thousands emigrated and became the “Scotch-Irish” of American history. President Andrew Jackson was the son of Ulster emigrants who left Carrickfergus in 1765. The exiles and their children played a notable part in the

revolutionary war and their struggle was followed with much sympathy by their kinsmen at home.

Tenant resistance was spearheaded by the Hearts of Steel, a Presbyterian defensive organisation particularly strong in Templepatrick. The local Presbyterian Minister called them “Sons of Satan” in 1771 and warned his parishioners against them after the Templepatrick men had marched on Belfast in broad daylight and attacked the military barracks demanding the release of their leader, David Douglas, who was under arrest. Douglas was released.

The Dissenters laboured under religious and political disabilities, though nothing on the scale of the penal laws against the Catholics. They had strong anti-authoritarian views. When their grandfathers slammed the gates of Derry on the troops of King James II they acted in the name of liberty and in defiance of the theory that kings ruled by “Divine Right.” They were hard-working, religious men whose ideals helped make a revolution in America. Sir Boyle Roche said of them in a memorable phrase that they were “a turbulent, disorderly set of people whom no King can govern and no God can please.”

“The American struggle taught people that industry had its rights as well as aristocracy,” said Jemmy Hope, “that one required a guarantee as well as the other.”

British policy in North America threatened Ulster’s extensive linen trade with the former colonies. The Volunteers began in Belfast ostensibly as a defence force when the country was denuded of troops. By 1780 they had forced the British Parliament to revoke the restrictions on Irish commerce. Two years later they enabled Henry Grattan to win legislative independence.

In 1784 the Belfast Volunteers passed a resolution calling for the emancipation of their Catholic fellow-countrymen. In that year the first Catholic church was opened in Belfast and the Volunteers attended the ceremonies in a body. The exclusively Protestant force then invited to its ranks “persons of every religious persuasion, firmly convinced that a general union of ALL the inhabitants of Ireland is necessary to the freedom and prosperity of this kingdom, as it is congenial to the Constitution.” Be it remembered that this bold statement on the brotherhood of Irishmen preceded the French Revolution by five years.

Republicanism was inherent in the principles of Presbyterianism. The Northern Whig Club hailed the Revolution in France as “a

glorious era in the history of man and of the world" and Wolfe Tone found when he set out to organise the United Irishmen that Tom Paine's "Rights of Man" had become "the Koran of Belfast."

Jemmy Hope saw the rise of the United Irishmen as a revolt against the tyranny of privilege and foreign rule. He wrote:

There are circumstances which should be kept always before one connected with the events of 1798; to which their production is mainly to be attributed. As a people, we were excluded from any share in framing the laws by which we were governed. The higher ranks—in which there never was, nor never will be a majority of honest-principled men—usurped the exclusive exercise of that privilege, as well as many other rights, by force, fraud, and fiction. By force the poor were subdued and dispossessed of their interest in the soil; by fiction the titles of the spoilers were established; and by fraud on the productive industry of future generations, the usurpation was continued.

The Influence of Union

JEMMY HOPE was born on August 25, 1764, of Convenating stock, the son of a weaver. By the age of ten he had received 15 weeks schooling before going to work for a local farmer. His narrative tells what happened:

The first three years I earned my bread, was with William Bell of Templepatrick, who took every opportunity of improving my mind, that my years would admit. In winter he made me get forward my work, and sit with him while he read in the Histories of Greece and Rome, and also Ireland, Scotland and England; besides his reading and comments on the news of the day turned my attention early to the nature of the relations between the different classes of society, and passing events rather left impressions on my mind for future examinations, than established any particular opinions.

Later he was hired by another local farmer who taught him to read, write and spell. He continued his service and his studies for six months with a third farmer by which time he could "read a little in the Bible, though very imperfectly." At 15 he was apprenticed to a linen weaver. When he had served his time he became a journeyman and married Rose Mullen, the boss's daughter. Despite the vicissitudes of Jemmy's life they were very happy together and reared a large family. Rose shared his sufferings and Jemmy was disconsolate when she died in 1831. "My happiness went to the grave with her," he told Dr. Madden.

The linen industry in Ulster was flourishing. Factory conditions had not yet been introduced and the drapers gave out the yarn to the weavers in their cottages and then bought back the cloth. If the weaver grew the flax himself he could dispense with the draper and sell the cloth direct to the wholesale merchant at the market. The weaver who employed a journeyman also provided for his board and

paid him one-third of their earnings. Linen made Ulster prosperous.

Though interested in public affairs from an early age, Jemmy Hope's first connection with politics began in the Roughfort Corps of the Volunteers. He saw regiments of fine young men "driving off to be slaughtered in America." He heard Break-of-Day men (sometimes called Peep-of-Day boys) boast of "the indulgence they got from Magistrates for wrecking and beating Papists." It seemed to the young Jemmy Hope that mankind was "divided into different species, each preying on the other." He learned his lessons from life, tested his ideas against life, and applied them to his politics.

"The Volunteers of 1782 were the means of breaking the first link of the penal chain that bound Ireland," he told Dr. Madden. "They were replaced by the Break-of-Day robbers, the wreckers, and murderers who were supported by an indemnified Magistracy; and the system which grew out of these combinations comprehends the political history of Ireland from 1782 down to a later period in the history of Orangeism."

Most of the Roughfort Volunteers joined the United men when a Society was formed in Templepatrick. They hid their cannon under the floor of the Presbyterian parish church when the Arms Bill became law. It reappeared in '98 when the Roughfort men were "foremost in the ranks of the people" at the Battle of Antrim.

Jemmy Hope was elected delegate to the County Committee in Belfast where he met Samuel Neilson, Henry Joy McCracken, Thomas Russell and other leading members. He became a United Irish organiser in 1796 and communicated with several people "I was sworn never to name." He explains how members were received into the organisation:

"I was in the confidence of the Ulster Directory and of some of the principal members of the Leinster one. I took the oath of a United Irishman by being sworn on the Bible; the Covenanters were sworn by lifting up the right hand; the Catholics on their own prayer-book."

The United Irishmen succeeded in ending for a time the bitter feuds between the Defenders, a Catholic organisation, and the Protestant Break-of-Day men. Jemmy Hope noted the change in Ulster life:

The influence of the Union (United Irishmen) soon began to be felt at all public places, fairs, markets, and social meetings, extending to all the counties of Ulster, for no man of an enlightened mind had intercourse with Belfast who did not return home determined on dis-

seminating the principle of the Union among his neighbours. Strife and quarrelling ceased in all public places, and even intoxication.

The Break-of-Day boys and Defenders lamented their past indiscretions on both sides, and tracing them to their legitimate source, resolved to avoid the causes which led to them. In short, for a little time, Ulster seemed one united family, the members of which lived together in harmony and peace.

The "Northern Star," edited by Samuel Neilson, sowed "the seeds of truth over the land," said Jemmy. The military wrecked it in May 1797. Neilson by the way was in prison but uncharged, for the Government informer could not summon up enough courage to go into the witness box against him. Neilson, Henry Joy McCracken, Thomas Russell and Robert Emmet were Hope's special idols because they understood the social basis of the struggle. He did not know Wolfe Tone although there is a suggestion that they met once in Belfast; Hope does not mention it in his narrative, nor does Tone in his autobiography.

Belfast with a population of about 30,000 ranked at the time after Dublin and Cork in commercial importance. It made its fortunes on the linen trade and year by year its wealth and importance increased. Mrs. Sam Miller, whose husband and brother were United men, said its rich merchants "skipping from the counter to their carriage, run one down with force of wealth which sanctions ignorance and vulgarity, and now gives them a lead and fashion, who, a few years since would have shrunk with awe from the notice of what is called good company."

No town in Ireland was as revolutionary as Belfast. Lord Castle-reagh arrived with a strong military escort in September 1796 with warrants for the arrest of Neilson, Russell and McCracken. The first two gave themselves up voluntarily and demanded a speedy trial. The Government answer was to suspend *habeas corpus*.

McCracken was arrested in October and other arrests followed. Mary Ann McCracken saw prisoners marched through Belfast handcuffed in pairs and put aboard a prison ship anchored in the Lough.

As the strength of the United men grew new elements joined the movement. Jemmy Hope saw it like this:

The appearance of a French fleet in Bantry Bay brought the rich farmers and shopkeepers into the societies, and with them all the corruption essential to the objects of the British Ministry, to foster rebellion, to possess the power of subduing it, and to carry a Legislative Union.

The new adherents alleged as a reason for their former reserve, that they thought the societies, only a combination of the poor to get the property of the rich. The societies as a mark of satisfaction at their conversion, and a demonstration of confidence in their wealthy associates, the future leaders, civil and military, were chiefly chosen from their ranks.

Jemmy Hope, travelling hundreds of miles up and down the country on hazardous organising missions, arrived at the conclusion that "there could be no solid foundation for liberty, till measures were adopted that went to the root of the evil, and were specially directed to the restoration of the natural right of the people, the right of deriving a subsistence from the soil on which their labour was expended." James Fintan Lalor arrived at the same conclusion 50 years later.

The Organiser

IN the spring of 1796 Jemmy Hope was sent to Dublin as a delegate from Belfast to introduce the Union among workers in the capital. He was promised money which did not arrive and given contacts which proved unreliable. He settled in the weavers' quarter—the district known as the Liberties—near St. Patrick's Cathedral. This was his own world and it was natural for him to base himself there.

Unemployment was widespread because of the war. The United Irishman, Dr. William Drennan, explained the situation thus in a letter to Belfast: "The natural vent of the goods in foreign parts is kept shut by the war, while at the same time England is disburthening her glutted market upon us and throwing all at an underselling rate into our market when she cannot dispose of her goods abroad."

The population of the capital was about 170,000. There was appalling poverty. The Rector of St. Catherine's, the Rev. James Whitelaw, carried out a house-to-house census in 1798. He reported as follows on the Liberties:

A single apartment in one of these truly wretched habitations, rates from one to two shillings per week, and to lighten this rent two, three, or even four families become joint tenants. As I was usually out at very early hours on the survey I have frequently surprised from ten to 16 persons, of all ages and sexes, in a room not 15 feet square, stretched on a wad of filthy straw, swarming with vermin, and without any covering, save the wretched rags that constituted their wearing apparel. Under such circumstances it is not extraordinary that I should have frequently found from 30 to 40 individuals in a house. . . .

This crowded population wherever it obtains, is almost universally accompanied by a very serious evil—a degree of filth and stench inconceivable except by such as have visited these scenes of wretchedness. Into the backyard of each house, frequently not 10 feet deep, is flung from the windows of each apartment, the ordure and other filth of its numerous inhabitants; from which it is so seldom removed, that I have seen it nearly on a level with the windows of the first floor; and the moisture that, after heavy rains, oozes from this heap, having frequently no sewer to carry it off, runs into the street, by the entry leading to the staircase.

In a city perpetually simmering with revolt the weavers constituted the most militant element. At a time of depression they had risen in

a body and smashed all shops carrying English goods, then retired to the Liberties "and threatened to pull down several houses if their associates who had been captured were not released," as a contemporary newspaper report put it. The army had to be brought out and several were killed in clashes between troops and weavers. Dean Swift's "Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture," the first of his Irish tracts, was written with the miserable condition of the weavers in mind.

Despite laws passed by the Irish Parliament against "combinations of workmen" trade unionism was strong. James Gandon, the renowned architect, learned something about it when building the Custom House. He notes in his journal:

Hitherto, none but Dublin masons were employed in the city, but for the expedition of this great work it was found necessary to employ all who would offer. This was opposed by the Dublin fraternity, unless the aliens would take an oath of secrecy, subscribe one guinea each, and submit to their laws or combinations. This in some cases was at first resisted, but gradually and of necessity afterwards complied with; and generally those reluctant converts subsequently exhibited a zeal more turbulent and refractory than the others.

These were the men James Hope brought into the United Irish movement. He was extremely successful; many Societies were established throughout the city and the job of organising the Union soon spread from the city to the Provinces.

Jemmy worked for a time in the West with the redoubtable William Putnam McCabe, son of Thomas McCabe of Belfast a founder of the United Irishmen and friend of Wolfe Tone. One of their many adventures involved the freeing of a United man held in Roscommon. Disguised as a recruiting sergeant Jemmy enlisted the prisoner in the dock and McCabe, dressed as a militia officer, demanded his release. They would have freed a second United man, says Jemmy, but "he made such a noise in the dock with the chains and bolts he had on, that he had been ordered back to his cell, before the arrangements were completed."

Jemmy Hope must have been a great walker. On one occasion he added up the mileage and it worked out like this: to Roscommon and home to Belfast, 200 miles; to Dublin, 80; to Prosperous and back to Dublin, 30; to Roscommon from Dublin, 79; to Dublin from Roscommon, 79; to Stratford on Slaney from Dublin, 26; to Dublin from Stratford, 16; astray in Wicklow mountains, 8; from Dublin to Roscommon, 79; from Roscommon to Belfast by Athlone, 100; total number of miles travelled, 707.

He continued his organising work in Leitrim, Roscommon, Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh and Armagh. The following from his narrative gives some idea of how he went about it:

Having assisted in forming the Co. Monaghan Committee in Castleblayney on a market day, when several very respectable linen merchants were there, we planted the Union at Maguiresbridge, Clones, Enniskillen, Ballinamore, Cashcarrigan, Carrick-on-Shannon and Strokestown, where we saw delegates from a body of the old Defenders, and initiated them. We left 500 copies of the constitution in Roscommon, and on our return home, formed committees in Ballyhays, Butlersbridge and Newtownhamilton. Such of these connections as we were able to visit the second time, were increasing rapidly. . . .

The progress of the Revolution in France had excited the mass of the people in this country, and had put the aristocrats to their shifts. The people, as appeared afterwards, wished to rise at various times, trusting solely to their own resources; but were always withheld by their committees, who were, for the most part, aristocrats and foreign-aid men, who contrived to involve the people with France, thereby frightening government, and enhancing their own value as traitors. Many of them thus obtained and enjoyed tolerable advantages and some hold them even unto this day.

Jemmy Hope was against foreign aid. He distrusted Bonaparte as did most of the United Irish leaders. He notes somewhere that because "the Republican spirit of Irish refugees did not accord with Bonaparte's imperial views, this was the chief cause of his unfavourable dispositions towards them."

Foreign aid was a major factor in the attitude of some northern leaders to a Rising. A proposal to revolt in the summer of 1797 was rejected on the grounds that the rest of the country was not ready and that French aid was necessary. The number of United Irishmen enrolled in Co. Down at the time was reported as 28,597 and in Co. Antrim, 22,716.

Ulster was put under virtual martial law in March 1797. Chief Secretary Pelham told General Lake, commander of British forces in the North, that "the insurrectionary spirit which had manifested itself in certain districts of Ulster had rendered it necessary to the Lord Lieutenant and Council to issue a Proclamation." Two weeks later Lake urged stronger measures. "Belfast ought to be proclaimed and punished most severely," he wrote, "as it is plain every act of sedition originates in this town."

Lake's reign of terror succeeded in its purpose. In January 1798 he reported from Belfast that "the flame is smothered, but not extinguished." Spies and informers kept the Government up to date with the plans of the United men.

The Rising—which Lord Edward Fitzgerald was to lead and which

broke out on May 23 after his arrest — did not take place in Ulster as planned. Wexford rose on May 26. Then on June 1 at a United Irish meeting in Templepatrick, Robert Simms—a founder of the movement—resigned as Adjutant-General for Co. Antrim. This was a shattering blow.

“Blood had been shed in the south and the people of the north had become impatient,” Jemmy Hope wrote. “I went to the General of Antrim (Simms) and told him that an irregular movement could not long be prevented. He said he would certainly call them out; I went among the people and told them what he said; they wanted to know who he was; I said they would know that when he appeared . . .”

Simms never appeared. After much discussion Henry Joy McCracken was appointed in his place. “But the opportunity had been lost,” as Mary Ann McCracken told her grand-niece years later. “Everything had become disorganised—the fearful and half-hearted had deserted; many of the zealous knew not where to go nor whom to follow. At various places small parties had assembled according to appointment, but finding no leaders and no instructions, had no other course open to them but to endeavour to make their way back to their homes as best they could. H. J. McCracken suddenly thrust into the foremost place, was considered to have shown much skill, but it was a forlorn hope. He and a few coadjutors exerted themselves to the utmost . . .”

Communications between Down and Antrim were in the hands of an informer, a Belfast bookseller named John Hughes. He betrayed the Adjutant-General for Down, the Rev. Dr. William Steel Dickson, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster, who was arrested on June 5, 1798. The man appointed to Dickson’s place, Henry Monro of Lisburn, was not named until after the dispersal of the Antrim men. Accordingly there was no concerted action in the North.

“I never knew a single (United Irish) colonel in the County of Antrim, who, when the time for active measures came, had drawn out his men, or commanded them, in that character,” commented Jemmy Hope bitterly. “They had, however, a sufficient apology, for the General-in-Chief whom they had appointed (Simms) resigned on the eve of the action.”

These leaders had staked more than was in them, said Jemmy Hope. He would not classify them with the common herd of traitors. “They were like paper money, current for the time, keeping business

afloat without any intrinsic value.” They had seen the political struggle in the early days of the United Irishmen as “merely between commercial and aristocratical interests to determine which should have the people as its property, or as its prey.”

Although disappointed by the actions of the Antrim leaders, Jemmy Hope says in his narrative that he was not surprised. He had been prepared for the worst. When his gloomy forebodings were realised his spirits did not sink and he never regretted his own activities in the cause of the people at a critical hour in the nation’s history. He had the satisfaction too of knowing that whatever about the leaders the rank and file did not waver.

The Spartan Band

“**W**HEN all our leaders deserted us,” said Jemmy Hope, “Henry Joy McCracken stood alone faithful to the last.” Of Covenanted stock like Hope himself, Henry Joy had won the support of the Catholic Defenders because of his broad outlook. In June 1795 he was one of the United Irish leaders who with Wolfe Tone climbed Cave Hill to take an oath on the summit of MacArt’s Fort “never to desist in our efforts until we had subverted the authority of England over our country, and asserted our independence.” Arrested in 1796 and held in Kilmainham prison for 11 months his health broke down completely and he was released. Jemmy Hope called him the most determined of all the northern leaders.

On the morning of June 7, 1798, Henry Joy mounted his standard at Roughfort near Templepatrick. Jemmy Hope was with him. The day before, McCracken as Commander-in-Chief of the United Irish forces had issued a proclamation calling on the leaders in each area to attack the enemy and ending with the stirring message: “Tomorrow we march on Antrim.” Underneath McCracken’s name was the date and the announcement: “The first year of liberty.”

Contingents joined them from every district as they moved on Antrim. Jemmy Hope’s own Roughfort Company of Volunteers (the Spartan Band) led the march. “The column that followed consisted of Templepatrick and Carmoney men, and some of the Killead people, who had arms.”

It was a lovely summer morning. A man named Harvey started singing the well-known “Marsellois Hymn.”

Jemmy Hope thought they needed a livelier air and struck up an

Irish song. Everyone joined in the singing. Thus they marched on Antrim town.

The old cannon piece of the Roughfort Volunteers was trundled along under the expert guidance of a weaver and ex-artillery man, James Burns. Before the day was out the brass six-pounder accounted for many enemy casualties although it became unserviceable after the second round. The mounting collapsed.

The enemy had reinforcements ready to back up the Antrim garrison. They consisted of militia units from Armagh, Monaghan, Dublin, Kerry and Tipperary as well as the regular 22nd Light Dragoons with attached artillery and the Belfast Yeoman Cavalry. The battle opened in Jemmy Hope's words when—

“ . . . a party of the 22nd Light Dragoons wheeled out of the lane below the church, fired on us and then retreated. Another party then advanced from the same quarter, but were soon brought down, men and horse.”

The yeomen burned some houses in the town, then took refuge behind the wall of a park fronting the High Street, occasionally rising up to fire some shots down the street. “Close to the Market-House, near the Castle gate, some yeomen and horse soldiers kept their ground, the yeomen had two pieces of cannon there, which were soon silenced,” wrote Jemmy Hope.

Jemmy Hope's Spartan Band seized and occupied the churchyard commanding the main street. “There our green banner was unfurled,” he said, “and McCracken was stationed with his principal officers.”

It seemed for a time that victory was theirs. The United men who had taken Randalstown advanced to the help of their comrades in Antrim. They met the fleeing enemy cavalry and thought they were being attacked by a victorious army. In a moment of indecision their leader ordered a withdrawal. The untrained men fled in disorder. The panic spread and the hard-pressed troops in the town profited by the confusion.

“The people began to give way, and in attempting to stop the fugitives, McCracken, who, proceeding with a party of men by the rear of the houses to dislodge the yeomen stationed in Lord Massarène's park, was borne down, disobeyed, and deserted by the panic-struck multitude,” said Jemmy Hope. “He then made his way to Donegore Hill, along with Robert Wilson, where he expected to find

a body of men in reserve, but all his plans had been frustrated by the defection of the military chiefs.”

Jemmy Hope maintained the fight “as long as there was a hope of keeping possession of the town.” This is an understatement. The Spartan Band held the churchyard until cut off completely from the rebel forces. With colours flying they fought their way through the town. By a feint attack they forced the advancing troops to regroup for defence while they retreated to Donegore Hill.

When the fighting was over Henry Joy McCracken wrote a letter to his sister Mary Ann outlining the progress of the rebellion in Antrim as he saw it and the reasons why it failed. He wrote:

I will endeavour to arrange matters so that anything I want will come regularly to me, at present I cannot as my lodging is the open air, which with great abundance of exercise keeps me in good health and high spirits, altho my companions are not so numerous now as they were lately. These are the times that try men's souls. You will no doubt hear a great number of stories respecting the situation of this country, its present unfortunate state is entirely owing to *treachery*, the rich always betray the poor.

In Antrim little or nothing was lost by the people until after the brave men who fought the battle had retreated, few of whom fell, not more than one for 10 of their enemies, but after the villains who were entrusted with the direction of the lower part of the county gave up, hostages and all, without any cause, private emolument excepted, murder then began and cruelties have continued ever since.

It is unfortunate that a few wicked men could thus destroy a county after having been purchased with blood, for it was a fact which I am sure you never knew that on Friday the 8th June, all the county was in the hands of the people, Antrim, Belfast and Carrickfergus excepted. . . .

McCracken, Hope and a handful of companions withdrew from Donegore Hill to Slemish. They had to withdraw again as strong forces tried to encircle and capture them. Some days after the battle Mary Ann McCracken set out to find her brother and after a long search located him “with James Hope and five others sitting on the brow of Bohill.” McCracken hoped to join the United men still in arms under Henry Monro in Down. But then they heard of the defeat at Ballynahinch on June 13—they could actually hear the guns from their place of refuge—of Monro's capture, courtmartial and execution.

General Nugent reported after the Battle of Ballynahinch: “For the present the rebellion here is entirely crushed, but there is the best positive information that a general Rising is still in agitation—the rebels cannot however be very formidable without arms and must wait, I think, for the arrival of the French to hope for any prospect of success.”

That seemed the situation in Antrim too. “While any prospect

of serving our cause appeared to exist, a few of us remained in arms," said Jemmy Hope. "Our ranks at length diminished, the influence of the merchants on the manufacturers, and that of the manufacturers on the workmen, formed a strong claim of pecuniary interests in the province of Ulster, so that shelter or relief of any kind afforded to those who stood out, was at the risk of the life and property of the giver."

Efforts to put Henry Joy McCracken aboard a foreign ship at Larne failed. On July 7 while attempting to make his way there yeomen seized him in Carrickfergus. Tried by courtmartial in Belfast on July 17 he was condemned to death and hanged the same day at the corner of High Street and Cornmarket.

"I wish you to write to Russell, inform him of my death and tell him I have done my duty," he told his sister before the end.

James Hope remained on the run in the neighbourhood of Belfast and Ballymena for nearly five months after the collapse of the rebellion. Then he headed for the Dublin Liberties once more. In the winter of 1799 he went to work for Charles Teeling, the Ulster Catholic United leader who had established a bleach green at the Naul, Co. Meath. A foreman discovered his identity and he fled to the safety provided by his fellow-weavers in the Coombe.

He would not apply for a pardon and resolved not to be taken alive. "Thinking a clear conscience of all things most necessary and looking to the Most High alone for protection, I could not join in any written or verbal acknowledgement of guilt, or solicitation for pardon to any human being," he said.

When the State prisoners were released from Fort George, Samuel Neilson visited Ireland secretly. He was very ill, wanted to see his family in Belfast and entrusted Jemmy Hope with the mission of taking him there. Capture might have meant death for both of them.

They stayed one night with Charles Teeling at the Naul. While Neilson discussed the state of the nation with his host Jemmy remained on guard outside; they could not prevail on him to enter the house. They remained in Belfast three days then returned to Dublin by way of Ballybay, Co. Monaghan, where one of Neilson's daughters was living. Some months after leaving Ireland Samuel Neilson, one of the founders of the United Irishmen, died in exile in Poughkeepsie, New York, at the age of 44. Jemmy Hope continued working in the Coombe.

The Emmet Rising

THE United Irish leaders held in Fort George, Scotland, were released in 1802 when the Treaty of Amiens ushered in a brief period of peace between France and England. Thomas Addis Emmet, Thomas Russell, Dr. MacNevin and Samuel Neilson went to the Continent. Others were allowed to return home.

The exiles regarded the Irish struggle as merely suspended. They hoped to renew it at the first favourable opportunity. Thomas Addis Emmet's younger brother, Robert, met the leaders after their release. He had been expelled from Trinity College by Lord Clare in April 1798. He was a brilliant youth and high in the counsels of the United Irishmen. But Dr. MacNevin said later Robert knew nothing of plans then being hatched to start a new revolt in Ireland. When he returned home in October 1802 he was told 17 counties would rise if Dublin led the way and he began to prepare for insurrection.

One day Jemmy Hope received a note at his home in the Coombe suggesting that if he walked on a certain evening between Roper's Rest and Harold's Cross he would meet a friend. The friend was Robert Emmet.

Emmet told him "some of the first men of the land," wanted to renew the struggle. He sought Jemmy's opinion. "Was I for an appeal to arms? I replied, I was. After some further conversation he said his plan was formed."

Hope believed that "The fire of 1798 was not quite extinguished—it smouldered and was ready to break out anew."

Others were planning too. In London, Colonel Edward Marcus Despard, a native of Queen's County (Laois), had a plan to overturn the British Government and wanted to act in concert with the United Irishmen. His liaison officer was William Dowdall of Mullingar. The Colonel and some of his associates were arrested in November 1802, charged with high treason, and executed in February 1803. Many of Despard's followers were Irishmen working in England. Before mounting the scaffold, Despard declared he died for "the poor and the oppressed." Jemmy Hope helped Dowdall escape to France.

At their second meeting Robert Emmet told Hope he needed his constant assistance. Stores had been purchased and workmen chosen to manufacture special equipment. Emmet had put his entire fortune into the project. But more money was needed.

"There are many who profess to serve a cause with life and for-

tune," he told Jemmy Hope, "but if called on to redeem their pledge, would contrive to do it with the lives and fortunes of others . . . If I am defeated by their conduct, the fault is not mine. Even my defeat will not save the system I oppose, but the time will come when even its greatest advocates cannot live under the weight of its iniquity . . ."

Hope's rather caustic comment was: "When money failed, however, treachery in the upper ranks began to appear, as in all former struggles."

On another day Jemmy Hope raised the matter of the social content of the coming revolution with Robert Emmet. "In conversing on the state of the country, I expressed an opinion to Mr. Emmet on the subject of the rights of the people in relation to the soil, which, until they were recognised, it would be in vain to expect that the North would be unanimous." Emmet agreed.

Thomas Russell had been in prison for six years without charge or trial but that did not dampen his ardour. Before his release he had written to a friend: "So far from conceiving the cause of Ireland lost, or being weary of its pursuit, I am more than ever, if possible, inflexibly bent on it . . ." In the spring of 1803 the man who would have commanded the North in '98 had been free returned secretly to Ireland.

There were those who believed that Russell's name alone was worth 50,000 men in Ulster and Jemmy Hope was one of them. With Myles Byrne of Wexford he went on a tour of inspection of northern areas and reported back to Emmet that with Dublin captured and Russell in charge the Ulstermen would rise.

"If the people are true to themselves," said Thomas Russell, "we have an overwhelming force; if otherwise, we fall, and our lives will be a sufficient sacrifice."

Jemmy Hope was in effect Emmet's quartermaster and chief organiser. He superintended the make-up and delivery of arms and gunpowder to different parts of the country. He had a hand in Emmet's experiment with rockets which were tested successfully.

"The extent of the preparations in Dublin will never be fully known," wrote Jemmy Hope. "Considerable quantities of gunpowder were sent to the country, and one stout party in particular who had defied the power of government for five years in the mountains of Wicklow (Michael Dwyer), was amply supplied with ammunition and arms."

The revolutionary organisation spread rapidly among the workers of the Liberties—weavers, tanners, tailors, shoemakers. Political feeling ran high in the wake of the Act of Union. When a union with Britain was discussed in 1759 the workers of Dublin had marched on the Parliament Buildings in College Green, invaded the House of Lords and placed an old woman on the Viceroy's throne. On other occasions they had staged demonstrations in the gallery of the Commons. They were expected to react to the fall of the Castle as the people of Paris reacted to the fall of the Bastille. But Dublin Castle did not fall.

One of the tragedies of the Emmet Rising was that the preparations were so thorough and the results so poor. Among the reasons for the failure of July 23, 1803, was Jemmy Hope's absence in the North with Thomas Russell. The strength of the organisation lay in the Coombe, Jemmy's stamping ground. He was also the link with Michael Dwyer. The man who replaced him failed to contact the Wicklow leader.

It is a great tribute to Jemmy Hope's influence that he was so badly needed in the North too. The old organisation had been disrupted; small groups were willing to rise if Dublin led the way. A Belfast Catholic solicitor named James McGucken, who acted as law agent for the United men, was in the pay of the authorities and local key-men in touch with Russell and Hope were usually arrested after the leaders passed on. Another of McGucken's tricks was to spread false reports. He told William Hamilton, the leader in Co. Antrim, that Russell had returned to Dublin to stop the Rising. Russell at the time was making his way to Belfast trying to rouse the Co. Down countryside.

Emmet's plan to seize the Castle failed. Stragglers on the streets turned the foray into a riot. The leader was out of communication with his armed followers and the great plan fell apart. Emmet returned to Rathfarnham. When he was taken on August 24, Thomas Russell came south to free him. But he was betrayed and seized. Taken to Downpatrick he was tried, sentenced to death and hanged outside the jail gates. Robert Emmet died on the scaffold on Thomas Street, Dublin, and the hangman held his severed head by the hair and showed it to the crowd. "This is the head of a traitor," he said. Thus ended the United Irish movement.

Jemmy Hope moved back to Dublin. He felt safest there among his friends in the Liberties. Then in January 1806 a new Government

came to power in England. "At last Mr. Pitt died," writes Dr. Madden in his history of the United Irishmen. "It was a joyful day. The prisons were thrown open, where many an honest man had lain for many days."

Mrs. Hope sent a memorial to the Duke of Bedford in her own name acknowledging that her husband had fought on the side of the people and asking that he be allowed to return home. She was given to understand that he would be permitted to take his chance with the civil laws.

"I resolved to return home," he wrote, "and brave my secret enemies to their faces, to call on them for employment, or their interest to procure it. Many made fair promises, which (like their former oaths) they never fulfilled."

Ulster had changed greatly in the intervening ten years. Local industries were booming. The anti-combination laws were strictly enforced and the employers joined in a joint declaration condemning attempts by workers to limit the number of apprentices and get uniform wage rates. Among the signatories was Henry Joy McCracken's brother, John, now head of the family business. He employed Jemmy Hope for a time, but in 1808 Mary Ann McCracken received a sad letter from Henry Joy's old comrade-in-arms:

"I was obliged to tell Mr. John that I must leave his employment for want of wages, not being able longer to support my family out of my small salary," Jemmy wrote. "I hope I am still possessed of resolution to save what money will discharge a few small accounts which I owe, and enable me again to join my little family with the fair chance of another tradesman, without being troublesome to any whom I call friend . . . Let no friend of mine grieve at my situation; it is a little hard, but does not discourage me; I am determined to deserve success."

But he never forgot Henry Joy. A son born one year after the letter to Mary Ann was proudly named Henry Joy McCracken Hope.

Afterwards Jemmy went to work for an Englishman named Tucker who had a factory near Larne. He stayed with him for nine years then got a job in Belfast as a clerk with Joseph Smyth, the publisher of the Belfast Almanac.

Jemmy Hope wrote many poems in the closing years of his life. One called "Hint to Polemical Controversialists" carries the lines:

*These are my thoughts, nor do I think I need
Perplex my mind with any other creed.*

*I wish to let my neighbour's creed alone,
And think it quite enough to mind my own.*

As a man who believed in human rights for all peoples, Jemmy Hope was strongly anti-slavery. In "Jefferson's Daughter" he deals with this theme:

*Peace, then, ye blasphemers of Liberty's name,
Though the swords of your fathers were red in her cause,
Still redder your cheek should be mantled with shame,
Till the spirit of freedom shall cancel your laws.
But the sin of the slave is the tint of the skin,
Though his heart may be loyal and brave underneath,
While the heart of the tyrant is rotten within,
And the white of the sepulchre gleams over death.*

*Are you deaf to the plaints that each moment arise?
Is it thus ye forget the mild precepts of Penn?
Unheeding the clamour that maddens the skies,
As ye trample the rights of your dark fellow-men.
When the incense that glows before liberty's shrine
Is unmixed with the blood of the galled and oppressed,
Oh, then, and then only, the boast may be thine
That the star-spangled banner is stainless and blest.*

The True Presbyterian

JEMMY Hope was described as of medium height, slightly but firmly built. His comrades called him "the Spartan." The historian of Presbyterianism in Ireland, the Rev. William T. Latimer, paid him this tribute:

"Although occupying but a humble position, he was trusted implicitly by the leaders of a great movement, and he exhibited the determination and uprightness of a true Presbyterian."

Jemmy Hope was incorruptible. Once offered £500 by a man named Ferris Martin if he would supply evidence against Nielson, McCracken or Russell, Hope got in touch with the three leaders who decided to find out who was behind the offer. They hid in a closet while Hope bargained with Martin. It transpired that Lord Hillsborough was the one prepared to pay the money.

Before the '98 Rising Jemmy was sent to John Hughes, the man responsible for communications between Antrim and Down. Hughes it transpired later was an informer. When Jemmy arrived at the bookseller's Belfast home early in the morning, Hughes came into the room half-dressed and wringing his hands. "Our leaders," he said, "have deserted us and there is only one way to stop their career of treachery and that is to have them arrested. You have done much for the cause, but no service equal to that of lodging information against them."

Jemmy drew a pistol and told Hughes he would kill him but for the fact that his wife and family were in the house. The informer tried to make a jest of the incident. He said he was testing Jemmy's "firmness."

That same day Jemmy collected musket balls and gunpowder for the rebels and walked through Belfast with them. Later he had to collect three swords, a green uniform and the colours under which he was to fight in Antrim. He solved his problem by joining a body of passing yeomen with his dangerous bundle, leaving them at the Shankill where he headed for the mountains. The uniform was for Robert Wilson, who showed great courage during the attack on Antrim town.

Jemmy had another brush with a Government informer when McGucken, the Belfast solicitor, discovered his whereabouts in 1803. McGucken had followed one of Russell's men from the North to Jemmy's home, which was opposite a temporary barracks in the Coombe. He offered Jemmy money "to quit my connection with the United Irishmen." Jemmy took a pistol from under the counter and levelled it at McGucken. Pointing to the barracks he said: "James I know the guard is there. You have shown what you are. I will show you how little I regard your threat." "Ah, Jemmy," said McGucken forcing himself to smile, "I never thought it would come to this, between you and me." The moment McGucken left, Jemmy paid his rent, packed up and left. At 10 next morning McGucken accompanied by yeomen raided the house.

When Samuel Neilson was leaving Ireland after his secret visit in 1802 Jemmy Hope saw him off at Ringsend. Neilson pressed a guinea on him for his help in getting the United Irish leader to Belfast and back again. Jemmy knew Neilson couldn't afford the money, but didn't want to hurt his feelings. So he took it and bought a guinea's worth of goods for Neilson's voyage and put them aboard.

Rose Mullen Hope was of the same calibre as her husband. She remained cheerful, patient and staunch in the face of adversity. Once with her youngest child in her arms she took a blunderbuss and a case of pistols through a cordon of soldiers. "On another occasion," wrote Jemmy, "she was sent to a house in the Liberty, where a quantity of ball-cartridges had been lodged, to carry them away, to prevent ruin being brought on the house and its inhabitants. She went to the house, put them in a pillow-case, and emptied the contents into the canal, at that part of it which supplies the basin." The city was then under curfew and martial law.

Jemmy Hope was "never shaken or ever found waiting in the hour of need or adversity to his associates," said Dr. Madden. The Spartan would have put it another way. His great courage was rooted in his great beliefs. "Parliaments may decree, but nature will have its course," he wrote. "Patriots may modify their demands, but the people will have their wrongs eventually and entirely redressed."

In each great revolutionary period at least one man has examined the social content of the revolt. Such a man was James Fintan Lalor in 1848. Such a man was James Connolly in 1916. Such a man was James Hope in 1798.

In his long life of political struggle Jemmy Hope exemplified the United Irish movement that brought together—if only for a short period—the two great traditions that are rooted in the soil of Ireland: the Catholic tradition of resistance to the Conquest and the Presbyterian tradition of struggle against tyranny. His concern, like Wolfe Tone, was "the rights of man in Ireland."

It is significant that the man who led the Spartan Band in Antrim in 1798 was also the trusted organiser of the Dublin workers in 1803. For him there was but one Irish people. His ideas have ~~not~~ outlived his bi-centenary. They are valid still.

His poem "The Fast—From Blood" shows that his vision was not confined to Ireland but extended to all mankind.

*When tyrants wage unbounded war,
And suffering nations groan,
When dreadful tidings from afar
Cause mothers' hearts to moan;
When judgment dread in thunders roar
Against the human race;
From pole to pole, from shore to shore
They banish blessed peace.
While sanctimonious men in prayer
Give thanks for battles won,
Or call for Heaven's propitious care,
And shed more blood, anon.
But know, proud man, that God won't deign
To answer your request,
While murder's in your heart and brain,
And vengeance in your breast.
Go learn the way that Heaven commands,
And righteousness obey,
Undo each yoke, and burst all bands,
And quit your tyrant sway;
The hungry feed, the naked clothe,
The prisoners' fetters break,
The poor that's at your gate, don't loathe,
But kindly act and speak.
Then shall your light as morning shine,
And every cloud dispel,*

Whilst every gift that is divine
Shall in your bosoms dwell,
This is the fast that God demands
Throughout his Sacred Word,
And none but this in mercy stands,
Or tells with mercy's Lord,
This be your offering—these your fasts,
Strict fasts from pride and blood,
And keep them while existence lasts
If you would please your God.

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