



John Gamble

Society and Manners  
in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland

Edited by Breandán Mac Suibhne

**John Gamble** was born in Strabane, County Tyrone, Ireland, in 1770. Educated locally and in Edinburgh, he served as a doctor in the British army, seeing action in the Netherlands in 1799, and spending three years on the island of St. Helena. In 1807, he retired to London, where he interested himself in theatre and literature, mixing with actors and musicians, authors, critics and scholars. Although now losing his sight, Gamble emerged as a writer of ability in the 1810s, publishing stories, novels, and a play. However, it is the works collected here for the first time—accounts of trips home in 1810, 1812 and 1818—that are his finest achievement. Never, perhaps, has everyday life in early nineteenth-century Ireland been more acutely observed or as evocatively presented. Sometimes travelling on foot, sometimes in crowded coaches, Gamble ate and drank with high and low in city, town and country; he met doctors and surgeons, beggars and prostitutes, publicans, shop-keepers, servant girls and clergymen. These people are the motley cast of his remarkably vivid travel-writing, and their memories, hopes and fears are its subject.

The Ireland to which Gamble returned in the 1810s was very different to that which he had left in the 1790s. Republican rebellion and the state's repression of it in 1798 had combined with wider cultural developments to corrode many of the institutions which, in the 1780s and 1790s, had sustained reasoned discourse in Irish society. Gamble's contemporaries, who had devoted their youth to the pursuit of a political project that had failed, were now finding, in a degraded public sphere, that their activities in those decades were no longer worthy of an honest reckoning, certainly not a fit subject for the public prints. And when that which had defined the youth and, in many cases, the middle age of such people—that which had defined their *lives*—was ignored, it was almost as if they themselves had never really lived. And so, as this half-blind man traversed Ireland, he entered the spectral afterworld of failed revolution, where memory (a 'true story') rebukes history (a barefaced fiction) and the living meet the dead. The result is a series of fireside tales of rebels who had departed for America, passing out of this world and into another, and ghost stories—endeavours to explain what was, in the light of day, inexplicable; to say what could not be said, that those who were denied their past had, in fact, lived.

(Continued on inside back)

Cover: detail of Nathaniel Grogan, *The Itinerant Preacher*, 1783.  
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## Society and Manners



# Society and Manners in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland

John Gamble

Edited with an Introduction by Breandán Mac Suibhne

Field Day  
in association with the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies  
at the University of Notre Dame  
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for Kathryn Kozarits



## Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Editor's Introduction	xiii
Note on this Edition	lxxix
SOCIETY AND MANNERS	
<i>Sketches of History, Politics and Manners,     Taken in Dublin, and the North of Ireland, in the Autumn of 1810</i>	1
<i>A View of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland     in the Summer and Autumn of 1812</i>	229
<i>Views of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland,     in a Series of Letters Written in the Year 1818</i>	435
Appendix	
Extract from <i>Brief Observations</i>	647
Introduction to 1826 edition of <i>Sketches</i>	649
Index	651



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An earlier version of what is here the Introduction appeared as 'Afterworld: The Gothic Travels of John Gamble (1770–1831)', *Field Day Review*, 4 (2008), 63–107; several of those mentioned above passed helpful remarks on that piece as did Guy Beiner, Joe Cleary, Cormac Deane, David Dickson, Patrick Griffin, George O'Brien, the late Breandán Ó Buachalla, Antaine Ó Donnghaile, Cormac Ó Gráda, Brendan O'Leary and Jim Patterson. I appreciated being asked to talk about Gamble's tours at meetings in Letterkenny,

Aberdeen, Cardiff, and London, organized by John Cunningham, Michael Brown, Claire Connolly, and Ultán Gillen and Ian McBride; on each occasion, comments and questions by the participants changed my assessment of Gamble and his writings. John Dooher of the Strabane History Society very kindly arranged for me to talk in the author's hometown, where I learned much from a wide-ranging discussion of local history.

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# Editor's Introduction

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September 1810 was a fine month and one Sunday morning Dr. John Gamble shook off the dust of Newtownstewart, County Tyrone, and hit the road for Strabane.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1770, Gamble had been reared in Strabane. He had been educated locally and then at the University of Edinburgh, from where, on graduating in 1793, he had moved to London to pursue a medical career. He had accepted a commission in the British army and seen action in the Netherlands in 1799; he had also served in the South Atlantic, spending three inactive years on 'the dreary rock of St. Helena'.<sup>2</sup> And now he was going home, not

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The works reproduced in this volume are Anon. [John Gamble], *Sketches of History, Politics and Manners, Taken in Dublin, and the North of Ireland, in the Autumn of 1810* (London: C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1811), John Gamble, *A View of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland in the Summer and Autumn of 1812* (London: C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1813) and idem, *Views of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland, in a Series of Letters Written in the Year 1818* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819). Hereafter, these books are cited as *Sketches*, 1810; *A View*, 1812; and *Views*, 1818; all page references are to this edition.

- 1 The following account is abridged from *Sketches*, 1810, 193–95.
- 2 *Views*, 1818, 630. In *St. Helena*, Gamble was on the staff of the East India Company; see A. W. Mason and George Owen, *The East India Register, for 1819*, 2nd edn. (London: Cox and Baylis, 1819), xxiv, noting his retirement in 1807. A. Albert Campbell, *Notes on the Literary History of Strabane* (Omagh: Tyrone Constitution, 1902), 28–35, provides a succinct biographical sketch. Also see George O'Brien, 'The First Ulster Author: John Gamble (1770–1831)', *Éire-Ireland*, 21, 3 (1986), 131–41, Jack Gamble, 'A Literary History of Strabane', in Jim Bradley, John Dooher and Michael Kennedy, eds., *The Fair River Valley: Strabane through the Ages* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000), 250–66, esp. 258–59, and Rolf Loeber and Magda Loeber, with Anne Mullin Burnham, *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650–1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 482–83.

For extracts and commentaries, see W. J. McCormack, 'Language, Class and Gender (1780–1830)', in Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols. (Derry: Field Day, 1991), vol. 1, 1106–15, and Stephen Regan, ed., *Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Writing in English, 1789–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xix, xx, 57–61, 474–75, 523.

to settle, but to spend the summer months in hopes of recovering from a bout of illness. Gamble did not care for Newtownstewart. It was, he was prepared to admit, an attractive village, but there was ‘more cunning and trick,’ he would write, ‘more envy and jealousy, more heart-burnings and dissensions, more hatred and malice, more mean, pitiful and paltry contentions [in such little country villages] ... [than] in the largest town in Christendom’.<sup>3</sup> In truth, the reason the doctor did not care for Newtownstewart was that its Churchmen (and some of its Presbyterians) had embraced Orangeism and John Gamble was no Orangeman.<sup>4</sup>

And so late that fine Sunday morning, Gamble left this town he had never liked to walk the eight miles to Strabane; he noted tellingly that, ‘The people were going to meeting and to church as I was turning my back on them.’ Some distance out the road he was overtaken by a boy driving a car with a chest and some furniture on it. Walking behind the car were a good-looking young man and a woman. Their eyes were red and their faces inflamed and Gamble thought they had been drinking or quarrelling. Both were crying. The man turned his head away from Gamble as if embarrassed to be seen crying, but the girl did not turn her face. ‘In a woman’s tears,’ Gamble wrote, ‘there is a softness that seeks sympathy—in a man’s there is a sternness that rejects it.’

Gamble asked the woman if they travelled far, meaning if they had far to go.

‘I do not,’ she said. ‘He does.’

‘Do, Peggy darling,’ interjected the young man, his Scotch twang intimating that they were Presbyterians, ‘do, turn now; ye ha gone far enough; we man part, and isn’t it best to have it our?’<sup>5</sup>

‘I’ll just *gang* the length of that *auld* tree, on the *tap* of the hill—many a sorrowful parting has been at it, and we’ll put ours to the number.’

‘The best friends must sometimes part,’ said Gamble, ‘you will soon, I trust, have a happy meeting.’

‘Never, never, *surr*, in this *leefe*,’ shot back the woman, ‘when we *pert* now, my *hert* tells me it is for ever. Ah! man, man, *gin ye* had *na* been *prude*, *gin ye* had trusted to Providence,

3 *Sketches*, 1810, 191. Gamble was not an admirer of Omagh either: ‘Omagh (pronounced Omay, as being softer) is the assize town of the county of Tyrone; a dignity it owes more to its central situation than to any other advantage it possesses. There is a degree of gloom about it which it is more easy to feel than to describe. If I were confined to a country town, I should not chuse Omagh for my prison.’ See *Sketches*, 1810, 180; he also describes the town as dirty, its streets irregular and the houses grotesque, and 183 where a fiddler in the inn plays ‘not so well as Mr. Ware, perhaps, but well enough for Omagh.’

4 Arriving in Newtownstewart the previous evening, he had recalled how ‘some time since’ when there was a yeomanry review in the town, the corps, by then almost universally composed of Orangemen, had defied their officers’ orders and marched through Strabane. Here, he was referring to a controversial march in August 1808. He had earlier, when at Omagh, given details of a fatal riot by Orange yeomen in 1809 that resulted in five fatalities. In both instances, he is highly critical of the Orangemen. See *Sketches*, 1810, 182–83, 192–94.

5 The Scotch twang was not exclusively Presbyterian. Gamble elsewhere renders the speech of Catholics in the same dialect. However, a discussion of emigration prompted by the encounter with the couple strongly suggests that the young man was Presbyterian.



and staid at hame—what though we could na get the ferm—what though we could na live in a stane house—they could na keep us out of a scraw one. I would have wrought for ye, and slaved late and early—and gin we could na ha got bread—we could have died together.'

'Dinna Peggy,' said the man, 'dinna break my hert; it has enough to bear already; dinna make me shame myself.' He again turned his head to conceal his tears. 'It is a braave country I'm ganging to, woman. There's nae hard landlords nor prude vicars there to tak the poor man's mite. I war'nt ye, I winna be slothful, and whene'er I earn the price of your passage, I'll send it our, and then wha will pert us?'

'You are going to America, I presume,' said Gamble.

'Yes, surr, please God; this is no country for a poor man to levee in. I thought for a wee bit of land—but it's nae matter—God forgive them that wronged me, is the worst that I wish them.'

'You have been wronged then?'

'A, surr, it is nae to seek that I could say—but we winna talk o' that now, for I wish to gang in peace with all men. I would na hae cared for myself—a know that man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards; and wee God's help, I dinna fear either hertship or difficulty—but that poor lassie—she was aa to me in the world—and to pert with her is a sore tug—I man own it—but it was my fate, and I could na get our it.'

He began to whistle, for fear he should cry.

The woman walked by his side, apparently unconscious of what he was saying. She moved mechanically forward, for the large drops that every instant gathered in her eyes, and fell on the ground as she walked, must have prevented her from seeing.

'Now, Peggy, honey,' said the young man, 'we are at the tap o' the hill—the road is rugged, ye hae a lang way hame, and ye hae na me too.' By now he was crying again.

'I will never, never, leave ye,' she said, starting from her trance, and grabbing him by the arms. 'I will never leave ye—I will go barefoot our the world—I will beg with ye, sterve with ye, dee with ye—one ship will carry us, one grave will houlde us—nothing but death now shall pert us.'

Moved by the conversation, and aware that the couple seemed exhausted by hunger as well as emotion, Gamble brought them into a little public house at the side of the road. He got them some oat-bread and butter, and whiskey and water. It would be absurd, he impressed on the distraught woman, for her to even think of going to America without making the proper preparations. Her lover was an active young man and he would soon earn enough money to take her over decently. The couple grew more composed and, leaving the public house, they parted with deep but less frantic sorrow. Gamble walked on a few paces, but the young man soon caught up with him.

'See what a beautiful day this is?' the doctor remarked; 'The sun shines on your setting off.'

'Let him shine on her I left behind,' he replied, 'and he may spare his beams to me. Mony and mony a time we ha seen him set, from the hawthorn bush in my father's garden; but that's over now, as well as every thing else.'

‘It is not over, I hope,’ responded Gamble. ‘You will, I trust, have as happy hours, as you now have sorrowful ones; but if you should not, remember that affliction is the common lot, and that you have no right to expect to escape it.’ No doubt thinking of the conversation that had passed in the public house, he continued: ‘You have health and you have youth. You have the testimony of a good conscience; you have the approbation of your own mind, for manfully acting your part in life. Of these your enemies cannot deprive you—they will follow you to America, and gladden the wilderness where you may chance to reside; they will sweeten the rude morsel that labour procures you; they will lull you to sleep in the torrent’s roar while greatness, that wants them, will find its costly viands insipid, and seek, in vain, repose on its gilded couches, and beds of down. You think the rich are to be envied. I tell you they are more to be pitied than you; they have the lassitude, intemperance and vice, of ill-health, that folly engenders, of vice that gives no enjoyment, and of the greatest of all wants, that of having something to do. Leave them their diseases and riches—take you your poverty and health. Leave them their sensuality and gluttony, and drunkenness—take you temperance and content. Leave them their close apartments, their midnight revels, their burning tapers, their gilded canopies, their luxuriant carpets—take you the air which breathes so sweetly on you, these birds which sing around us, this immense apartment of the universe, this green and verdant earth, which heaven itself has fitted up for the gratification of man.’

And Gamble having said his piece, they shook hands and parted.

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This chance encounter on the road to Strabane intrigues, not least as the conversation in the roadside tavern, which might fully explain the tear-stained young man’s departure, is left open to conjecture by the reported exchanges on the road. He is leaving because he can not get a farm. He might have got a farm, but he was a man of conscience, a proud man; his enemies are wealthy, lazy men, rectors and landlords. And he is leaving at a time when the Orange Order, the tool of rectors and landlords, was in its pomp. So there is the ghost of politics—youth, love and integrity against power, wealth and bigotry.

Gamble published his description of this encounter in his *Sketches of History, Politics and Manners, Taken in Dublin, and the North of Ireland, in the Autumn of 1810*; it appeared in London in 1811. The book was a success, in part because it was well written but more particularly because it appeared at a time when Ireland, most especially ‘the North of Ireland’, was making news in England on account of a spike in intercommunal violence, caused by Orange marches intended to provoke a reaction that would cause aspersions to be cast on Catholics’ insistence that they were eligible for full citizenship. Gamble’s book was also controversial. Legal action by William Conyngham Plunket, a lawyer who had acted as a crown prosecutor in the trial of the republican leader Robert Emmet, forced booksellers to withdraw it from sale; Gamble had alluded to the ‘rancour and

virulence' with which Plunket had conducted the prosecution.<sup>6</sup> Gamble, however, produced two other books on his trips home to Strabane, one visit in 1812, the other in 1818, when it appears he returned to stay.<sup>7</sup> He also wrote a pamphlet, published in 1811, that argued for Catholic Emancipation,<sup>8</sup> a play, *Retribution; A Dramatic Romance*, in Three Acts (1813), and several works of fiction, all either set in 'the North of Ireland' or involving characters from it: *Sarsfield; or, Wanderings of Youth. An Irish Tale*, 3 vols. (1814), *Howard. A Novel*, 2 vols. (1815), *Northern Irish Tales*, 2 vols. (1818) and *Charlton; or, Scenes in the North of Ireland. A Tale*, 3 vols. (1823; 2nd edn., 1827).<sup>9</sup>

For a modern reader, Gamble's 'tales' and novels (with the exception of *Charlton*) suffer from the weaknesses of much early nineteenth-century fiction—overwrought language, types rather than characters, predictable plots.<sup>10</sup> But his books about his journeys home are a different matter. In all three of them, he introduces a memorable set of characters, including his fellow travellers—drunken sailors on the Liverpool coach, other drunks singing and snoring and a woman chewing garlic who shared the Derry mail with him, a lonely country boy who accompanied him through the mountain districts of west Tyrone—as well as people met on the roads, people like

- 6 For the offending passage, see *Sketches, 1810*, 73–74; compare with *Sketches of History, Politics, and Manners, in Dublin, and the North of Ireland, in 1810* (London: a new edition, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 84–85; also compare with the much more favourable presentation of Plunket in *Views, 1818*, 478–81, where his election as MP for Trinity is described. On the suppression of the book, see McCormack, 'Language, Class and Gender', 1106, 1113 n. 11, and Maeve Ryan, "'The Reptile that had Stung Me': William Plunket and the Trial of Robert Emmet", in Anne Dolan, Patrick M. Geoghegan and Darryl Jones, eds., *Reinterpreting Emmet: Essays on the Life and Legacy of Robert Emmet* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), 77–101, esp. 83; Plunket's affidavit is reproduced in R. R. Madden, *The United Irishmen: Their Lives and Times*, 3rd ser., 3 vols. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1846), vol. 3, 249–53. Gilbert and Hodges, the company at the centre of the dispute, were respectable but occasionally audacious printers and booksellers, publishing, in 1810, Thomas Moore's *Letter to the Catholics of Dublin*, which like Gamble's work, had first appeared in London, and William Cooper's letters to the exiled republican William Sampson. They also published antiquarian and literary works by, inter alia, the Catholic activist Charles O'Connor, and *For-oideas Ghnaith-Ghaoighilge na h-Eireand* (1815), simple texts for people learning the Irish language, by Patrick Lynch.
- 7 *Views, 1818*, 470, gives the impression he had no intention of returning to England. However, see Gamble's Preface to *Charlton; or, Scenes in the North of Ireland. A Tale*, 3 vols. (1823; 2nd edn., 1827), vol. 1, v, where he suggests he returned on a visit of a few weeks but happened to stay.
- 8 'A Protestant Dissenter' [John Gamble], *Brief Observations on the Present State of Ireland; Designed as a Supplement to a Work Lately Published, Entitled, Sketches of History, Politics, and Manners, Taken in Dublin, and the North of Ireland, Principally Addressed to the English Nation* (Dublin: Thomas Courtney, 1811).
- 9 Some passages in the pamphlet *Brief Observations* had already appeared in *Sketches, 1810*; others reappeared, slightly emended, as the Conclusion of *A View, 1812*, 423–29, and in *Views, 1818*. Gamble recycled many choice pieces, phrases from his journey books echoing in his fiction; for instance, a passage from *A View, 1812*, 297, has a clear echo in *Charlton*, vol. 2, 185–86, and Jacqueline Belanger, ed., *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 1–30, 24 n. 30, notes that the Preface to the novel reproduces passages from *Sketches, 1810* (below, 221 n. 3).
- 10 Gamble's journey books have occasionally been cited and anthologized, but his 'tales' have attracted little attention. For an exception, see the acute reading of Gamble's work in both genres in O'Brien, 'First Ulster Author'.

the tear-stained couple on the road from Newtownstewart, a gigantic prostitute who accosted him on the street in Drogheda, and the Monaghan beggar who, when proffered a penny, replied ‘I canna tak it; gentlefolks always gie me siller.’<sup>11</sup> There are also his friends and close acquaintances, notably a dying Presbyterian minister with whom he passed a few days at Toome, a former patient whose dying niece he tended in a house between Castleberg and Ardstraw—he chastized his friend for discussing the girl’s funeral with her—and servant girls who sang in Irish at their spinning wheels in a house near Aghyaran as he pretended to sleep by the fire.<sup>12</sup>

And then there is Gamble himself. He was emphatically a Dissenter partisan—‘Presbyterianism, as it now exists in the North of Ireland, is beyond all others the religion of reason’—but a partisan who was not a bigot.<sup>13</sup> His fondly remembered nanny was a Catholic, he socialized and engaged intellectually with Catholics (discussing politics with them, attending Mass, visiting the pilgrimage island in Lough Derg and befriending a priest), appreciated their culture (including the Irish language, Irish music, and, remarkably, the much-derided ‘Irish Wake’ and ‘Irish Cry’) and, if at times patronizing about their political direction, he wrote with passion of their historical ‘sufferings’ and argued trenchantly for Catholic Emancipation.<sup>14</sup> There is a brutal honesty in his discussions of Catholics’ position. In 1812, when a man named Sullivan, with whom he breakfasted at an inn in Larne, informed him (before Gamble had swallowed his first cup of tea) that, despite his surname, he was a Protestant, descended from a French Huguenot, Gamble wondered: ‘How must the native Irish have been treated in their ancient land, when it is thought degradation even to be descended from them?’<sup>15</sup> And later that same year, when he was in the predominantly Catholic mountains of west Tyrone, he remarked that ‘in ancient times [the mountains] were the asylum of those unfortunate people, and they were not dispossessed of them, probably because no other people would live in them’. The image here is stark, its effect startling: ‘Into these mountains, their ancestors were driven. They were driven and pent up like sheep, and left upon black bog, and dun heath, and barren rock, to mourn over their fallen greatness, their ancient

11 *Sketches*, 1810, 7–8 (sailors), 116–18 (prostitute), 120–22 (garlic-eater), 130 (beggar), and *A View*, 1812, 402 (boy).

12 *Views*, 1818, 577–79 (dying girl); *A View*, 1812, 341–62, esp. 341–43 (minister), 385–89 (spinners). Listening to the spinners leads Gamble into a discussion of the controversy over the relative merits of the settings of some traditional Irish tunes by Edward Bunting and, for Thomas Moore’s *Melodies*, by Sir John Stevenson; he finds both wanting.

13 *Sketches*, 1810, 199; the italics are Gamble’s, warning against the Old Light turn in Presbyterianism.

14 On his Catholic nanny, see *Views*, 1818, 544–45, where he discusses how, when he became ill at eighteen months, her husband had pledged to make a pilgrimage to Lough Derg if he recovered. On the ‘cry’ and wake, see *A View*, 1812, 400–401, and *Views*, 1818, 634–35. On the Irish language, see *A View*, 1812, 388–89, where he insists he does not understand Irish, and 413–15, where he mentions an old priest having told him it was ‘the best language in the world for a man to make love in’. And see, inter alia, *Sketches*, 1810, 107, on the use of Irish in shops in Drogheda, and *Views*, 1818, 575–76, where he converses with Irish-speaking women near Killeter Bridge in west Tyrone.

15 *A View*, 1812, 278.

possessions, their fertile vales, their flocks and their fields.<sup>16</sup> And on another occasion, near Ballygawley, expressing irritation at travellers who attribute the 'torpor and listlessness' of the Catholic poor to 'inherent and constitutional laziness', the effect of his imagery is more startling still: 'It is not laziness ... in the common acceptation of the word—it is melancholy, it is hopelessness, it is despondency. It is a singular recollection of ancient sufferings and humiliations. It is the heart-sinking of the prisoner, to whom the act of cleaning himself becomes at length a burthen.'<sup>17</sup>

Gamble, it should be said, was also something of a wit. All three books are replete with wry one-liners:

An Irishman's house, like Polyphemus's den, is of easy access—the difficulty is in getting out of it.<sup>18</sup>

[In the North of Ireland], excessive heat is as rare as adultery.<sup>19</sup>

Extravagance is no more a Presbyterian's vice than distrust in Providence.<sup>20</sup>

And Gamble was most definitely a drinker.<sup>21</sup> In 1810, the most drunken of his trips, the journey from Dublin to Strabane involved 'large potations' of wine and punch in Drogheda, where, being on the Boyne, he drank the 'Glorious and Immortal Memory' of King William, a toast he describes as 'an excuse for drunkenness upwards of a century'. At Drogheda, he got the Derry mail, which stopped to change horses in Carrickmacross. Although it was only 'about seven in the morning', Gamble was offered 'a drop of something warm, just to keep the damp out of my stomach this cold morning'; he declined. The mail stopped again to allow the passengers to breakfast at a 'well-kept'

16 *A View*, 1812, 385–86, 401.

17 *Sketches*, 1810, 178.

18 *Sketches*, 1810, 120.

19 *Sketches*, 1810, 91. Adultery was known in Louth: *Sketches*, 1810, 112, observes that 'even in this remote place the progress of refinement begins to be felt, and, within the last four years, two cases of adultery have occurred'.

20 *A View*, 1812, 372.

21 Gamble has a drinker's tendency to philosophize on alcohol. For instance, see *A View*, 1812, 391–92, where, observing that people in mountainous parts of Ireland ('in common with inhabitants of other mountainous countries') had a 'great tendency to drunkenness', he muses: 'The craving and longing of a man, in a cold and damp climate, for ardent spirits is so universal, that it seems an instinct given by nature for his preservation, rather than a pernicious habit which leads to his destruction. It has been remarked, that the Indians have diminished every where in America, since their connection with the Europeans. This has been justly ascribed to the Europeans having introduced spirituous liquors among them. In the same period the Irish peasantry have every where increased, nor is there, perhaps, a healthier body of men in the universe.' Also see *Brief Observations*, 17: '... the people are indolent, because they are depressed; they are drunken, because they are unhappy; they are turbulent, in that situation, because resentment, which sobriety conceals, displays itself in drunkenness; they are oppressed by their landlords, because man is little valued here.'

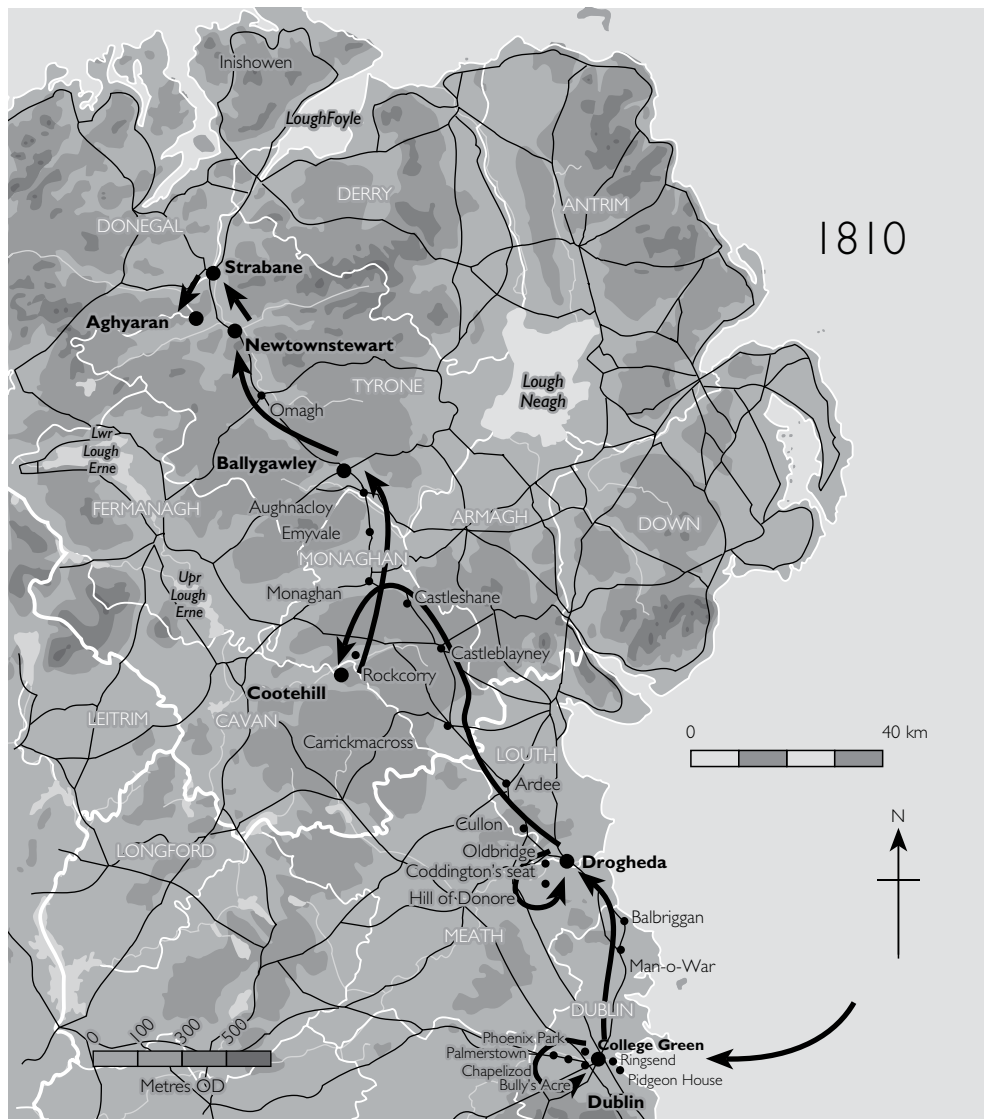


Fig. 1. Gamble's itinerary in 1810

inn in Castleblayney. Here, Gamble remarks on how he preferred travelling by coach in Ireland than in England, as ‘an Irish coach stops longer for meals, and is more tedious in changing horses than an English one’:

You are not obliged to devour your food like a cannibal, and at length to run away like a debtor pursued by bailiffs. You are allowed a decent time for dinner; and should the godness of the wine induce you to wish to extend it for a few minutes,

the guard is seldom inexorable. His majesty's mail can wait, you may finish your meal at leisure.

Later, he drank whiskey (although wine was on the table) in Monaghan with some Clones Methodists and then half a pint of excellent wine—'I would never wish to drink better wine, nor did I ever, in a coffee house in London, drink any so good'—in a disordered establishment in Rockcorry, a 'poor little place, containing about a dozen indifferent houses'; 'drinking', he had remarked drily on entering the town, 'must be highly prized here, for, out of the dozen, five or six were public ones'. At this stage, Gamble, who had got off the coach at Monaghan, was making a major diversion to visit the mother of a deceased friend, another doctor, in Cootehill, a town of which he had little to say but that the shambles was remarkably neat and that 'drunkenness' was becoming increasingly common among the young. On leaving Cootehill, he spent a night at the house of a relatively casual acquaintance; they had a 'drop of the cratur' on arrival and, after dinner washed down with a bottle of 'excellent wine' (his drunken host cut his hand trying to carve the goose), they 'continued drinking and conversing to a late hour'. The following day, he walked five miles to Crossroads, where he had breakfast in a public house but (to his relief) no alcohol, before walking to Emyvale; there, he was offered a seat by a gentleman's servant driving a jaunting car, who, letting him off a mile outside Aughnacloy, agreed with his suggestion that they 'must not part with dry lips' and joined him for some whiskey in a house at the side of the road. Gamble walked into Aughnacloy, opting to wait for the Derry mail in the lesser of the town's two inns, where he ate fish, roast lamb and sweetmeats and downed a pint of port.<sup>22</sup> The mail, when it arrived, was full of noisy drunks, so he had to walk to Ballygawley. There he got accommodation in the village's only inn; it was 'shabby looking' from without but 'a little Eden within' and the whiskey was like 'nectar'. The next morning, he walked a few miles before flagging down the Derry mail. En route, the guard, who was playing the clarinet on the roof, fell from the coach and died on the spot; the driver and passengers took the corpse into a cabin at the side of the road

22 Gamble was not surprised to find that the port was good in Aughnacloy, remarking that 'the wine in Ireland is universally so'. Here, *Sketches*, 1810, 170, he again contrasted the quality of wine in Ireland with that in London. He recalled how, in a leading restaurant in that city, he had ordered 'a pint of something they were pleased to term port' only to have to ask the waiter which of the decanters on the table was the vinegar. 'This is it, sir,' he replied, 'you see it is much clearer coloured than the wine'; to which Gamble retorted 'And to do the wine justice, my lad, it is much sourer than the vinegar.' Gamble's insistence on the excellence of wine, and the quality of inns, coaches and so forth in Ireland, is a response to English travellers' tendency to contrast them unfavourably with those available in England. In that context, Gamble's commenting (*Views*, 1818, 621) that in Belfast, 'You might fancy yourself in Liverpool or Glasgow, only that the accent is a little too English for the one, and a great deal too Scotch for the other ...' is a more nuanced remark than some commentators have allowed. This sentence is quoted in Paul Bew, *The Politics of Enmity: Ireland, 1789–2006* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 565, but not the preceding one: 'As to the town itself, it is a great commercial one, and commercial towns are nearly the same all the world over.'

before proceeding. At Omagh, Gamble visited the Abercorn Arms, where he dined with the landlord, a Mr. Jenkins, and enjoyed at least a tumbler of whiskey, before taking a night coach to Newtownstewart, where his supper was ‘bacon and eggs ... the best relish for whiskey punch I am acquainted with’; he describes how ‘I quaffed the latter off in full streams as clear as if they had issued from Mount Helicon’. He spent the night in Newtownstewart and the next day he drank with the departing emigrant and his girlfriend in the roadside tavern. In Strabane itself, where he was to spend the next few weeks, he was frequently invited to ‘dinner and evening parties’, at which ‘every person was at liberty to drink as he pleased’, but Gamble saw no ‘disposition to excess’. The wine on the table, Tenerife, Sherry, and Port, was scarcely ever touched, he wrote; ‘Wine is taken without pleasure, but the approach of the punch is hailed with rapture, as it makes its appearance immediately after the cloth is removed.’ ‘Punch,’ he adds, as if by this stage the reader needs to be told, ‘is the national liquor.’<sup>23</sup>

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Gamble’s ostensible purpose in these books is ‘to make better known to the inhabitants of England, a people deserving to be known’, the approach being to relate—‘by hasty sketch, by short tale, and brief dialogue’—his journeys home and the recollections and speculations provoked by things he sees and hears.<sup>24</sup> They are forms of travel writing but they are not the jottings of an outsider. Rather, they are the work of someone reared in the country he describes and familiar with the people and places he visits. And yet several years have passed since he was last there. More especially, then, Gamble’s books are the reflections of a returned exile, a man who goes home after a long absence and finds, as the returned emigrant always finds, that familiar as the home-place may be, he has changed and it has changed and he no longer fits in; he may get back to a place, but not to a place in time:

I should never advise him who quits in early life the place of his birth, to come back in mature age in expectation of enjoyment; if he does, and has but ordinary sensibility, he will be disappointed. If such a hope has been his solace in a

23 The quotations on drinking are from *Sketches*, 1810, 101–102 (Drogheda), 122 (Carrickmacross), 123 (Castleblayney), 133 (Monaghan), 135 (recalling Castleblayney), 138 (Rockcorry), 141, 156 (Cootehill), 157–60 (farmer’s house), 164 (Crossroads), 169 (near Aughnacloy), 169–71 (Aughnacloy), 171 (Ballygawley), 183 (Omagh), 189 (Newtownstewart), 214–15 (Strabane). The most curious aspect of Gamble’s drinking is that he frequently gives the impression that he is more abstemious than those around him. Indeed, in his final journey book, that of 1818, by which stage he had cut back, he observed of a man he meets in Armagh, that ‘he is no more a drinker than myself’, *Views*, 1818, 614. Later, in the revised edition of *Sketches*, 1810, published in 1826, he modified many of the references to drinking to moderate the amount he had drunk; for example, see *Sketches*, 1810, 102 n. 3.

24 *A View*, 1812, 231. Parts of this description of his style are repeated in *Sketches*, 1810, 2nd edn., v.



strange land, I pity him, for it will fail him the moment his heel touches his native earth. The scenes of his youth he may return to, but his youthful joys, like his youthful years, will return no more; like luminous vapours which mislead the benighted traveller, they shine on him from afar, only to plunge him as he approaches in darker gloom.<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, and because, in addition, Gamble has not been in Ireland since 1798, the year of the United Irishmen's great rising, the journey books are preoccupied with the political imaginary. The 'ghost of former days', as he puts it in the third book, haunted him on each of his trips home; things reminded him of the past but also the future as it had been imagined in the past. Strabane, as he saw it, in the 1810s—commercially (depressed, especially in 1818), culturally (moribund; life there is 'like a grass-grown lake, which stagnates by its own stillness') and politically (sectarian, if not as sectarian as Newtown Stewart)—bore little resemblance to what it had been in his youth in the 1780s or, more importantly, to what he and others had then imagined it would become in the new century.<sup>26</sup> And as the ghost of former days—the remembered past and the outline of the might-have-been—cast a lengthening shadow over the never imagined but actual present, so 1798, the year in which the future imagined by a generation finally disappeared, became for Gamble the point on which time had turned and still turns; it became, for him, the reason that home is not what home was supposed to have become.

Gamble's presentation of 1798 as history's pivot—as distinct from the Union of 1801—can be read as provincialism: the loss of the Irish parliament ('Three hundred Bacchanals, whose sun daily set in claret') was more grievously felt in the capital than in the country.<sup>27</sup> However, it is better seen as an expression of his concern for 'society and manners', that is people—'human passions, human actions, and human beings, with all their imperfections on their heads'—and culture, more especially sociability. 'Men and women,' he writes, 'are of more importance than pillars or columns.'<sup>28</sup> In all three books, he grieves for the decline of 'society' since the Rising—'There is no community of feeling in Ireland ...'<sup>29</sup>—drawing attention to the most subtle signs of diminished interaction between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>30</sup> He notes, for

25 *Views*, 1818, 524. And compare *A View*, 1812, 371–72.

26 *Views*, 1818, 524, 538.

27 *Sketches*, 1810, 60. He later (217) notes the disinterest in repeal in Strabane. Also see *Brief Observations*, 14–15.

28 *A View*, 1812, 231.

29 *Sketches*, 1810, 217. Likewise, discussing the effects of Orangeism (182), he refers to 'the diseased state of public feeling'.

30 Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 2000), 198, thinks differently, arguing that 'John Gamble's invaluable tour of 1810 ... shows that the old traditions of hospitality and deference had not been eroded by the bitter experiences of the 1790s ...' Elsewhere (335–36), she writes that 'The impression [in Gamble's various tours] is of roads full of human traffic,

instance, that Protestant travellers used to prefer Catholic innkeepers ‘on account of their greater subserviency and civility’ but were now increasingly favouring their co-religionists with their custom. Likewise, he remarks on Protestants’ wonder that the ‘lower-classes of Catholics’ now ‘give offence by what is called their rudeness and sulkiness’ (he himself sees little cause for wonder—‘The man employed in bending the tough elm into a bow need not be astonished when it flies back in his face’).<sup>31</sup> The erosion of a common cultural life that, he avers, had existed in his youth is a recurrent theme.<sup>32</sup> In 1812 he comments, ‘with regret’ and some surprise, that he had travelled 150 miles since arriving in Ireland and ‘I have not even heard of a party of strolling players, or even a single mountebank, horse-rider, juggler, or puppet-showman, in any town, great or small, I have passed through’.<sup>33</sup> And he is suspicious of the new enthusiasm for religion—be it focused on church, chapel or meeting—seeing in it a divisive, disabling force. Methodism, enjoying a surge in popularity in the wake of the Rising, he views with a mixture of fascination and repulsion, representing it as

of walkers invariably seeking companionship, of hospitality to excess.’ However, George O’Brien has read Gamble in similar terms to myself. See ‘First Ulster Author’, 140, where he observes that ‘Both [Gamble’s] travel books and novels are suffused with a sense of aftermath and marginality, of psychological trauma and cultural withering.’

- 31 Gamble’s comments on the changing attitude to inns were prompted by his observing that Pat Lynn’s inn, which had once been considered the ‘best-kept house’ in Belfast, had recently lost something of its reputation; see *A View*, 1812, 267. He explains, ‘I should suppose, from the name (for a zealous Protestant would as soon call his son Judas as Pat) that Mr. Lynn is a Catholic.’ Lynn (or Linn) kept the White Cross on Castle Street. The Donegall Arms (run by James Sloan), which Gamble claims had superseded Lynn’s, was on the same street. He stopped at Campbell’s on Ann Street. For another observation of a change in drinking habits, see Public Record Office of Northern Ireland [hereafter, PRONI], Abercorn Papers T2541/IB3/21/9 Ballygawley, 27 August 1815, Sir John Stewart to Abercorn; describing the amusements (and a riot) at a pattern in the second week of August in Leckpatrick, Stewart claims that Protestants and Catholics had ‘till lately’ drunk in the same tents.
- 32 Importantly, while Gamble (contra Elliott’s comments) was insistent on the decline of sociability since the Rising, he had no illusions about its limits before it. See *Sketches*, 1810, 128, where he describes how, in the North of Ireland, Scotchmen had only taken possession of the valleys and fertile spots, leaving the natives the bogs and mountains, adding ‘By degrees, as fear abated and rancour subsided, [the Catholic] crept slowly down, and the lowly Presbyterian, who was now become of consequence enough to have another to do for him, what he was once happy to do himself, allowed him to labour the land which he once possessed, and when his spirit was fairly broke to his fortunes, treated his humble hewer of wood, and drawer of water, with something that resembled kindness. He still, however, regarded him with distrust; he rarely admitted him into the house where he slept, and when he did, a large door, double locked, separated their apartments: “Never trust an Eerishman, gude troth he’s a foul chap—gin ye tak him in at your boosom, he’el be oot at your sleeve.” The Presbyterian farmer often spoke thus, many generations after he had become an Irishman himself.’ This passage is repeated in *Views*, 1818, 437, as far as ‘... resembled kindness’. Although the concern here is Gamble’s attitude to the recent past, spectres from Protestant folk history—stories about 1641, references to travellers crossing Glenshane in caravans for fear of rapparees and the like—appear in all three narratives.
- 33 On the absence of players in 1812, see *A View*, 1812, 383–84. Also see *Views*, 1818, 613, where he remarks: ‘Musicians are so much prized in the North of Ireland, and at the same time so rare, that I wonder more do not leave the crowded streets of London and Dublin, where they are but as owls at Athens, and come hither, where they are so much required.’

an addiction, but he also frowns upon the Old Light turn in Presbyterianism and the emergence of a more Roman (less Irish) Catholicism in the same years. It is the wider social and cultural consequences of religious enthusiasm, then, that concern him.<sup>34</sup> On his first trip home, he reported that a travelling psalm-singer appointed by the bishop of Derry had caused the traditional popular songs 'Grammachree', 'Granua Uile', and 'The Blue Bells of Scotland' to be neglected around Strabane, as young and old, men and women, 'people who had voices and others who had none', flocked to learn hymns.<sup>35</sup> He is relieved to find that 'rage' is dying down, remarking that it is being replaced now by card-playing, another 'frenzy'. Ultimately, the most obvious expression of diminished sociability—the degradation of society and manners—was overt and particularly casual sectarianism. He repeatedly appears shocked by bigotry. He has no time for Orangeism: an Orange song with the refrain 'And to H[ell] with the breed for ever' appals him, for instance, and he is insulted to be offered a bunch of Orange lilies by a street-trader, replying, 'I am no party man, nor do I ever wear party colours'.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, a Catholic herdsman damning Presbyterians as a 'black-hearted breed' disconcerts him (although he can understand the man's bitterness at how 'they' had been quick to 'sell the pass upon us' at Ballynahinch).<sup>37</sup>

Conversely, occasions when Gamble meets the old sociability are described in detail and at length and, it seems, experienced on an emotional level. The honest and open, rational and heartfelt discussion with the distraught couple on the road from Newtownstewart in 1810 is an exemplary incident, as is the time he spent that summer with his late friend's mother in Cootehill, talking of 'times that were long past, and of persons I had once well known'; so too are a few days spent near Ballymena in 1812 with a former United Irishman, reading books and talking politics, telling stories and drinking whiskey; an argument about religion and titles with an old Covenanter he meets on the road from Ballymena to Toome—the man explained his refusal to refer to his landlord by anything other than his first name by asking 'wha ever said Mr. Matthew, or Mr. Luke, or Mr. John?'—and a couple of weeks he passed in the predominantly Catholic mountain districts around Aghyaran, where 'Life, like the mountains which sustain it, like the wind which howls over them, like the mists which ever rest upon them, and now come down in thick and drizzling rain, is solemn and lugubrious'; there, he ate with the herdsmen and servant girls, smoked their tobacco and drank their whiskey, attended a wake and funeral, worked as a doctor, listened

34 On Methodism, see *Sketches*, 1810, 6, where a young woman is represented as 'addicted' to Methodism; 132–33, where, while conceding it may be 'fanaticism', he argues it is productive of much good; and 189, where he associates Methodist preachers with quack-doctors. Also see *A View*, 1812, 405, and *Views*, 1818, 504, 510–516.

35 On the psalm singer, John McVity, see *Sketches*, 1810, 199 n. 2. For Gamble's appreciation of the 'noisy bawling' that typically passed for singing at Presbyterian meetings, see *A View*, 1812, 414.

36 *Sketches*, 1810, 109; *A View*, 1812, 253.

37 *A View*, 1812, 295; italics in original.

to stories of banshees, and ghosts and *wraths* ('a shadowy representation of a living person'), and talked about politics.<sup>38</sup>

The weeks in the backhills moved Gamble. 'Simple and warm-hearted people!' he wrote. 'Because I had in a light work written a few lines in your favour—because I had done you a faint kind of justice, how expressive were your feelings, how warm was your gratitude, and how sincere were your thanks.'<sup>39</sup> On another occasion, taking leave of a Frenchman whom he had befriended in Ballymoney and with whom he had visited the Giant's Causeway on the north Antrim coast, he remarked that 'parting with those whose society has pleased, and whom in all likelihood we shall never again behold, is the tearing of a part of life's scaffolding away'.<sup>40</sup> And it is perhaps here, in the savouring of the shade of the old sociability and in the mourning of its passing—rather than in the discussion of 'public affairs' or the arguments for Catholic Emancipation or the memory of the dead—that Gamble's books are most decisively political.<sup>41</sup>

38 On his time in the 'fleshpots of Cootehill', see *Sketches*, 1810, 136–156 (the quotation is from page 140); on his sojourn with the United Irishman and his exchange with the old Covenanter, see *A View*, 1812, 297–336, 338–40; on the mountain districts, see *A View*, 1812, 385–404, esp. 385–86.

39 *A View*, 1812, 394. Here he may be referring to *Brief Observations*, where (20–21) he argued: 'The people and government are at issue. The one must become Protestant, or the other (in a degree) must become Catholic; you [meaning, the English] have tried the former experiment—we have seen with what success—try now the latter. The Catholics are Ireland; govern Ireland then, don't govern a Colony. Let office, civil and military (in its full proportion) be Irish, be Catholic, and I dare say, you will not find them averse to an English, or Protestant king.'

40 *Views*, 1818, 639. This too is a recurrent theme. See *Sketches*, 1810, 156, for his emotional parting with his late friend's mother in Cootehill. She was seventy-two and he knew that he would never see her again. Oddly, she took ill the day he left and died a few hours after. Eight years later, when he returns to Cootehill, he describes leaving the town for what he knows will be the last time 'as the tearing off of the drapery of Fancy from the ground of human life; and the dropping of Time's everlasting curtain on the scenes of my youth'. Also see *Views*, 1818, 495.

41 While Gamble's early efforts at fiction were clumsy, the style of his journey books (thick description of 'ordinary' people, the use of dialect and what might be seen as the romancing of a destroyed world) anticipated that of Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels (1814–27), and that of his final and most accomplished novel, *Charlton*, might be considered to mimic it. Although an admirer of Scott (see *A View*, 1812, 412–13, and *Views*, 1818, 635), Gamble thought that his own political 'impartiality' distinguished *Charlton* from Scott's novels: 'I have lived in this mountain region, and have nothing better to offer than a mountain tale. It is truly such; the characters are all natives of these mountains, nor does the scene ever shift from among them. It has, I fear, many faults; but it has at least one merit—it is, I flatter myself, a faithful representation of the people whom I describe. I compare not myself with a great Scottish writer—but I am, I trust, free from a fault which has been attributed to him. I deal with the most perfect impartiality towards my different characters, to whatever sect or party they belong.' See *Charlton*, vol. 1, v–vi.

The sensibility in Gamble's journey books might be usefully compared to the "'Tis gone, and forever, the light we saw breaking ...' element in Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. For a suggestive discussion of Moore and Scott, see Luke Gibbons, "'Tis Songs that are most to be dreaded": The United Irishmen and Moore's *Melodies*', an essay accompanying Kathleen Tynan, tenor, Dearbhla Collins, piano, and the Irish Piano Trio, *Romancing Rebellion: 1798 and the Songs of Thomas Moore* (CD; Black Box Classics, 1998). For Gamble on Moore, most especially John Stevenson's settings of the *Melodies*, see *A View*, 1812, 387–88; also see *Views*, 1818, 481–82, where he defends 'a living [Irish] poet', and 488–89, where at Tara he quotes Moore's 'The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls' as he recalls the battle there in 1798.

James Clarence Mangan was a poet and a drinker and a drug-abuser and he was an admirer of John Gamble: the Tyrone-man's 'domestic and exceedingly melancholy' narratives, he told a friend, had made a 'powerful impression on me when I luxuriated (*à la Wert[h]er*) in my teens'.<sup>42</sup> The style and subjects that so impressed Mangan—'the mingled gloom and levity', as Gamble himself describes it, the sense of being alone or lonely at home, the flitting from what he sees to what he remembers and from what he remembers to what he fears—stemmed from a source other than the emigrant's return to an alien home-place: John Gamble was going blind. Always 'remarkably short-sighted', he suffered 'frequent attacks' of 'almost total blindness' and he was resigned to permanently losing his sight. A Preface to his account of 1812 offers a pointed defence of his everyday subjects, his sudden shifts from sombre to light-hearted concerns and his ostensibly casual intermixing of incident, anecdote and apprehension. His flickering eyesight is the bottom line, 'an apology ... which I dare say will be thought a sufficient one':

Even at the best ... I can take little share in the business or the amusements of life, and while feeble is the light that shines on the present, I have the past to remember, and the future to apprehend. Inevitable blindness, like all other inevitable misfortunes, may be borne ... But neither to be wholly blind nor entirely to see, to vibrate as it were between light and darkness, may well throw the mind off its balance, and cause joy and sadness, mirth and melancholy, to struggle together, and contend for mastery, like the elemental particles of chaos.<sup>43</sup>

But here the doctor protests too much. The apparently meaningless physical and mental meanderings as he tries to get home are deceptive. All three narratives are based on extensive background reading as well as chance encounters and casual meetings and all three make pointed interventions in contemporary political and cultural debates.<sup>44</sup>

42 The quotation is from a letter to Charles Gavan Duffy, suggesting republication of Gamble's *Northern Irish Tales* and Charles Robert Maturin's *Milesian Chief* (London: H. Colburn, 1812). Mangan continued: 'His narratives are all domestic and exceedingly melancholy. Which county of Ulster gave him birth I wist not, but in one of his tales he apostrophizes the Mourne as his own river—and in truth he seems to have drunk royally of its waves, for he is very, very mourne-ful.' Quoted in D. J. O'Donoghue, *The Life and Writings of James Clarence Mangan* (Edinburgh: P. Geddes, 1897), 145. Mangan was referring to Sarsfield, vol. 1, 7–9, where Gamble hopes that he will be remembered 'as unnational in an age of nationality, unprejudiced in an age of prejudice, and liberal in an age of illiberality', and that a monument to him will be erected on the river's banks. On Mangan, see David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 122–39.

43 *A View*, 1812, 231–32. Also see Preface to *Charlton*, vol. 1, v–xi.

44 Gamble's journey books include many phrases and some lengthy passages taken silently from works by other authors; the works from which he borrows include anonymous entries in *Encyclopædia Britannica*

They are deliberate works, carefully structured to make a case (the case is often in the structure)—most obviously about the need for Catholic Emancipation—but also, it appears, to illuminate, by cumulative impressions ‘rather than by formal dissertation’, the connection between ‘society and manners’ and politics and to show that people ‘do not live in the present alone, but in the future, and in the past, and while they have hope to brighten, [they] have recollection to darken their path’.<sup>45</sup>

Hope guttering in dark recollection might well describe John Gamble’s own ‘manner’, but a Gothic aspect in his journey books—not least the representation of living people in ghostly terms—owes less to that melancholy sensibility than to the particular condition of post-1798 Ireland, most especially the condition of his home-place.<sup>46</sup> Republican rebellion and the state’s repression of it (a process intensified by infringements on the right to bear arms, freedom of assembly and the freedom of the press in the five years prior to 1798) had combined with wider (though not all unconnected) social and cultural developments—such as the rise of evangelicalism—to corrode many of the institutions which, in earlier decades, had sustained reasoned discourse.<sup>47</sup> For instance, public houses, as Gamble himself intimates, had changed in the opening years of the new century. The Catholic publicans whom Protestants had once preferred for their meekness had, by their very presence, exercised considerable influence on society and manners—why gratuitously offend the inoffensive; why be unreasonable to

(for example, see *Sketches*, 1810, 23 n. 2; 24 n. 1), a history of Ireland, by his teacher William Crawford (*Sketches*, 1810, 86 n. 2; *A View*, 1812, 365 n. 4), an account of the parish of Dungiven, by Alexander Ross (*Views*, 1818, 634 n. 3), a treatise on the Irish linen industry, by S. M. Stephenson (*A View*, 1812, 329 n. 2), and Samuel M’Skimmin’s account of the history of Carrickfergus (*A View*, 1812, 270 n. 2, and *passim*). Also see his listing of the art collection of Frederick Augustus Hervey, Earl Bishop of Derry, in *A View*, 1812, 381–82, taken from ‘A Catalogue of the Principal Pictures and Statues at Down-Hill and Ballyscullion’, in George Vaughan Sampson, *Statistical Survey of the County of Londonderry, with Observations on the Means of Improvement; Drawn Up for the Consideration of and Under the Direction of the Dublin Society* (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1802), 420–23. Although Gamble’s Dissenter chauvinism might be at odds with Sampson’s High Church condescension, the influence of the latter’s *A Memoir, Explanatory of the Chart and Survey of the County of London-Derry, Ireland* (London: G. and W. Nichol, 1814), esp. 184–94, 332–59, is also very much in evidence in *Views*, 1818: the discussion of the ‘character’ of the three ethno-religious groups (particularly Catholic character, which both describe as ‘monarchical’), concern that Catholics were replacing Protestants on the land, and conviction that power falling to Catholics would have disastrous consequences, are all strikingly similar.

45 *A View*, 1812, 231. The lyrical sentence on people living outside the present is from his account of his time in the mountains around Killeter: see *A View*, 1812, 393. Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40, reads Gamble’s Introduction to *A View*, 1812 as underscoring ‘an allegiance to ephemeral forms’. However, the books—based on background reading, cleverly structured, employing a range of tropes—are decidedly literary efforts, while also shaped by ‘involuntary memory’, on which see Luke Gibbons, “‘Where Wolfe Tone’s statue was not’: Joyce, Monuments and Memory”, in Ian McBride, ed., *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139–59.

46 Here, Gamble’s home-place should be understood to mean, in the first instance, north-west Ulster but also, in a secondary sense, Presbyterian Ulster.

47 The state’s assault on the press had begun in earnest in the mid-1780s; see Brian Inglis’s judicious *Freedom of the Press in Ireland, 1784–1841* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954).

reasonable men?—promoting ‘conversation in mixed company’, a space where people of diverse backgrounds could ‘unite’—as ‘the people’, ‘the Irish people’, and ultimately republicans. Now, with Catholics and Protestants inclining to drink with their own ‘breed’, there was greater latitude for sectarian expression in public houses and a greater propensity for overt animosity to the ‘other’ to be the hook for conversation and the basis for identification.<sup>48</sup>

The public prints too had changed.<sup>49</sup> If not fewer books, certainly shorter books and more books of inferior quality were published in Derry and Strabane in the two decades after the Rising than had been published in the twenty years prior to it.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, where once printers had published on diverse topics—history, politics, science—now evangelical tracts dominated their lists. Gone was the day when a regional printer would insist, as George Douglas of Derry had done in 1782, that there were ‘no texts in Scripture so neglected not to have received “explications” ... over and over again.’<sup>51</sup> But if such ‘explications’ were now printers’ stock-in-trade, different men were now the printers. After over a decade protesting at government’s harassment of the free press, Douglas himself had sold up in 1796 and emigrated to the United States, where he settled in Baltimore, Maryland; other prominent regional printers—notably the Alexanders of Strabane—also went out of business in these same years.<sup>52</sup> The London-

48 The number of occasions on which Gamble was taken aback by a stranger opening a conversation with a sectarian comment is itself evidence of this tendency.

49 Besides public houses and public prints, institutions important to the public sphere that underwent change in this period included barbershops, the Presbyterian Synod, town and parish meetings, and clubs and societies, not least Masonic lodges. The transformation of Northern masonry is the subject of a fine study, Petri Mirala’s *Freemasonry in Ulster, 1733–1813* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), but the other institutions have received little or no attention.

50 In Derry, where the late eighteenth century had seen the publication (by Douglas) of volumes of several hundred pages, the longest book published in the first two decades of the 1800s was a 168 page builder’s manual; only one other book printed in the city in 1800–20 had more than 100 pages, the rest less than fifty. The book trade was stronger in Strabane, but the output was predominantly evangelical.

51 *London-Derry Journal* [hereafter, LJ], 19 March 1782; italics in original. Douglas was responding to a reader’s suggestion that a corner of his ‘political paper’ be given over to explaining neglected religious texts.

52 On Douglas’s career in Ireland and America, see Breandán Mac Suibhne, ‘Politicization and Paramilitarism: Northwest and Southwest Ulster, 1796–98’, in Thomas Bartlett, et al., eds., 1798: *A Bicentennial Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 243–78. Douglas had relinquished editorial duties for a period in the 1780s (1786–88), also citing government oppression; see LJ, 14 February; 28 March; 2 May 1786. At this time, John Alexander, printer of the *Strabane Journal* [hereafter, SJ], had offered his own newspaper for sale, but he failed to find a buyer. Alexander remained printer of the SJ until at least 1790: see SJ, 30 April 1787 [Linen Hall Library], and LJ, 21 September 1790, in which he is mentioned in an advertisement. James Elliot became editor of the paper by 1795 and was still editing it in 1801: see SJ, 17 August 1795 [Bradshaw Collection, Cambridge]; 2 March 1801 [Linen Hall Library].

The changes in the ownership and editorial lines of the regional press had parallels elsewhere in Ulster. In 1795 Henry Joy, the printer of the *Belfast Newsletter*, sold his interest in the paper which his family had co-founded almost sixty years earlier; George Gordon, the new editor, adopted a loyalist line and by the end of 1796 he was in the pay of Dublin Castle: see *Belfast*, 12 April 1794, Joy to Charlemont, in J. T. Gilbert, ed., *The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont*, 2 vols. (London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1891–94), vol. 2, 235–37, and Nancy J. Curtin, *The United*

Derry Journal, which Douglas had established in 1772 and built into the main regional paper, had passed into the hands of men who proved themselves strong supporters of the constitution in Church and state in the crisis years of 1797–99. Later, when the prospect of revolution was ‘gone and for ever’, William McCorkell, the new editor of the *Journal*, would countenance Catholic Emancipation, but a suspicion of Catholics’ intentions and an acceptance of the state’s professed neutrality still restrained his liberalism, his editorial line collapsing into an anaemic centrism. For example, McCorkell would readily concede that Orange marches were intended to give offence, but he would almost always add the weak-kneed rider that Catholics should not be so quick to take offence. And through the 1810s, he would time and again point out to his Catholic readers that they lived in a tolerant place, which was a way of saying that they should know their place—hope but not expect, desire not demand.<sup>53</sup> Hence, while Douglas had conceived the business of a newspaper to be monitoring ‘great men’ and providing ‘the people’ with a platform to make the case for reform, it was now the excluded, those anticipating power, not those in power, who were to be watched most carefully.<sup>54</sup>

And so it was that, in the 1810s, men and women<sup>55</sup> who had devoted the 1780s and 1790s to the pursuit of a political project that had failed found, in this degraded public sphere, that their activities in those decades were no longer worthy of an honest reckoning, certainly not a fit subject for the public prints.<sup>56</sup> And when that which had defined the

*Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791–1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 205. Further south, Joseph Gordon ceased to publish the *Newry Chronicle* about 1795. Francis C. Crossle, *Notes on the Literary History of Newry* (Newry: Newry Telegraph, 1897), 4.

- 53 There is a statement of McCorkell’s editorial principles in LJ, 5 December 1809; also see the statement of ‘the proprietors’ in LJ, 12 June 1810, where they say that, being committed to truth and candour, they would not give space to ‘party spirit’ and ‘factious writers’. For McCorkell’s hostility to the populist Catholic leaders (‘hair-brained orators’, ‘briefless counsellors’, ‘the Theatrical Orators of Fish-shamble Street’) who came to prominence in the 1810s, see LJ, 23 June 1813, where he argues that they were doing more harm than good to the Catholic cause; also see LJ, 10 May 1814, for an example of his repeated insistence on the liberality of Derry Protestants. For his attitude to Orange marches, compare LJ, 7 August 1810, and 25 September 1810, where he blames ‘both sides’ for the rioting that they provoked, and LJ, 16 July 1822, where he argues that: ‘Such processions, though harmless in themselves, never fail to give pain to our Catholic fellow-subjects, and, from regard to their feelings, their omission would be more expedient than their observance.’ Despite such statements, the *Journal* was still often denounced as an ‘Orange’ paper by southern Catholic commentators.
- 54 On Douglas’s notion of the function of the journalist, see LJ, 8 March 1785, where a tax increase provoked the outburst: ‘So—the tax on advertisements is augmented still further—a penny stamp on every sheet of paper, and 1s. 4d. on every ten lines of advertisements!—But these News Printers are a troublesome set, and must be silenced some way or other—They publish County meetings, and Volunteer meetings and Parliamentary Intelligence—they are ever talking of Parliamentary Reform, and of Liberty and all that—they tell tales about certain great men, nay, they sometimes discover the evil deeds of certain great men!—Therefore, down with the Press!’
- 55 Women feature as both political activists and acute cultural and political commentators in Gamble’s various narratives. For instance, see *Sketches*, 1810, 149–54, and *A View*, 1812, 303–28, esp. 315–17.
- 56 In time, children would deny the reality of their parents’ lives. For a late example, see Thomas Ainge Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century: or, ‘Chivalry’ in Modern Days. A Personal Record of Reform—Chiefly Land Reform, for the Last Fifty Years* (New York: Thomas Ainge Devyr, 1882), 86 [American Section].



youth and, in many cases, the middle age of such people—that which had defined their lives—was ignored, it was almost as if they themselves had never really lived.<sup>57</sup> Only seldom in the first decades of the century did an obituary in the regional press even hint at a respectable person having been a rebel or a republican in former days. Those few that did were for men who died abroad, suggesting that their politics was not only not of this time, but also not of this place: the past was in a different country.<sup>58</sup> But such hints were rare; when a rebel died, even when he died abroad, the tendency was to hide the truth in a meaningless half-telling. Robert Moore (1752–1807), a wealthy ironmonger of Bishop Street, Derry, was ubiquitous in public affairs in the north-west from the 1770s through until the late 1790s. He was a Volunteer officer, who was delegated to the Dungannon convention in 1782. He was the chairman and treasurer of Derry's poor-house and infirmary, a founding member of the city's Chamber of Commerce, and a representative of his congregation at the Presbyterian Synod. And by the mid-1790s, he was a key figure in the provincial leadership of the United Irishmen. Forced to go into exile in September 1798, Moore died in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1807; there at the end were Douglas, the Derry printer, and John Glendy (1755–1832), formerly Presbyterian minister of Maghera, south Derry, who, like Moore, had been a Volunteer and a United Irishman.<sup>59</sup> The Baltimore papers—and those of Philadelphia, New York, Boston and other cities—noticed his death and the reason he had left home:

Devyr (c. 1805–87), the son of a Donegal Town republican, was involved in radical (and Ribbon) politics in Ireland and Chartist politics in England, where he moved in 1838, before settling in the United States in the early 1840s. He returned to Ireland on holiday in 1860 and, when at Derry, 'Met three clever educated gentlemen at Derry—whose father was known to my father when both were servant boys. When I spoke of this they shrank from the record as if their father were their disgrace—that clever, energetic man—who founded for them, the respectability which they were thus striving to guard from the supposed contamination of his name.' Devyr himself comments on his family's politics but also see LJ, 28 May 1793, where Derry republican Robert Moore presides at an anti-militia meeting in Devyr's Hotel, Donegal Town. The surname is a variant of Diver (Ó Duibhir).

- 57 See the elegant discussion of grievable and ungrievable, real and unreal lives in Judith Butler, 'Violence, Mourning, Politics', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 4, 1 (2003), 9–37, reprinted in her *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 19–49. Also see David Lloyd's 'The Memory of Hunger', in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 205–28, and 'The Indigent Sublime: Spectres of Irish Hunger', *Representations*, 92 (2005), 152–85.
- 58 For instance, the *Strabane Morning Post*, 4 May 1824, carried the following obituary, presumably lifted from an American paper: 'Died ... At Mountpleasant, Kentucky, of typhus fever, on the 7th of August last, Mr. Samuel Molyneaux, aged 63, formerly a respectable farmer of British, Killead, near Antrim. He was one of the Volunteers of 82, the principles of those patriots he never abandoned. He ever was an enthusiastic friend of freedom, and this was the chief cause of his emigrating to a land of liberty. His wife died two days before him.'
- 59 For some of Moore's many civic and political involvements, see LJ, 25 February; 28 March 1780 (Volunteer; member of an elected committee that oversaw the Derry Battalion's affairs); 12 March 1782 (Dungannon delegate); 6 July, 10 August 1790 (poor-house and infirmary); 11 December 1792 (establishing the 'Union Volunteers' in the revival of volunteering in 1792–93); 6 August 1793 (Chamber of Commerce). On his attendance at the Synod, see *Records of the General Synod of Ulster, from 1691–1820*, 3 vols. (Belfast: John Reid, 1890–98), vol. 3, 86 (1787), 106 (1789). Moore's career in Ireland is sketched

Died—On Thursday the 18th inst. in the 55th year of his age, Mr. Robert Moore, a native of Ireland, and one of her exiled sons, who suffered in the cause of freedom and humanity—this cause he maintained with all the order of a patriot till his last breath. If the most inflexible integrity, in scenes peculiarly calamitous and distressing, and the most extended philanthropy, embracing man as a brother, where he met him, united to those interesting and pleasant manners which flow from the warmest sensibilities and charities of the heart, constitute the principles of an honest man and the graces of a gentleman—this character justly belongs to the deceased. ‘He was an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile.’<sup>60</sup>

But at home, the single sentence that appeared in the *Journal* rang hollow: ‘Died. ... In Baltimore, Mr. Robert Moore, for many years a Respectable Merchant, of this City.’<sup>61</sup> Here, the book closed on the actual past, and a great lie—that ‘the whole Protestant community’ had been loyal—began to become history.<sup>62</sup> Refused ink, the republican account of what had happened in the late eighteenth century became a matter for the fireside and the hours of darkness. Accordingly, the things that were best remembered when Gamble returned to Strabane in 1810, in 1812 and in 1818 were songs, and the stories that were told often concerned rebels who had departed for America, passing out of this world and into another, or they were ghost stories—endeavours to explain what was, in the light of day, inexplicable; to say what could not be said, that those who were denied their past had in fact lived. Hence, while Gamble’s drinking, descriptions of everyday life and depictions of Catholics and Presbyterians—well written, eminently quotable, easily cherry-picked—draw a certain type of researcher, a reader follows a half-

in Mac Suibhne, ‘Politicization and Paramilitarism’, 243–78, and ‘Up Not Out: Why Did North-west Ulster Not Rise in 1798?’, in Cathal Póirtéir, ed., *The Great Irish Rebellion of 1798, Thomas Davis Lectures* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), 83–100. On his career in the United States, see Richard Moore-Colyer, ‘The Moores of Londonderry and Baltimore: A Study in Scotch-Irish Eighteenth-Century Emigration’, *Familia*, 19 (2003), 11–40, esp. 15–25.

60 *Democratic Press*, 22 June 1807, quoting the *Baltimore American*; this obituary was also carried in *New York’s Public Advertiser*, 22 June 1807. Notices of his death also appeared in Boston’s *Columbian Centinel*, 27 June 1807, which noted he was from Derry, and the *Salem Register*, 29 June 1807, where he was described as a ‘worthy Emigrant from Ireland.’

61 LJ, 18 August 1807.

62 The process was largely complete by the mid-1840s: see Robert Simpson, *The Annals of Derry, Showing the Rise and Progress of the Town from the Earliest Accounts on Record to the Plantation under King James I—1613. And thence of the City of Londonderry to the Present Time* (Londonderry: Hempton, 1847), 224, where the author goes through considerable contortions to assert that Derry had been loyal in ‘1797–8–9’. Most particularly, Simpson argues that while ‘the rebellion of 1798’ was said to have been ‘hatched’ by ‘the descendants of the first Colonists of Ulster’, meaning Presbyterians, ‘it can be positively asserted that the Citizens of Londonderry were not either directly or indirectly, materially implicated in the concoction, or in furthering the progress of that rebellion’. Elsewhere in the volume (257), after conceding that ‘it must be acknowledged that few “stars” have risen above our literary horizon’, Simpson makes mention of William Hamilton, whom he describes as a ‘distinguished writer’, commenting: ‘Unfortunately for himself, and for society, he fell a victim to the brutish violence of party in 1797.’ On Hamilton, see below, *A View*, 1812, 367–69.

blind man into the spectral afterworld of failed revolution, where memory (a 'true story') rebukes history (a barefaced fiction) and the living meet the dead.

### Ghosts of Former Days

The 1798 Rising is first mentioned early in Gamble's account of 1810, shortly after he has landed in Dublin. Determined not to drink whiskey on his first day in Ireland, he visited a few acquaintances in the afternoon but dined alone that evening in a box in the Ormond Tavern on Capel Street. The tavern was raucous—enlivened further by somebody calling a waiter a 'damned wriggled-eyed bastard'—with diners shouting across the room at acquaintances in other boxes ('all eating, all speaking, and, except myself, nobody listening') and Gamble, enjoying the general and what he saw as very Irish conviviality, downed a bottle of 'excellent' wine ('more than I intended on going in').<sup>63</sup> He spent much of the next few days in the company of an unnamed friend, drinking a 'great deal' at dinners and on excursions around the city and its suburbs.<sup>64</sup> The friend, a former regimental surgeon, had been a fellow student in Edinburgh in the early 1790s.<sup>65</sup> Although a mere sixteen or seventeen years had passed since they had graduated, Gamble remarks that only two others from a group of twenty-five close friends from college days were still living; twenty-one, in other words, were dead. Some had drowned, others had died of yellow fever and others had fallen in duels. One had committed suicide—a man who had insulted him at a dance refusing his challenge (as his father, a church organist, was not a 'gentleman'), he had rushed into the ballroom in a frenzy and blown his own brains out. And another of the group had been executed aged twenty-six for his part in the Rising in Wexford. Gamble writes at some length about this man, John Henry Colclough (he only gives his surname), describing him in some detail and in terms that flit between affection, admiration and admonishment. He remembers him as 'a young man of considerable talents and great gentleness of manners', but vain and ambitious; 'vanity and ambition, more than conviction', Gamble avers, 'have made many young men republicans. He who thinks himself qualified to govern does not like to obey ...'

63 *Sketches*, 1810, 21–22.

64 *Sketches*, 1810, 27–28, 38–39.

65 *List of the Graduates in Medicine in the University of Edinburgh from MDCCV to MDCCCLXVI* (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1867) lists medical students by year of graduation, nationality and specialism; for example, in 1793: 'Joannes Gamble, Hibernus. De Rheumatismo'. Ten of the forty students in Gamble's year were Irish; the others were West Indian, American, English (9), Welsh, Genevan and Scottish. Positively identifying Gamble's friend is difficult, as several doctors practising in Dublin in the 1810s had been at college in Edinburgh in the late 1780s and early 1790s. However, Gamble refers to him as Dr. P——, says that he has been a regimental surgeon in Ireland for several years, and indicates that he was at a controversial duel in Wexford in 1807, all of which may yet help to identify him. On the difficulty of positively identifying him, see *Sketches*, 1810, 27 n. 1.

'Mr. Colclough' had been a Catholic and Gamble remembers that though he thought it 'degrading as a philosopher and a republican, to wear the shackles of so contracted a religion', he used to be seen stealing privately to the only Catholic chapel in Edinburgh. He also recalls a meeting of a students' debating society which had considered the motion 'Was it a justifiable act on the part of Brutus and the other conspirators [to assassinate Caesar]?'. Colclough had taken the side of 'the great martyr of freedom', meaning the republican Brutus, in a 'long and brilliant speech, which was greatly admired and rapturously applauded by all who heard it'. For Gamble, that applause set him on the course that would lead him to his death. He threw up medicine for the bar, but before he could complete his legal studies a small fortune was left him, and he returned to Ireland. Here, Gamble uses a theatrical metaphor that insinuates an element of unreality or artifice that suffuses many of his discussions of the Rising; 'the stage was now erected on which so many thousand were doomed to perish; he flattered himself, no doubt, with being able to play a distinguished part, and was among the foremost who appeared on its reeking boards'. He describes his capture and how, at his trial and execution, he conducted himself with a 'calm intrepidity and dignity, tempered with mildness, which commanded the admiration and esteem of the spectators'; he refuses to credit a report that Colclough had disgraced himself on the scaffold by asking for a glass of wine to toast the king. To the extent that there is a moral in the tale it is about vanity.<sup>66</sup>

By the time Gamble leaves Dublin for Strabane a few days later, he has seen John Philpot Curran, the republican lawyer whose daughter Sarah had been involved with Robert Emmet, and he has been 'lucky enough' to see Henry Grattan, the politician associated with the achievement of legislative independence in 1782, on Dame Street. He has also experienced the absurdity of what then passed for politics in Ireland. Gamble prefaces his account of this absurdity with a description of horror in a graveyard; he follows it with a description of the horrors on the streets of Dublin in 1798; the same word, Golgotha, in both descriptions, frames the discussion. He and his friend, the doctor, had walked through the barracks squares of the north inner city ('The Barracks are esteemed the largest and most commodious in Europe'), the Phoenix Park and Chapelizod out to Palmerstown to attend the village fair. The approach roads to the village were thick with people, 'mostly of the lower class', and seated on the roadside were beggars who 'exhibited the most disgusting sores to excite compassion'. The fair itself was boisterous; the two doctors drank 'excellent' wine in one of the many tents

66 *Sketches*, 1810, 29–31. Ironically, the duel Gamble's college friend attended in 1807 resulted in the death of a member of Colclough's extended family, John Colclough. Although engaged by Colclough's opponent, William Congreve Alcock, this friend attended to the dying man. See *Sketches*, 1810, 41–43. For the trial, in which Alcock was controversially acquitted of murder, see William Ridgeway, *A Report of the Trial of William Congreve Alcock, and Henry Derenzy, Esqrs. On an Indictment for the Murder of John Colclough, Esq., at Wexford Assizes, 26th March, 1808, before the Hon. Baron Smith* (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1808). Although he did not complete his medical studies, John Henry Colclough had, like Gamble, been a member of the Edinburgh-based Hibernian Medical Society; see *Laws and Regulations of the Hibernian Medical Society. Instituted December 14, 1786* (Edinburgh: Chapman and Company, 1791), 21.

but opted to return to the city just as the fighting was breaking out.<sup>67</sup> On their way back to Dublin, they cut through the Hospital Fields; this was 'the burial place of the lower-class: of the poor, the artizan, and the stranger; of the unfortunate who ends his days in an hospital, the wretch who perishes on the highway, and the criminal who dies by the executioner; the outcast who had no friend, the wanderer who had no habitation ...' Their ostensible object, besides making a short cut, was to see the reputed grave of Brian Boru, the high king who had, in Patriots' imagining of the Irish past, expelled invaders at the Battle of Clontarf (1014). What they find is a shambles:

We walked over their mouldering remains, which a little earth loosely scattered hardly concealed from our view; in some places it did not conceal them. Whether from the carelessness of interment, or the ravages of animals, the graves of several were open, and the coffins exposed, through the broken boards of which we saw their decaying bodies in every progressive state of putrefaction; in some the knees were falling from their sockets, and the eyes melting in their eyeballs, the worms crept along their fingers, and the body and face was one great mass of corruption; in others an unshapen heap of bones and ashes only remained. We turned in horror from a spectacle so hideous and revolting, from a sight so dreadful and disgusting, so mortifying and shocking to mortality; nor can I conceive how such a violation of decency and humanity could be permitted. I did not even stop to look at the tomb of Brian Barome, monarch of all Ireland, who was killed by the Danes at the battle of Clontarf, and is said to be buried here. I fled with precipitation from this Golgotha, where the air is contaminated with the exhalations of death, nor did I seem to myself to breathe freely till I was some distance from it. A little further we met the lord and lady lieutenant, with their attendants and some other company.<sup>68</sup>

The constituent parts of this episode—the absence of civility (at the fair), the barbarity of neglecting the dead, the reference to the Irish king's grave and the sudden appearance of the British king's representative with his train of attendants—appear to be prefatory to a political commentary. Gamble does not explicitly offer one, concluding the chapter by imagining the dead paupers, prisoners and outcasts rising from their graves to rebuke the great and the good with mortality:

Imagination could hardly form a greater contrast than this gay and gallant party to the quiet and silent group we just had quitted; yet they once were active and animated, though not so splendid as these are, who in a few years, perhaps a few months, will be mute likewise in their turn. Oh! could the wand of enchantment

67 On Curran and Grattan, see *Sketches*, 1810, 34–38; on the trip to Palmerstown, see *Sketches*, 1810, 39–46.

68 *Sketches*, 1810, 46–47. Robert Emmet, the republican leader, was also reputed to have been buried in the Hospital Fields, popularly Bully's Acre.

touch the slumbering bones and raise before them these inhabitants of the grave; could they gaze on their fleshless arms, their putrid lips, their hollow cheeks, their eye-less sockets, where the worm has now taken its abode; could they behold, as in a magic glass, the reflection of what all that lives must be, how would they start affrighted and dismayed; how would their mirth and gaiety vanish, their pomp and consequence subside; how would the frivolous pursuits, the transient pleasures, the restless wishes, and busy cares of this fleeting scene sink into the insignificance they deserve.<sup>69</sup>

Still, while Gamble here refrained from making a direct political comment, politics past and present come to the fore as he proceeds towards his lodgings and finds ghosts of that other Golgotha—1798—stalking his imagination. Having just closed one chapter with the sight of the lord lieutenant, he opens the following one by reflecting on the office—‘He is always now an English nobleman of high rank: there are no instances of a Scotchman being appointed, and I believe but one or two of an Irishman’—and recalls some men who have held it. He praises Lord Ormond (1610–88), who resisted ultra-Protestants’ demands for punitive measures against Catholics in the late 1670s and early 1680s, and Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773), a scholar and wit who relaxed the Penal Laws against Catholics in the mid-1700s. The rest, with few exceptions, he dismisses as ‘grave and formal courtiers, who wore bag-wigs and swords, turned on their toes, danced minuets, and laughed as seldom as they thought.’ The current incumbent, he observes, seems determined to drink himself into favour (‘he is what is called a five bottle man’), but in general people are rightly indifferent to lords lieutenant: ‘a lord lieutenant of Ireland has no more to do with the measures of government, than the postman with the incendiary letter he is the bearer of.’<sup>70</sup>

Walking through the city streets, he sees caricatures of John Foster, the chancellor of the exchequer, on old walls and gateways, ‘sometimes hanging and sometimes roasting’. Foster was held responsible for an increase in taxes and the Common Council of Dublin (the Corporation) had just passed a motion ordering that his portrait be removed from their meeting room; when one alderman proposed that it should be kicked by every member, ‘another greater genius’ said it should be kicked by every man in the nation.<sup>71</sup> Gamble sniffs at this ‘playing at football with pictures’—he has earlier noted that Grattan’s portrait suffered a similar fate—and he writes scathingly of what had become, by the proroguing of the Irish parliament with the Act of Union, the most important representative body in Ireland. Being almost exclusively loyalist, it contained no difference of opinion and there being no difference of opinion, there was neither reason nor eloquence in its debates: ‘There are few good speakers in the Common

69 *Sketches*, 1810, 47.

70 *Sketches*, 1810, 48–52.

71 *Sketches*, 1810, 54–55. Gamble also comments on Foster when passing through his constituency (Louth), see *Sketches*, 1810, 108–10.

Council of Dublin—it is the collision of opinions only which emits eloquence, and there can be little argument where almost all are of one mind'. Its most conspicuous member, the rabble-rousing John Giffard, he reports to be a prejudiced man who expressed himself with more 'vehemence and force than is usual among English orators'. He then mocks Dublin loyalists generally as 'poor hen-hearted creatures who go about croaking about plots, and pikes, and the church, and Papists'; they include 'gossiping people' who recount frightful tales of nocturnal meetings 'that have no existence but in their own imaginations' and timorous ones who frighten themselves and endeavour to frighten others with outlandish rumours of an imminent rebellion. There is no prospect whatsoever of another rebellion, Gamble argues: 'Government knows it, and every rational man who thinks must know it likewise ...' The 'horrors' and 'terrors' of 1798—most especially the experience of martial law—would deter 'every humane and thinking man' from insurrection: people were sickened and frightened, prepared to accept an imperfect constitution rather than face worse oppression:

A suppressed rebellion (as it is proverbially expressed) strengthens government—it cuts off the active and ambitious, it frightens the timorous, it sickens the humane, and for a time lays the people prostrate at the feet of government. Reconciled to lesser evils by the recollection of greater [evils], legal subjection or even oppression is scarcely felt by those who have just escaped from the insolence of military dominion, the fury of lawless and unbridled will.<sup>72</sup>

For his own part, Gamble insists that he would live content under the most despotic government 'rather than run the risk of making it better by a rebellion of even half [1798's] terrors'. Here, he recalls having been 'a very young man' in Dublin at the time of the Rising, when the city was a scene of unrelieved terror:

... was I to live to patriarchal age, I shall not forget the impression it made on me, nor the gloomy and sepulchral appearance Dublin presented—when all business and pleasure were suspended; when every man was a tyrant or a slave, a rebel that was suspected, a spy that suspected, or an executioner that punished; when malice and hatred, terror and doubt, fear and distrust were on every face, and all the tender charities of nature withered and perished before the poisoned breath of party, which made no allowance for error, had no recollection of friendship, felt no gratitude for kindness, no sympathy for age, sex, sickness or sorrow; when almost every house was a barrack, every public building a prison, and every street a Golgotha, or a shambles, on the lamp posts of which some wretched fellow

72 *Sketches*, 1810, 56–58.

creature was daily suspended, who, while his limbs quivered in the agonies of death, was the subject of brutal joke and unfeeling exultation.<sup>73</sup>

And yet, while deploring rebellion, Gamble is ambivalent about the Rising itself. He remarks that ‘though there is so much to lament and reprobate’ in the memory of 1798, ‘there is something likewise to admire’. The recollection of ‘magnanimity, unshaken fortitude, and contempt of death’ on both sides, he hopes, can obliterate the memory of ‘savagely excesses and midnight murders’ by the republicans, and the ‘vindictive and unrelenting vengeance, the floggings and torturings’ of government. He proceeds to praise the Irish parliament for continuing its sittings ‘undaunted’ during the Rising and for rejecting the proposition of its more violent members ‘to order the prisoners to military tribunals, and instant execution’. But he also praises the valour of the republican leaders who ‘almost universally’ faced death ‘with a courage which was never excelled’. He mentions the execution of prominent rebels—the Sheares brothers and Billy O’Byrne—and the death in gaol of Oliver Bond, the republican leader in Dublin whose family in St. Johnston, a few miles from Strabane, would have been known to him. He also remarks on the slow death of Edward Fitzgerald, describing him as a man esteemed for his ‘courage and military conduct, his honour, humanity and candour’; he cites William Cobbett’s high regard for him and quotes Mark Antony’s speech over the body of Brutus, the republican who, on principle, kills his dearest friend, in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*:

His life was gentle; and the elements  
So mixt in him, that nature might stand up,  
And say to all the world, ‘This was a man!’<sup>74</sup>

The year 1798 and its aftershock, 1803, continue to unsettle Gamble’s narrative as he travels north. A few miles outside Drogheda he notes that the residence of the Coddington family was ‘attacked and nearly carried by the rebels in 1798’, and he inspects the battery on ‘Castle-mount’ (that is, Millmount) to which he attributes the town remaining ‘tolerably quiet’ during the Rising, though ‘the number of disaffected was supposed to be very great’. He also discusses the billeting of a large number of predominantly Protestant yeomanry corps on the town during the Rising; ‘they all drank and caroused, swallowed wine and whisky in pail-fulls, and, in their zeal for the good old cause, I fear committed a number of bad actions’. And he describes with pity how, when some rebels who broke out of Wexford and fled north arrived in the vicinity of the town, the yeomen marched out and attacked the ‘unfortunate wretches’; the courage

<sup>73</sup> *Sketches*, 1810, 58.

<sup>74</sup> *Sketches*, 1810, 58–63. Gamble returns to this theme several times, contrasting the high idealism and sense of society in the late eighteenth century, with the squalid sectarianism in the fractured community that emerged in the early 1800s. See, for example, *A View*, 1812, 405.