

Christian Restorationism in Ireland in the early nineteenth century: the strange case of Miss Marianne Nevill*

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In the British Library there is a small, battered, handwritten volume which carries on its title-page the following curious inscription: “BIBLION DEMOSION PROSEUCHON. Sha’ar ha-Tefillah ve-Seder ha-Avodah. The Book of Common Prayer. (Written in lithographic ink by Marianne Nevill . . . for the use of the Christian Israelites at Smyrna.). Marianne Nevill, No 2 Mountjoy Square West, Dublin. Oct. 25, 1829.” It contains Matins and Evensong from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (hereafter BCP), along with the Catechism, done into Hebrew but with the rubrics in English and Greek. Curiouser still is the fact that there are four other copies of this strange little work extant, all in the same hand – one in the New York Public Library, one in the Christoph Keller Jr. Library of General Theological Seminary New York, one in the Boston Public Library, and a fourth in Lampeter University Library, Wales.¹ The Hebrew translation is grammatically reasonably accurate but stylistically poor, and since style is of the essence for such a liturgical text, this is a serious drawback. In general competence it falls well below the standard attained by C. H. F. Bialloblotzky’s Hebrew rendering of Matins and Evensong published in London in 1833,² or by the London Society for

1 Samuel Krauss, the great authority on Jewish–Christian polemics, wrote a short article in 1923 on Miss Nevill’s prayerbook, based on a copy of it in the possession of a friend of his in Vienna. Whether this is a sixth copy, or is the same as one of the other five, I do not know. Krauss, like most others till recently, had no idea who Marianne Nevill was. S. Krauss, “A Curious Prayer Book for ‘Christian’ Israelites”, *Jewish Guardian*, 10 Aug. 1923, p. 9. I am indebted to Nick Brett for drawing my attention to this article.

2 C. H. F. Bialloblotzky, *Liturgiae Ecclesiae Anglicanae partes praecipuae scilicet Praeces Matutinae et Vespertinae nunc primum in Hebraicam Linguam traductae* (London: Impensis Friderici Bialloblotzky, 1833).

* The present paper is very much work-in-progress. Much primary archival material remains to be searched, and I am still piecing Miss Nevill’s story together. I would like to thank Timothy Stunt, Nick Brett, and above all Andy Crome for suggestions and comments. The errors, however, remain my own.

the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews' translation of the whole BCP (drafted by the Polish Jewish convert Christian Czernski and revised by three of the Society's luminaries – Alexander McCaul, Michael Solomon Alexander, and J. C. Reichardt), published in London in 1836.³

Oddly, this was not the first time that a Hebrew BCP had been produced in Dublin. In 1717, a Polish Jewish convert, Abraham Jacobs (probably at the instigation of the formidable Archbishop of Dublin, William King), had made a Hebrew translation of the Anglican prayerbook. Like the Nevill prayerbook, this also exists in five manuscript copies, prepared by the translator (Dublin printers at the time presumably did not have enough Hebrew type to print it) – one in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, one in Marsh's Library in Dublin, one in the Bolton Library, Cashel, one in Cork Diocesan Library, and one in the library of Springhill, a little planter house near Money more in Northern Ireland, not far from Bellaghy – Seamus Heaney country. If we exclude earlier Hebrew renderings of individual elements of the BCP – the Catechism, the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, and the Lord's Prayer – then the Jacobs translation appears to enjoy the distinction of being the first translation of the Anglican prayerbook, or substantial portions of it, into Hebrew.

When the Jacobs and Nevill prayerbooks are set side by side what is immediately striking are the differences. Jacobs was clearly a trained *sofer* and his Hebrew hand is strong and handsome, whereas Nevill's is awkward and "schoolgirlish". On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that Nevill knew and used Jacobs: there are too many identical, somewhat idiosyncratic renderings of tricky passages for this not to be the case. She probably had access to the copy of Jacobs's work in Marsh's Library, which was, and still is, open to the public. But she has not copied him slavishly: she has "improved" on him from time to time, and her prayerbook contains elements which are not in his, so there seems to be no grounds for denying that she had some knowledge of Hebrew. But how much is not at this point clear. In her subsequent trials (on which more later), Miss Nevill's knowledge of languages in general and Hebrew in particular became an issue. The prosecution argued that she claimed to know several languages which in fact she did not, and this was further proof that she was self-deluded. She herself comments on this: "A strange misapprehension has generally occurred about my knowledge of

3 *The Book of Common Prayer, according to the use of the United Church of England and Ireland. Translated into Hebrew* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1836).

languages. I can pronounce a great many, so as to read them aloud for the edification of those who came to me for instruction, and thus have read portions of the Bible in more than eight languages; can always find my place, but do not understand them so as to translate any part; and this was called an assumption of reading languages I did not previously learn. Lady Barton has heard me read German and Bohemian in this manner to a foreign lady, who understood me perfectly. I have a Bible in twelve languages for this very purpose.”⁴ At one point asked whether she knew Hebrew, “she showed the manuscript of the Liturgy in Hebrew, done under Mr. Alexander’s eye, now Bishop of Jerusalem”.⁵ This latter statement is significant, suggesting she may have had some help, but the extent of this is unclear. Michael Solomon Alexander was a competent Hebraist and would hardly have countenanced some of the howlers in Miss Nevill’s prayerbook.

Although it remained in manuscript, the existence of the Nevill prayerbook was known in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Muss-Arnolt mentions it in his pioneering catalogue of the Books of Common Prayer in the Benton Collection, Boston (1914),⁶ and from there it got into David Griffiths’ updated catalogue of 2002.⁷ Muss-Arnolt must have known of it through the copy in the Boston Public Library. In a separate study of translations of the Book of Common Prayer, also published in 1914, he mentions it again and speculates on who Miss Nevill might have been.⁸ He cites a personal communication from Lukyn Williams which suggests that she must be the same as the “rich Irish lady” mentioned in De le Roi’s *Geschichte der evangelischen Judenmission* (1899), whose Hebrew prayer book had been used at a service for Jews in Berlin. But apart from recording the odd circumstantial detail, surely based on oral tradition,

4 Marianne Nevill, *Narrative of Seven Years of Religious Persecution from January 13, 1838, to the Day of the Moving of a Writ de Supersedeas* (Dublin: Joseph B. Colridge, 1844), 8.

5 *Ibid.*, 39.

6 William Muss-Arnolt, *The Book of Common Prayer and Books Connected with its Origin and Growth: Catalogue of the Collection of Josiah Henry Benton* (2nd edn, Boston, MA: privately printed, 1914).

7 David N. Griffiths, *The Bibliography of the Book of Common Prayer, 1549–1999* (London: British Library, 2002).

8 William Muss-Arnolt, *The Book of Common Prayer among the Nations of the World: A History of the Translations of the Prayer Book of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church of America. A study based mainly on the Collection of Josiah Henry Benton* (London: SPCK, 1914), ch. XX. See further David N. Griffiths, “The Translations of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer” (Ph.D. diss., University of Reading, 1991).

that she had composed it “while confined to bed by illness”, le Roi leaves us none the wiser.⁹

This ignorance as to who Marianne Nevill was, even among people as informed as Muss-Arnolt and among members of the London Society, is surprising because she was, in fact, well known – notorious might not be too strong a word – in the Dublin of her day. In 1837, Marianne Nevill’s nephew, Francis Geary, petitioned the Lord Chancellor to commission a *de lunatico inquirendo*, to discover whether or not his aunt was sane and capable of managing her own affairs. The inquiry, involving several medical men, duly took place and as a result Marianne Nevill was declared insane. The affliction from which she was supposed to suffer was described as monomania – a condition, isolated only in 1810, in which an otherwise normal and competent person is fixated by a particular idea which leads them to behave in irrational ways.¹⁰ Miss Nevill’s fixation was the conversion and restoration of the Jews. She was given leave to appeal against the Chancellor’s decision to a jury court (the first time this had ever happened) and the case was duly heard before the Court of Queen’s Bench in January 1838. Despite the fact that Miss Nevill was defended by one of the rising stars of the Irish bar, Francis Blackburne, later himself to become Lord Chancellor of Ireland, the jury upheld the original judgment. She lost control of her finances, was confined to her house, and a housekeeper installed to look after her (a certain Lady Barton), to act, in effect, as her jailer.¹¹

The case was a *cause célèbre*. The court was packed, and the proceedings reported at length in the Dublin and London press, from which it got into a number of English and Irish provincial newspapers.¹² It divided Dublin

9 Johann Friedrich Alexander De le Roi, *Geschichte der evangelischen Judenmission seit Entstehung des neueren Judentums*, 2 vols in 1 (2nd edn, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899), vol. 2, 144. De le Roi’s information is plausible. Miss Nevill had links with missions to the Jews in Prussia.

10 See John O’Neill, “The Portrayal of Madness in the Limerick Press 1772–1845” (Master’s diss., University of Limerick, 2013), 94–103; more generally, Thomas Knowles and Serena Trowbridge, eds., *Insanity and the Lunatic Asylum in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014). Nevill herself made some shrewd remarks on the condition in an anonymous pamphlet, *Hints upon insanity, especially monomania: by a person supposed insane* (Dublin: J. D. Scott, 1837).

11 Miss Nevill describes Lady Barton memorably as “a great fat vulgar woman, who boasted she was the *best whip* in England, and the *best shot*. – could hit a target against any man in the regiment, in which her late husband was, and not unfrequently *groomed her own horse!* She was used to West India manners, and a great gourmand”. Nevill, *Narrative*, 4.

12 I am indebted to my Manchester colleague Andy Crome, who is writing a study of

society. Some, convinced a serious miscarriage of justice had occurred, formed the Friends of Miss Marianne Nevill, and continued to argue her case. They published Blackburne's defence speech in full in 1843 (it is a major source of information about her),¹³ and it was presumably thanks to them that she was able in 1844 to publish two little works that drew her plight to the attention of a wider public, her *Narrative of Seven Years of Religious Persecution* and her *Psalms written during Captivity and Persecution for Christ's Sake*.¹⁴ She showed herself ingenious in getting her sad story recorded for posterity. She was an excellent needlewoman and was allowed to teach sewing to orphan girls. In 1847, with the help of five of these, she stitched in needlepoint on a linen scroll, eight inches deep by a thousand inches long, the complete text of Luke's Gospel in English and Italian, but as a preface to this work she also stitched a brief account of her trials. The scroll still exists and was auctioned for £6250 at Christie's Interiors in London on 8 December 2009.¹⁵

So who was Miss Marianne Nevill and why was she declared insane? She was the daughter of Richard Nevill (1743–1822) of Furness (or Furnace), County Kildare. The Nevills were a landed Anglo-Irish ascendancy family who had been settled for several generations in Kildare. Marianne's father was the MP for Wexford in the Westminster Parliament from 1802 to 1819 (the Act of Union of 1801 had abolished the Irish Parliament) but, like many Irish MPs of the day, he does not seem to have attended much in London. When he died in 1822 his two daughters, Henrietta and Marianne,

Christian Restorationism, for the following information (by personal communication): the fullest account of the Nevill trial (and very full it is) appears to be in the Dublin newspaper, *The Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 13 Jan. 1838. From there it got into *The Standard* (London), 17 Jan., and from there was picked up by provincial newspapers, such as *The Berkshire Chronicle*, 20 Jan., *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 20 Jan., *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 22 Jan., all 1838. For the Irish provincial papers see O'Neill, "Portrayal of Madness", 94–103.

13 *The Speech of the Rt Hon. Francis Blackburne on behalf of Miss Nevill, in the Court of Queen's Bench, on the 10th of January, 1838, and studiously suppressed in the published account of the trial, as reported by a barrister* (Dublin: James Charles, for the Friends of Miss Nevill, 1843).

14 Nevill, *Narrative*; Marianne Nevill, *Psalms written during Captivity and Persecution for Christ's Sake* (Dublin: Henry Shaw, 1844).

15 Lot 301, Sale 5919, Christie's Interiors Auction, London, 8 Dec. 2009. The scroll was described as a Needlework "Sampler", 8 in. (20 cm.) deep x 1000 in. long, with a length of unembroidered plain linen continuation. I have been unable to discover who was the purchaser or where the sampler is now. See further the blog, "The Curious Case of Marianne Nevill", 7 Dec. 2009 in *Needleprint: Opening up the World of Needlework for You*, <http://needleprint.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/curious-case-of-marianne-nevill.html> (accessed 24 Oct. 2015).

inherited substantial fortunes. Marianne was left, among other things, the family seat at Furness (it still survives and was recently on the market for three million euros!). Henrietta already had her own establishment, having married, on 15 January 1810, Sir William Geary (1756–1825), one of the Gearys of Oxon Hoath in Kent (he was the second baronet), the MP for Kent in 1796 and again in 1802, who seems to have been a friend of her father. He was, apparently, her second husband, and it was their second son, Francis, born on 12 April 1816, who brought the petition in 1837 to have his aunt declared lunatic. Marianne, however, never married. She devoted herself to good works, chief among which, as she saw it, was the conversion of the Jews. It was this which got her into trouble.

Among Marianne Nevill's conversionary activities were attempts to set up "Hebrew Churches" in Liverpool, Bristol, and Norwich. What she seems to have envisaged were congregations made up of Jewish converts.¹⁶ She paid the rent for premises where the converts could meet, and provided funds for preachers and services. She seemed to want these congregations to be under overall Church of England control, and negotiated their status with the Bishops of Bristol and Norwich, who were, apparently, encouraging.¹⁷

The idea of having congregations made up of converts is a manifestation of what might be called "exceptionalism" in Christian attitudes towards the Jews, that is to say the tendency of Christians to treat Jewish converts as somehow different from other converts. Although this exceptionalism has a long history, the precise idea that Jewish converts should form

16 A reviewer of Marianne Nevill's *Extracts of Remarkable Testimonies from Rabbinical Writers* (Dublin: Curry & Co., 1828) in the *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine* 8 (Jan.–June 1829): 76–7 (a reference which, again, I owe to Dr. Crome), sees the idea that Jewish converts should continue to worship separately as something distinctive to Nevill: "The benevolent and active friend of Israel who has made this little compilation for their benefit is well known by all readers of the *Christian Examiner* as the writer of the reports of the Society under that name [i.e., her "Friends of Israel" group], and the founder of some churches and schools for converted Jews on the continent. With her peculiar views regarding the mode in which the ancient people of God are to be brought in, and the necessity for keeping them separate from other nominal Christians, we have nothing more to do than to express our dissent; but to add our respect for the earnestness and zeal with which she pursues her objects, and our pleasure at the accounts of her progressive success" (emphasis mine). The review is anonymous but the author was clearly someone of learning and critical acumen. One wonders if it might have been Michael Solomon Alexander or Alexander McCaul. Both were Restorationists, like Miss Nevill, but neither would have agreed with Nevill's Idumean variation of the hypothesis.

17 *Speech of the Rt Hon. Francis Blackburne*, 41–3.

their own distinctive congregations was, I think, rather new in Miss Nevill's day. Jewish converts in the past had been required to join their local churches and merge with them, though people found it hard to forget that they were Jews, and they were expected to proclaim publicly their loyalty to Christ in ways that Gentile converts were not. However, the idea of Hebrew congregations was beginning to emerge in the orbit of the London Society (in 1836 Palestine Place contained a meeting room for a Hebrew congregation), as did Bialloblotzky's Hebrew Institution in Camden Town. And, a little later (1842) came Christ Church in Jerusalem, established by the Jerusalem Bishopric. Chronology suggests that Marianne Nevill was in right at the beginning of this movement.¹⁸ Her "Hebrew Church" in Liverpool was probably opened in 1831.¹⁹ The Bishop of Bristol seems to refer to her proposed "Hebrew Church" in that city as a "synagogue", which, if this is his meaning, hints at how identifiably Jewish the congregation was expected to remain.²⁰ This is all of a piece with her attempt in 1829 to provide a Hebrew liturgy for such groups, though in this case it was a putative Hebrew Church in Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey). I will come back to Smyrna in a moment.

Here, I suggest, can be seen the beginnings of modern Messianic Judaism as institutionally distinct from mainline, Gentile Christianity. This development is often traced back to the Novy Israel congregation established in 1882 by Joseph Rabinowitz in Kishinev (now the capital of Moldova). That was certainly widely regarded at the time as a turning point. It caused a great stir in Christian circles, and led to visitations by eminent Christian missionary figures, such as Franz Delitzsch. There were, to be sure, subtle but significant differences in the Novy Israel case. Earlier attempts to found Hebrew congregations had been made under the patronage of well-established Gentile Christian organizations or individuals (though, inevitably, Jewish converts were involved), whereas Novy Israel was the personal initiative of a forceful and charismatic recent convert, and that set alarm bells ringing in the established churches.²¹

18 In general see Michael R. Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

19 This is clearly stated in a letter from her sister Henrietta Geary, dated 19 May 1831: "My dearest Marianne, This morning (not above an hour ago) I received your letter, telling me of the opening of your Hebrew Church [in Liverpool]". *Speech of the Rt Hon. Francis Blackburne*, 40.

20 *Ibid.*, 42. I take this to be the sense but the reference is not entirely clear.

21 Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement: The Heart of Jewish Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1995).

Nevertheless, the idea behind Novy Israel was not new and, indeed, was rooted in the longstanding Christian attitude that Jews somehow remain distinct and different, even when they have become Christians.

There is another aspect of Miss Nevill's Hebrew Churches project which is notable, because it is characteristic of Christian missions to the Jews as a whole, and that is her lack of realism, her boundless optimism. (The psychology of Christian missions was and is complex. Missionaries were not easily daunted because they felt the tide of history [or to put it more in their terms, God] was on their side. Setbacks were sent to try them. With God's help they would triumph in the end. A handful of converts were always seen as the firstfruits of the harvest. Viewing it more cynically, one could argue that missionary societies had to remain upbeat and make the most of every little success, to keep their sponsors donating. And, of course, some were successful, even when not backed by imperial power.) Christian missionaries, quick to rejoice over one Jewish sinner who repented, and to welcome them as the earnest of the final conversion of the whole people, often failed to face up to the fact that in fact little real progress was being made. Miss Nevill seems to have tried to set up the Hebrew Churches before there was any significant congregation to occupy them. She probably felt that she had only to throw open the doors of her Church and the Jews would flood in. There is a telling letter from her sister wishing her well with her Liverpool venture and hoping that many Jews would join.²² The language is revealing. There was, presumably, no congregation to speak of at that point.

Her Hebrew Christian Church in Liverpool survived at least until 1839, as the following passage from her *Narrative* shows:²³

Miss Nevill then sent Dr. Burton to Liverpool, to visit the Hebrew Church, and to report to her its present state – which she could then have it in her power to prove was still, not only in existence, but in a flourishing condition, and he wrote the following letter: –

Royal Hospital, May 23d, 1839.
My Dear Miss Nevill, –

22 Henrietta Geary, letter of 19 May 1831: "I hope it will lead to the conversion gradually of sufficient to fill your church to overflowing". *Speech of the Rt Hon. Francis Blackburne*, 40.

23 Nevill, *Narrative*, 23–4. Gidney, describing obviously the same congregation, states that it was founded in 1838 as the first station in the provinces of the London Society, and says nothing about Miss Nevill. W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 161. Is this a further case of Miss Nevill being "blanked" from the official record, or was she exaggerating her role in the founding of the Liverpool Hebrew Church?

...

I visited the Hebrew Church in Sir Thomas's Buildings, which you were the instrument of founding, and was highly gratified. The service on Friday evening was in Hebrew. The books new, and in good order. Like the early Christian Churches, there is a Gentile congregation connected with the Christianized Jews.²⁴ They sing the "Veni Creator Spiritu[s]" to the 150th psalm tune in Hebrew. The Jewish congregation is about thirty-five; communicants sixteen. They have the Holy Communion once a month, besides festivals.

The Rev. Mr. Joseph is minister. There is a large Sunday School, and an Institution for inquiring into the state of converted Jews. Mr Lazaraus, who keeps a depository for Hebrew books, acts a clerk.

...

Most truly, yours,
Nathaniel Burton

P.S. The ten commandments which you transcribed in Hebrew, still adorn the Communion Table of the Hebrew Church. I am happy you propose sending them back the Folio Hebrew Bible – the want of which they now feel.

This lack of realism comes out again in Miss Nevill's Hebrew liturgy for the Christian Israelites in Smyrna of 1829. Why Smyrna, and why 1829? The answer appears to be that in that year the London Society had opened a mission there. The town had a large Jewish population, and it was an obvious location for a mission station, but W. T. Gidney makes it clear in his account of the Smyrna mission that the missionaries found the going extremely tough, and only made two or three converts in the first few years (the first two baptisms were not until 1832).²⁵ There were, then, no Christian Israelites in Smyrna in 1829 when Miss Nevill composed her liturgy. Whether or not she belonged to the London Society (a point I have not been able to establish for certain), she would surely have been au fait with its latest news. (It seems that she formed her own coterie, known as the "Friends of Israel", presumably a small circle of like-minded evangelical Christians, exercised particularly by mission to the Jews and the restoration of Israel, who met from time to time in private houses. She

24 This is interesting. Many of these Hebrew Churches were probably significantly bulked out by non-Jews. Herein some Church authorities saw a danger: they could become instruments as much for the Judaizing of Gentiles as the Christianizing of Jews.

25 Gidney, *History of the London Society*, 171–7. Gidney notes (171) that Smyrna was the second city of the Ottoman Empire and had a large Greek and Jewish population, but Jews spoke "Judaeo-Spanish, a jargon composed of Spanish and Hebrew".

reported on their meetings to the *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*.²⁶ The Friends of Israel do not seem to have been a local branch of the London Society, though they may have held many of the latter's aims.) One can imagine her lying ill in bed in her house in 2 Mountjoy Square West, Dublin, and excitedly receiving the Society's latest bulletin about its new mission in Izmir. The far off, exotic place stirs her imagination, and so she whiles away the time by composing a liturgy for the floods of Jews who will come to Christ there, before a single convert has been made. And she does not do her homework properly. She puts the rubrics in Greek (where these came from is unclear: a Greek translation of the BCP?), presumably because she thought that that was the vernacular of the Jews of Izmir. There was indeed a large Greek-speaking population in Izmir, but it was Christian. The Jews spoke Ladino, and when the London Society finally in 1844 produced a version of the BCP for their use, it was in Ladino.²⁷ All this gives, I suggest, a window into the fantasy world in which Miss Marianne Nevill lived.²⁸

While planning her Hebrew Churches in the early 1830s Miss Nevill's mind seems increasingly to have been exercised by Restorationism, that is, the idea that the Jews would have to be restored to their ancient homeland, in literal fulfilment of biblical prophecy, before the second coming of Christ. Restorationism was by her day a well-established tradition of Christian eschatological thinking. It had had its advocates in Ireland such

26 See n. 16.

27 It was translated by John Baptist Cohen (known as "John the Evangelist") and printed in Smyrna in 1844. See Griffiths, *Bibliography of the Book of Common Prayer*, no. 68: 1. Muss-Arnolt, *Book of Common Prayer among the Nations of the World*, ch. XX, notes: "The greater portion of the edition of the Liturgy in Judaeo-Spanish was destroyed by a disastrous fire [in Smyrna] on July 3, 1845. This explains the fact that at present only a very few copies of the book are known to exist." Revised selections were printed at Constantinople in 1872: *El libro de Oraciones asegun el uzo de la Qehillah del Mashiakh de Inglaterra i Irlanda* (Constantinopla: Estampado de A. Bunyanian en año del Mashiakh, 1872); see Griffiths, *Bibliography of the Book of Common Prayer*, no. 68: 2.

28 Miss Nevill seems to have been in direct contact with the mission in Smyrna. In a letter to His Excellency Edem Bey, written apparently in June 1839, she states: "I contributed so many books to the library of Smyrna, I have not many left to offer as my small donation, but when I receive your answer I will send you fifty books as a beginning, with 'Egyptian Library' stamped on the covers". *Narrative*, 24. See also the obscure reference to Smyrna in *ibid.*, 44. The books in question were improving Christian works, so one assumes the library in Smyrna was attached to the London Society's mission there, and integral to its work. These libraries seem to have been attractive to locals wanting reading material to improve their English. One of the books she sent must surely have been a copy of her Hebrew BCP. One wonders where that copy went.

as Robert Clayton (1659–1758), Bishop of Clogher, in his *Dissertation on Prophecy* (1749) and *Enquiry into the Time of the Coming of the Messiah and the Restoration of the Jews in a Letter to an Eminent Jew* (1751). It was, it appears, undergoing something of a revival in Miss Nevill's milieu.

Ireland, and indeed Dublin, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century is central to our theme. Millennial expectations were rife among the Irish Catholic peasantry in this period, fuelled by the *Prophecies of Pastorini* and by wandering “prophecy men” such as “Barney McHaighrey”. These expectations lay behind the unrest and disorder associated with the Rockites and the Ribbonmen.²⁹ Admittedly, this millenarianism was focused on the impending victory of Catholicism over Protestantism (1825 was set as the year of victory), but it must have contributed to the apocalyptic atmosphere of the time, already highly charged thanks to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

More directly pertinent was the presence in Trinity College Dublin of influential teachers such as Richard Graves (“Dean Graves”; 1763–1829), who was a passionate Restorationist and supporter of the London Society, and who interested several generations of students in the conversion of the Jews. Two of these students were Alexander McCaul (1799–1863) and John Nelson Darby (1800–1882). The latter, now seen by many as the father of Christian Zionism, is particularly relevant here.³⁰ Miss Nevill certainly knew Michael Solomon Alexander, and probably also McCaul, but what of Darby? The chances that they were acquainted, however tenuously, are high. Both can be classified as “salon” or “drawing-room evangelicals”, by which I mean that they attended meetings in private, middle-class houses in which people of a broadly evangelical persuasion came together to pray, to study the Bible (particularly prophecy), and to hear fashionable, non-establishment speakers – a phenomenon which seems to have been

29 See James S. Donnelly Jr., “Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821–4”, in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780–1914*, ed. Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 102–42. Barney McHaighrey is a character in William Carleton's “The Irish Prophecy Man”, *Irish Penny Journal* 1, no. 50 (12 June 1841): 393–6.

30 See Timothy C. F. Stunt, “Darby, John Nelson (1800–1882)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Max S. Weremchuk's *John Nelson Darby: A Biography* (Neptune, NJ: Loiseaux Brothers, 1992) is rich in information but its judgments should be accepted with caution. On Darby's Restorationism see Paul R. Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2007).

growing in Dublin at this time.³¹ Since they belonged to the same small social class, and held similar beliefs, it is likely that they found themselves in the same drawing rooms or had acquaintances in common. The centre of Dublin is not big, and they must at least occasionally have passed one another in the street. Indeed, Darby spent 1827 (a crucial year in his spiritual development) at his sister Susan's house in the city, recovering from a riding accident, and in the 1830s he seems to have been a regular visitor to her home. She was married to Edward Pennefather, in his day one of the greatest advocates of the Irish Bar, who became Attorney General in 1830, Solicitor General 1835 and again 1841, and Lord Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench from 1841 to 1846. There is no way that Pennefather would have been unaware of the Marianne Nevill Case, and it is surely not unlikely that it would have cropped up in conversation with Darby, who had been called to the Irish Bar (though he never practised). Furthermore, Darby worshipped from time to time with the little congregation at 11 Aungier Street, which is now seen as the origins of the worldwide Plymouth Brethren movement.

Even more intriguing is the fact that Miss Nevill's rising interest in Restorationism coincided with the Powerscourt Conferences, held at the stately home of Lady Powerscourt just south of Dublin – the ultimate salon-evangelical event. These were an offshoot of the conferences hosted by Henry Drummond at his stately home at Albury near London, and like them they were taken up largely with questions of unfulfilled prophecy. Darby, along with Edward Irving, was a leading light at these gatherings (and nearly married Lady Powerscourt, to boot), which were crucial in the development of his Dispensationalist form of Restorationism. There is no evidence that Miss Nevill attended any of the Powerscourt Conferences (they were a male-dominated affair, with Lady Powerscourt as the “Queen Bee”), but I find it deeply suggestive that Miss Nevill's own intensified interest in Restorationism coincided exactly with them. Restorationism was in the air in Dublin at the time.³²

My sense is that she was well aware of these developments, through

31 See some characteristically acute remarks on drawing-room evangelicals in Timothy C. F. Stunt, “Evangelical Cross-Currents in the Church of Ireland 1820–33”, in *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish: Studies in Church History*, ed. W. J. Shields and Diana Woods (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 215–29.

32 See Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes, eds., *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2005* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt, eds., *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millenarianism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2006).

probably more from written sources and hearsay. She was not an active member of the main networks that were currently debating Restorationism, though she had her own little “Friends of Israel” group. A major problem is that she did not write much explaining her own views of prophecy. There are some relevant pages at the end of her *Narrative*, but we have to rely largely on the account given by Blackburne in his defence. He explicitly says that his exposition of her ideas was based on notes she gave him, but that is hardly a substitute for a lengthy and orderly account in her own voice. Her views strike me as amateur and idiosyncratic. Although she was doubtless voraciously reading books and articles, she was an autodidact, largely working things out for herself. Her social situation, too, needs to be considered. She was a spinster of ample means, with time on her hands. She had a good mind, but it had not been trained and disciplined by an education commensurate with her intellectual powers. And she was excluded by social convention from the cut and thrust of discussion that buffed up the ideas of men like Graves, Darby, and McCaul. She was trying to find her way in an intellectual world dominated by men, and was probably constantly, if subtly, being patronized and belittled by them.

This relative isolation manifests itself in two aspects of her Restorationism which were at the time, I think, highly unusual, if not unique. The first is her Idumean hypothesis. This was the idea that the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land would take place in two stages. First they would return to Idumea/Edom and establish themselves there, and only then go up to Jerusalem. Indeed, she held that Christ would come again first to Edom and from there make his way in triumph to Jerusalem. I cannot think of anyone who held this two-stage return theory at the time, or indeed later.

It is possible that she traced the idea of a return first to Idumea back to a vision she had had as a girl (possibly around the age of sixteen). She was open about this vision, even at her trial, and the prosecution made much of it. Her counsel played it down. He represented the Idumean theory as the convergence of several lines of reasoning. The first was a close if quirky reading of a number of biblical prophecies (counsel let slip that her exegesis did not entirely convince even him, but commented reasonably that it would be unfair to take poor biblical exegesis as evidence of insanity). The second was the fact that Idumea/Edom had been recently “rediscovered” by travellers to the Middle East, and they had written vividly about Petra and the thirty ruined cities that lay scattered across the

land. They stressed the utter desolation of the country, and commented on how this desolation had been predicted by the ancient Hebrew prophets: Idumea was an awful and instructive example of the judgment of God. All this doubtless worked powerfully on Miss Nevill's romantic imagination. The third was a "sign of the times", namely the seizure of power in Egypt by Mehmet Ali Pasha in 1811, and his continued success in reviving the Egyptian economy, modernizing the country, and extending his power into Palestine, Jordan, and what is now Saudi Arabia. Ali Pasha made no secret of his ambition to create a new Egyptian empire in the Middle East reaching up to the Euphrates. The rise of the pro-Western Ali Pasha caused a flurry of excitement in Restorationist circles, and there were some who saw him as possibly the key to the return of the Jews to their ancient land. Among these was Miss Nevill. She cast him in the role of a new Cyrus, and envisaged her Jews gaining access to Idumea through his territories.

The second unusual feature of Miss Nevill's Restorationism was her determination to do something practical about it. She tried to set up a scheme to organize and finance Jewish emigration not to Palestine but to Idumea. It was this scheme, which seemed to have been reaching maturity around 1835, that ostensibly set the family alarm-bells ringing, and provoked the petition to have her declared insane. I say "ostensibly" because there is another more sinister way of reading the evidence. The Gearys may have been swindling Miss Nevill out of a significant part of her inheritance, diverting to their own coffers income which her father had intended for her. It was when she began seriously to inquire into the matter, that they instituted the *de lunatico inquierendo*. This was, in effect, a smokescreen to cover their own malfeasance. If Miss Nevill could be declared insane, and incapable of managing her own finances, then they were home and dry. The ploy worked. They even, to a degree, bamboozled Miss Nevill. She was so outraged and wounded by the charge of insanity, and so consumed with refuting it, that she took her eye off the main issue relating to her inheritance. The family conjured up a vision of her squandering her fortune on a madcap venture, and becoming a prey to charlatans and mountebanks. If the prosecution is to be believed, there were certainly some crazy aspects to her project. She tried to print a currency which, they claimed, would be used in the Idumean settlements, and she started drawing plans for the new cities that would have to be built, and commissioned an architect to look them over. In fact, as Blackburne, her counsel, was at pains to point out, she was rather shrewd about the whole business, and only risked £150 of her own capital, a trifling sum

compared to her income and fortune. She tried to interest other people in her scheme, and to solicit subscriptions from them to fund it. She entered into correspondence with officials in the entourage of Ali Pasha, to recruit him to her cause, and seems to have been listened to with considerable respect. Drawing on her knowledge of textiles, she even offered advice on reviving the Egyptian linen industry. She did her homework on Idumea and argued that the land, though now desolate and empty, had once supported a considerable population and, with the right investment in agriculture and industry (including mining), it could do so again.

All this is astonishing. I know of no Restorationist at this time who was thinking in such concrete, practical terms. The others were focused exclusively on converting the Jews. The return to the Land would take place in God's good time, and under his agency. Take Darby, for example. Restorationism was central to his eschatology, but the last thing that would have crossed his mind would have been any action about it. To try to make it happen would have been (to borrow a Jewish phrase) "to force the redemption". It is not at all clear what inspired Miss Nevill's scheme. She seems to have been aware of Moses Montefiore's attempts financially to support various Jewish communities and enterprises in the Levant (there is an allusion to these in Blackburne's defence), and she actually tried to interest him in her plans through a letter to his wife Judith. Lady Montefiore's reply was short, friendly, and noncommittal, but the founding of Mishkenot Sha'ananim lay nearly thirty years in the future. The Jerusalem Bishopric may afford some parallels. It eventually got involved in establishing schools, fostering businesses, and offering medical services to the Jews of Palestine, and in the end it provoked the Old Yishuv to develop these services for themselves. It thus contributed in an indirect way to building up the infrastructure of the Jewish community in Palestine, and so played a part – now largely forgotten – in the founding of the State of Israel. However, although Michael Solomon Alexander and his successors were Restorationists, they saw these ventures fundamentally as acts of Christian charity and as instruments of conversion, not as a contribution to the restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient land. Besides, the Jerusalem Bishopric did not properly get going till 1842, some years after Miss Nevill had devised her scheme.

I suggest that it is not totally fanciful to see Miss Nevill's scheme, with its combination of political action to get a "great power" (in her case the Egypt of Ali Pasha) to guarantee and sponsor Jewish settlement, and practical measures to introduce settlers to build up agriculture and

industry, as similar to later Herzlian Zionism. The only major difference was that while Herzlian Zionism (eventually) put its efforts into creating a state in Palestine, Miss Nevill, perversely, wanted to dump her Jewish settlers first in southern Jordan.

Later Zionism was to show that Miss Nevill's basic ideas could actually work. However, her advocacy of them in 1830s Dublin was sufficient to get her declared mad and made a ward of court. It was her Restorationist beliefs that were at the very heart of the case against her. She seems to have had complete control of her inheritance, which was without entail, and had she simply squandered it in riotous living, there might have been little her family could have done about it. Substantial fortunes were regularly lost by wastrels, both men and women. What the family had to do was establish that she was not *compos mentis* and was in the grip of a delusion which was causing her irrationally to throw her money away. That delusion was her Restorationism. The implications were not lost on her fellow-Restorationists. She records that after the judgment against her, agitated Restorationists convened a meeting in Dublin to consider whether they should preach the usual annual sermons on the conversion of the Jews. Some were seriously worried that if they made their views too publicly known they too could be declared insane.³³ Marianne Nevill was clearly a strange, somewhat delusional woman, but an interesting question is this: had she been a man, would attitudes have been different? Would she have been treated more indulgently by posterity? She might have been celebrated, for all her oddities, as a radical visionary. Instead, she was all too easily fitted into the stereotype of the weak-minded woman whose male relations had a duty to save her from herself.

The memory of Miss Nevill faded quickly, even, as noted, in circles which might have been expected to preserve it. I have speculated that she was deliberately "blacked", because her trial had given a good idea a bad name. McCaul and others did not want to be branded lunatics. The

33 "It is a curious fact, that shortly after Miss N. was condemned, a meeting of the clergy was held, at No.—, Grafton Street, to consider if they would be made lunatics, should they preach the usual Annual Sermons for the conversion of the Jews; and it was agreed to be dangerous, but that they might get preachers from England and Scotland, who would not be under the liabilities of the law of lunacy. This course was adopted; and until seven years after, no Sermons were preached in Dublin by Irish clergymen, but by Rev. Mr. Noel, and others. One of Miss Nevill's counsel attended a sermon by one of these Englishmen, and said he might just as well be made a lunatic of, as it was the same doctrine she held of the evangelization of the Jews, and their restoration, for which an Irish jury had condemned her." Nevill, *Narrative*, 42.

revival of interest in her in recent years has focused on her prowess as a needlewoman (in connection with the sale of her scroll at Christie's in 2009), or on her as a victim of patriarchal oppression. Her case cries out for feminist analysis. A single woman of independent means and a sharp mind, who pursues her own ideas, is seen as a threat to patriarchy, which can only discipline and control her by having her declared insane. She was by no means the only single woman in Victorian Britain to be mistreated in this way. The one saving aspect of her tragedy was the fact that she was not committed to a Bedlam, where, even if she had not been insane on entry, she soon would have been. Instead, she was put under house arrest. Miss Nevill has featured in some recent studies of the treatment of female insanity in Victorian Britain. She has, then, been celebrated as a needlewoman and honoured as a feminist martyr. But I suggest that she also merits mention in the history of Restorationism and Christian Zionism. She did not have the education or the opportunities of a Graves, a Darby, or a McCaul to get her ideas out but, against appalling odds, in her own quirky way, she thought her thoughts and dreamed her dreams, which in retrospect were more radical, original, and prophetic than theirs.