Abstract
According to traditional scholarship, the collapse of the 1798 rebellion sounded the death knell for a united Ireland and the alliance of Ulster Protestants with Irish Catholics in the pursuit of Irish independence. The radicalism of Ulster Presbyterians, so this argument runs, who had formed the mainstay of the United Irishmen, gave way to a Unionist conservatism as they joined with Church of Ireland Protestants in buttressing established institutions and resisting the Repeal movement. Ulster Presbyterianism in the early nineteenth century is identified with the Rev. Henry Cooke, conservative establishmentarian who railed against both the threat of ‘Rome rule’ and the onslaught of theological liberalism in Ulster Presbyterian circles. Cooke’s opponents, a group of Presbyterian voluntaryists who sought the overthrow of the Church of Ireland, and indeed, all ecclesiastical establishments, have been almost entirely overlooked in Irish historiography. The tradition of Presbyterian radicalism was not wholly extinguished in the aftermath of 1798 but survived within this minority voluntaryist group who supported Daniel O’Connell’s movement for repeal of the 1801 Union. The Ulster voluntaries had the backing of their Scottish counterparts, Presbyterian dissenters from the United Secession Church, who travelled to Ulster to debate with Henry Cooke and who shared the stage with O’Connell during his tour of Scotland in 1835. Scottish historiography has focused overwhelmingly on the anti-Catholic dimension to Presbyterianism and to the tensions between Scottish Presbyterians and the Irish Catholic community. This paper uncovers a less bloody and more hopeful moment in the history of Protestant-Catholic relations.

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