



The Irish-American Press As an Agent of Change.

*The Transformation
of the New York Irish
1850-1880*

A SCHOLARSHIP ARTICLE BY BRIAN COGAN

In recent years much scholarship has been dedicated to the topic of Irish immigrant assimilation in New York City in the nineteenth century. An often neglected agent of assimilation was the Irish-American press, established chiefly by exiled Irish republican rebels during the mid-nineteenth century. A particularly useful work on this subject is William Leonard Joyce's *Editors and Ethnicity: A History of the Irish American Press*. Joyce examines the influence of papers such as the *Nation* and the *Citizen* on both the resurgence of Irish nationalism and the assimilation of the Irish into the mainstream of American life. Joyce wrote that the Irish were able to assimilate by "harmonizing the Irish retrospect and American prospect in a fashion that saw the values of one become compatible with the other" (184).

While Joyce's book is a seminal text on the contribution of the Irish papers in assimilation, it does not address a crucially important factor in the Americanization of Irish immigrants in New York City at that time: specifically, that cultural assimilation involved the adoption of a new mindset —

one embodied by that most American of values, literacy — and the casting off of an old oral mindset, which had indirectly led to the stereotype of the boisterous tale-telling stage Irishman. The cultural assimilation of Irish immigrants into American society during the mid to late nineteenth century was accomplished by much more than learning to read. A more accurate characterization would be that Irish emigrants in New York City learned an entirely different way of thinking about the world, and with the help of the Irish-American press, they were assimilated culturally.

INTRODUCTION

When the Irish achieved political ascendancy in the 1880s in New York City, there was far more to the process of assimilation than meets the eye. While the Irish were always a small but formidable presence in New York, the Great Famine inspired mas-

Brian Cogan is a doctoral candidate in the Media Ecology Department, School of Education at New York University. He is the grandson and great-grandson of immigrants from Ireland. His article on the Irish-American press in New York as an agent of change was awarded the Roundtable's John O'Connor Scholarship for graduate students for the year 2000. ©2000. Published with permission of Brian Cogan.

sive migrations. As a result, the Irish-American population rose to a staggering 133,730, or 26 percent of the city, by 1850 (McCaffrey 91). Most of these new immigrants occupied the lowest rung of the economic ladder. Socially, the largely Catholic Irish were a target of nativist resentment, suspicion, and occasionally, violence. Politically, at the midpoint of the 19th century the Irish were a marginal influence at best. Yet within thirty years, Irish-Ameri-



Illustration: A caricature of the Irishman from an 1870s work by Thomas Nast published in Harper's Weekly.

cans living in New York City underwent a drastic and amazing transformation that saw them leap from the poorest of the working class in 1850 to controlling the city's government by 1880.

This was a result of many factors, including increased immigration, the powerful binding influence of the Catholic Church, the English-language skills of many Irish, and a strong sense of social coherence that characterized the Irish as an ethnic group and facilitated the Irish-American's introduction into local political structures. One rarely mentioned but key factor in this transformation was the fact that the Irish during this time period also underwent a change from being a culture largely oral in nature, one that possessed the attitudes and mindset that orality fostered, to one that was astoundingly literate. At a time when America was "as dominated by the printed word as any society" (Postman 41), the transformation of the Irish from an oral to a literate culture was also the transfor-

mation of a marginalized group of outsiders into the mainstream of American life, with all its attendant privileges and power.

One reason the Irish were able to change from an oral to a literate culture in such a relatively short period of time was the resurgence of Irish Republicanism and its inherent literacy. While the main influx of Irish in New York was forced to immigrate there due to the horrific famine of 1845-48, another group of highly educated *literate* Irish intellectuals was forced to flee after the aborted uprising of 1848. These men, in contrast to the vast majority of their countrymen already in America, were convinced that the literacy they possessed was the key that would unlock the door to a free Ireland under Irish rule. Desperate to see the work they had started in Ireland flourish in America, they used any means at their disposal to educate their uneducated New York brethren in order to inculcate them with Republicanism, and the same passion for a free Ireland that they themselves possessed. Being an extremely literate group of exiles, they relied upon the power of the printed word, specifically newspapers, pamphlets and journals to make the case for the idea of a free and united Ireland.

Their task was extremely difficult since a main reason that the Irish were as denigrated and economically deprived was *because* they were an oral culture, in contrast with other immigrant groups, and American culture in general. The stereotype of the drunken, boisterous tale-spinning Irishman of stage and caricature was almost identical to the characteristics of a primarily oral culture as viewed by scholars such as Ong (1982), Lord (1960), and Goody (1987). In a few short years the astounding popularity of the Irish newspapers in New York City, with their highly literate brand of Republicanism, was to transform Irish-American culture.

Part 1. Immigration and Other Factors

IMMIGRATION

The horrific famine of 1845-8 completely disrupted the fabric of Irish life, reducing the population of Ireland by over 2 1/4 million due to starvation and immigration. Over a million Irish fled to America alone (Williams 18). A Dublin newspaper, the *Nation*, reported on May 3rd 1848 that "The wharfs are crowded with people and choked with baggage. The harbors are full with crazy, ill condi-

tioned hulks, taken from the corn or timber trades to meet the overwhelming demand for sea room." While over a million were desperate to leave Ireland, there was also another group that was forced to leave during the same time period, albeit more reluctantly than those who fled from the famine.

The end of the eighteenth century had also seen the start of a full-scale revival of Irish literary and political aspirations among the upper classes. Some were content to await the incremental advances in civil rights advocated by O'Connell and the Repeal movement. Others, inspired by the martyrdom of Robert Emmet and the radical and republican movements sweeping Europe during that time period, were less patient. The *Nation* reported on January 1, 1848 that there was "a real growth of nationality among the higher classes." While there had been many revolutionary movements over the previous few centuries, they had always failed. The "Young Ireland" aborted rebellion of 1848 was to prove no more successful (Grimes 325).

The stillborn Young Ireland revolution of "professionals and intellectuals" (Miller 285) forced the leaders who were not imprisoned to flee. Naturally most chose the nation with the highest concentration of Irish citizens outside of Ireland, America. As Daniel Moynihan noted "defeat made for flight and the bright ones left" (Greeley xv). The intellectual revolutionaries who were able to flee to America came over with a "quenchless hatred of Great Britain" (D'arcy 2) and "a regard for the possibilities of politics" (Moynihan and Glazer 57). This smaller but more educated group was forced to follow the largely uneducated masses to the refuge of America, where a new "dynamic" in class distinction (Bodnar xx) and the lack of direct British influence, allowed Irish immigrants to transform America into a breeding ground for a rebirth in republican sentiment. Joseph O'Grady wrote in *How The Irish Became Americans* that "the famine sent the masses to America, the Young Ireland movement and its abortive revolution provided their leaders" (38). By the 1850's, exiled Irish republicans in New York City "had fashioned the strategy that would last into the twentieth century" (Williams 113). That strategy was to educate and inculcate republican values into the disposed exiles in the new world. In order for this to happen the Irish in America would need to undergo a transformation they had resisted with

all of their might at home. To the exiled members of the Young Ireland movement the only hope for a united Ireland was the necessary transformation of the Irish immigrants in New York City from an oral culture to a literate one.

ORALITY, LITERACY AND CLASS

In the 1840s most Irish immigrants in New York City were functionally illiterate, just the same as they were back in Ireland. Because of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the educational and literacy rate had increased somewhat in Ireland, but hardly to the level of neighboring England, and the rest of the world. In Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, literacy in English was looked upon with some suspicion, as literacy in English in Ireland was initially promoted to wipe out the native Irish language (Graff 1987, 248), Irish, which had been outlawed as a spoken and written language for several hundred years already. Although many did learn English as a way of maintaining some social coherence and engaging in a society dominated by Britain, almost half of Ireland may have been Irish speakers up until the nineteenth century. For all intents and purposes those who spoke Irish as a primary tongue were far more likely to be illiterate than those forced to learn and use English on a daily basis. English was associated with literacy, which to many was associated with cultural genocide. Hence there was a connection between the Irish language, orality and Irish patriotism. Heroic legends, tales and songs passed down orally generation to generation may have acted to re-enforce a tendency towards resistance in a culture as oral as Ireland (Cogan, B. 1994). Thus the impetus to remain an oral culture took on an element of resistance against British hegemony. Even the standardization of print fostered by the printing press did little to change the situation in Ireland. According to Peter Fallon "Ireland remained primarily an oral country until well after the coming of the printing press" (219).

According to authors such as Walter Ong (1982) Jack Goody (1967) Eric Havleock (1963) and Albert Lord (1995), there is a distinct difference in mindset between a primarily oral culture and one that is primarily literate. Goody notes that writing affects the cognitive process in significant ways (290), leading to a more systematic organization of concepts. A primarily oral culture is forced by the

lack of writing to process and pass down information in different ways than a literate culture would. Memorization is vital in a society where history, law and genealogy cannot simply be "looked up." Oral communities are forced to rely on formulaic memorization, (Lord 133), heavy use of aggregates, alliteration, mnemonic patterns and redundancy (Ong 39). The oral "canon," or a culture's body of knowledge must be structured in a way to make it memorable. Thus the hero of a tale tends to be described by "heavy" epithets ("clever" Ulysses, "wise" Nestor, etc.). Proverbs, in order to be effective, must not simply store knowledge, but are judged in contrast to their perceived wisdom alongside other proverbs, stories or riddles. Boasting, bragging and "topping" other tales figures strongly within oral narratives (Ong 44). Oral cultures also tend to be largely homeostatic and resistant to change (Ong 41). As a result of the formulaic, narrative-based patterns of information processing and retrieval in a primarily oral culture, innovation is not as prevalent as in a literate culture. Oral cultures tend to be conservative and resistant to change.

People in literate cultures, such as those in Great Britain, found the Irish mindset to be puzzling and confounding. The "brawling, boisterous and sentimental" Irishman (Joyce, William 155) is not simply an easy stereotype, but to the literate English invaders, it must have seemed the easiest way to categorize the essentially alien "oral" Irishman they were attempting to "civilize." The Irish "fool", subject of so many racist Irish "jokes" was the result of the clash between oral Ireland and literate Britain (O'Sullivan 71). The difference was not merely of race, but one of mindset, a difference between the homeostatic oral Irish, and the linear literate British, a distinction that was to survive up until Catholic emancipation and the famine struck "the final blow against the old Irish sense of identity" through widespread immigration (Greeley 63). By the year 1900, almost 95% of the Irish could be categorized as literate. (McCafferey, 215). However the masses forced to flee to America would not be recipients of this change in identity.

At the time of the highest rate of Irish immigration to America in the late 1840s it seems likely that approximately one half of Irish immigrants to America were literate in English (Miller 326). This percentage is disputed by Schrier, who puts the number closer to 60% (22), and Graff, who notes a

literacy rate of less than 40% in Ireland in 1840 (Graff 1987, 248). It is extremely difficult to arrive at an exact number due to conflicting surveys, and a large contingent of native Irish speakers, of whom most likely the vast majority were illiterate, also immigrated to America at this time (Williams 18). As many as half a million of the Irish immigrants to



Illustration: A stereotypical representation of the "brawling, boisterous" Irishman by Thomas Nast published in Harper's Weekly.

America during this time period, or approximately 25% of all Irish immigrants, may have been native Irish speakers (Miller 297), almost all of whom were illiterate in English (Nilsen 255). Kerby Miller has written that in the 1840s it was not uncommon for entire ships of Irish immigrants to lack not only skills in literacy, but a command of the English language as well (Miller 326).

Harvey Graff had noted that many considered "literate" during this time period did not possess sophisticated writing skills, or even the skills that we associate with even basic literacy. Many considered "literate" could only sign their name or make a mark. During the 1840s, the Irish who were considered literate could be further divided up into 27% who could read and write, while another 19% could read only (Graff 1987 337). This percentage is probably largely skewed to the benefit of the mostly Protestant upper classes ascendant in Ireland at the time. Those most likely to immigrate to America out of desperation during the 1840s may have had basic skills in reading and writing, but probably could not be cat-

egorized by the modern notion of functional literacy. According to Miller 75% of the immigrants to America at this time were laborers and servants (295), a group that would hardly have had a higher than average literacy rate. Women in particular were likely to be less literate than men. Dublin's *The Emerald: An Illustrated Literary Journal*

noted on February 15th 1868

that even by then, most women possessed only enough literary skills to "read the Missal" at Mass, but "few could write more than to make their mark." While many

immigrants in America were literate, as evidenced by the almost one million letters sent home to Ireland every year (Schrier 22), it seems clear that the division of literacy was largely predicated on economic and gender status. The average Irish worker in New York City in 1850 was most likely illiterate and grateful just to make enough money to live on. Becoming more educated, advancing in politics and freeing Ireland from England's yoke were concerns held primarily by the higher strata of Irish immigrants, who prior to 1850 were more likely to be "Scots-Irish," Protestant, and therefore literate. There was little connection between them and the mostly Catholic, largely oral, lower classes. The vast majority of the Irish in New York City faced a difficult life without the advantages of the higher level of abstraction fostered by a literate mindset. For most of the Irish in New York City, there were far greater concerns than far-off Ireland.

Part 2. Conditions in New York City 1850

The Irish who arrived fleeing the famine found themselves in only a marginally better economic situation than in Ireland. Uneducated, illiterate and used to demeaning ill-paying jobs, they soon found themselves vastly over-represented in the lowest rung of the city's economic strata. Their

death rate was considerably higher than any other economic group at the time, and after the famine, twice that of their Irish brethren still at home (Williams 92). This is not surprising since the Irish accounted for 85% of the city's foreign born laborers (Cogan Joseph, 2) at a time when "only 5% of Germans, Scots and Scandinavians,

and under 5% of English and French immigrants were laborers" (Ernst 69). The Irish urban neighborhood was "probably the poorest in the

city" (Grimes x).

Unfortunately, economic deprivation was not the only peril the new

immigrants were faced with. They had left a country dominated by those antithetical to them, and arrived in another that despite its promise, largely shared their former British overlords disdain.

No one could really figure the Irish out. George Templeton Strong noted in his diary of July 7th 1858 that "Our Celtic fellow citizens are almost as remote from us in temperament and constitution as the Chinese" (Nilsen 255). Indeed, the Irish seemed as inscrutable and as worthy of disdain as Blacks and Asians in New York City at that time. Sometimes this manifested itself in intensely racist humor and mockery, as "in Anglo-American culture it was assumed that anyone that was black or Irish was an endless source of fun" (Williams 84). However, unlike their black fellow laborers, whom the Irish regarded with some mistrust, the Irish had no defenders. According to Noel Ignatiev, "No one gave a damn for the poor Irish, blacks had Quakers and abolitionists, but the Irish had no one" (Ignatiev 178). Ethiopian theater, or blackface, was challenged in popularity only by the characterization of the boisterous rowdy stage-Irishman.

There were "stereotypical portrayals of Irishmen in every popular medium: newspaper articles, travel books, novels and short stories, plays, songs, vaudeville sketches, political cartoons" (Williams 3), to name but a few. The stage Irishman, the boisterous tale telling buffoon, was an oral character, as was the "good natured paddy" who was generous, hospitable and courageous (O'Sullivan 70).

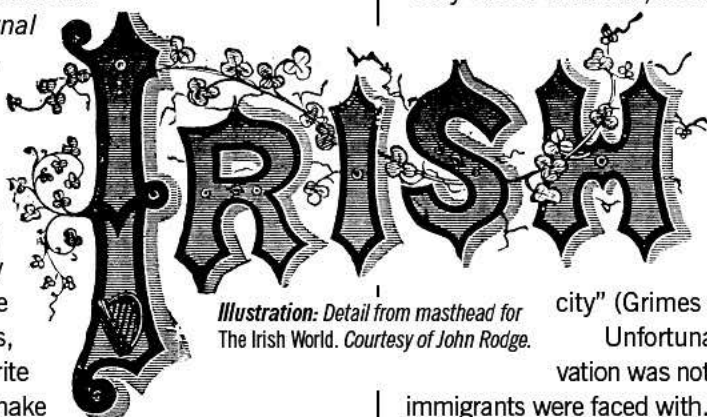


Illustration: Detail from masthead for The Irish World. Courtesy of John Rodge.

THE CITIZEN.

JOHN MITCHEL,
Editor and Proprietor.

VOL. I. NEW YORK, SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 1854. NO. 34.

Publications.

"THE CITIZEN."

RATES OF ADVERTISING.

Transient Advertisements, each insertion.....	10 cents per line.
Monthly.....	2 Do. Do.
Quarterly.....	5 Do. Do.
Yearly.....	15 Do. Do.

50 "THE CITIZEN" is published every Saturday. Terms \$3 per annum; Single Copies, 6 cents. The Retail Trade supplied at \$4 per hundred. Subscribers and Agents will be invariably required to pay in Advance. Communications to be addressed to

JOHN MITCHEL,
OFFICE, NO. 3 SPRING STREET, N. Y.

Wholesale Agents

T. R. GALLENDER, 85 SOUTH THIRD STREET, PHILADELPHIA.
HENRY TAYLOR, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND.
JULIUS QUINN, CINCINNATI, OHIO.
CALIFORNIA AGENTS.—J. W. SULLIVAN, Kearney-st., Next to the Post Office.
DUBLIN AGENCY.—SEARSON BOOKSELLER, Capel-st., Dublin.
OUR TRAVELLING AGENT FOR THE SOUTH.—CAPTAIN F. G. CONNELL has been appointed our Agent to collect subscriptions for the "CITIZEN," and to establish local agencies in the South. He has left on the 4th, and we have no doubt the friends of the paper will do all in their power to forward his mission.

"CITIZEN."

ALL ORDERS FOR THE "CITIZEN" WILL BE PROMPTLY ATTENDED to by the undersigned, on application at his Newspaper and Periodical Depot in Boston, between 130 and 132 NASSAU ST.

WILLIAM BU-TEED.

BOOKS RELATING TO IRELAND.

JUST RECEIVED

BROOKLYN RELIQUES OF IRISH POETRY;
LANIGAN'S ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF IRELAND

(4 vols.)

Curran's Life, by his Son (3 vols.) (O'Connor's Chronicle of Ed. (2 vols.);
Knox's Ireland; Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (2 vols.);
Antiquities of Ireland (2 vols.); Baker's English,
Irish and Scotch Calendars (2 vols.);
Annals of the Four Masters
Translated by O'Conor.

Business Notices.

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Who that is suffering with that dreadful disease, Dyspepsia, would not give almost anything to be relieved? We say confidently and enthusiastically that

HEYMAN'S DYSPEPSIA ELIXIR

will give speedy and permanent relief. Though it has but very recently been offered to the public, yet, we have experienced its use variously in its way: it has never yet failed to cure. Numerous certificates of those who have been cured can be sent at the

PRINCIPAL OFFICE, 187 BROADWAY, N. Y.

We submit two among the number.

CERTIFICATE.

"New York, June 24th, 1854.

"HEYMAN'S DYSPEPSIA ELIXIR."—The power over the above disease is not equalled by any other preparation for the cure of Dyspepsia. I have had several physicians for the last three years, who did all they could, and did not reach the disease. I have had two bottles of the Elixir, and now I feel myself cured of this horrible disease, Dyspepsia.

For further information call on me at my office, 330 Broadway street.

You must follow the directions, if you want to eradicate the disease.

A. P. CARMAN, D.D.S.

Member of the Society of Dental Surgeons, of the State of New York.

WHAT THE ELIXIR WILL ACCOMPLISH IN ONE WEEK!

I saw an announcement in the paper of "HEYMAN'S DYSPEPSIA ELIXIR," and called at the office, 187 Broadway, New York, where Mr. Heyman, by telling me what would be done for me, and how it would be effected by his medicine, induced me to purchase a bottle, though I had but little faith that it would help me.

I have now used the medicine exactly one week, and I am better than I have been before for two years; in fact, I feel well.

All the food I ate before distressed me, and I felt constantly miserable, and tried many things to obtain relief, but all to no purpose. Now I can eat anything with impunity; my digestive organs seem in perfect order; I am, in fact, a well man.

I can be seen at any time during the day, at my place of business, 170 Broadway, and cheerfully invite any person who may wish to satisfy himself more fully of the efficacy of HEYMAN'S DYSPEPSIA ELIXIR, to call and see me, and I will be most happy to recommend the medicine, and tell the patient upon what highly successful results it has produced. I know how to sympathize with those suffering from Dyspepsia. Given the relief I have already experienced, I rejoice for the price of the bottle, but I believe myself permanently cured.

J. A. ALEXANDER.

No. 170 Broadway, under the Bow-Window.

CITY AND COUNTY OF NEW YORK, ss.—I, Isaac Alexander, Jeweller, of 170 Broadway, in the city of New York, being duly sworn, depose that the contents of the above certificate are true.

ISAAC ALEXANDER.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 17th day of August, 1854.

E. R. BROADBENT, Commissioner of Deeds.

THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF THE AGE.

Plagues, Pains, Fevers, and others, can purchase no remedy equal to DR. TOBIAS' VENETIAN LINIMENT, the specific, cooling, emollient, chronic rheumatism, sore-throat, toothache, neuralgia, cold, croup, hoarseness, bruisings, old sores, bedsores, mosquito bites, pains in the limbs, chest, back, &c. It does not give relief, the money will be refunded. All that is asked is a trial, and use it according to the directions.

It is an English remedy, and was used by William the IV., late King of England, and certified to by him as a cure for Rheumatism, when everything else had failed. Over 10,000,000 bottles have been sold in the United States, without a single failure, and many have stated they would not be without it if it was \$10 per bottle, in case of Croup, as it is as certain as it is applied.

It cures Cholera when first taken in a few hours: Dysentery in half an hour; Toothache in five minutes. It is perfectly harmless to take internally and is recommended by the most eminent physicians in the United States Price \$2 and 10 cents.

Dr. Tobias could fill a dozen newspapers with certificates and letters, relating to the wonderful cures accomplished by this Liniment, but our letters would not suffice, so every person who does not obtain relief, need not pay for it.

Dr. Tobias has put up a HORSE LINIMENT in plain bottles, which is warranted cheaper and better than any other, for colds, sore throats, old sores, cuts, swellings, &c., &c. Price 5 cents.

DR. TOBIAS' Office, No. 100 North-st., New York, and 17.

DISEASES OF THE LIVER.

When the celebrated Dr. Rush declared that dyspepsia was a disease, he announced a truth which the experience and observation of modern men is every day confirming. The many apparently innocent excesses of those who indulge in the use of spirituous liquors, may be thus accounted for. The true cause of complaint, which is taken for indigestion, is very frequently a diseased state of the liver. No organ in the human system, when deranged, produces a more frightful catalogue of diseases. And if instead of applying remedies to the manifestation of disease, as is too often the case, physicians would prescribe with view to the original cause, fewer deaths would result from diseases induced by a deranged state of the liver. Three-fourths of the diseases enumerated under the head of consumption, have their seat in a diseased liver. (See Dr. Oen's great works.)

Purchasers will please be careful to ask for DR. M'LANE'S CELEBRATED LIVER PILLS, and take none else. There are other Pills purporting to be LIVER PILLS, now before the public. Dr. M'LANE'S LIVER PILLS, also his celebrated VERMIFUGE, can now be had at all respectable Drug Stores in the United States and Canada.

at 66

J. DONOHUE RESPECTFULLY INFORMS HIS FRIENDS AND the public, that having become disengaged with W. W. HUTCHINGS, his late Partner, he has made preparations for establishing himself (separately) as a member calculated to insure the highest satisfaction to every person, at No. 4 ROBERT STREET, near CHURCH-st., where he will be most happy to

at 157

Illustration: John Mitchel became editor of The Citizen in 1854 after escaping from imprisonment. Courtesy of John Ridge

Obviously this was an exaggerated, somewhat racist stereotype, but nonetheless the characteristics being mocked were based on the oral Irish mindset. Tale-telling, boasting, bragging, singing, the "heavy" stock characters always accompanied by aggregates, are characteristics of what Ong called the "psychodynamics" of orality (Ong 31). The old dispute between the English and Irish had been between an oral and literate culture. The same conflict was at work in America. Irish plays were in constant demand, even amongst the Irish themselves, who could somehow ignore the inherent racism of the plays, and even seemed to see something of themselves in the offensive caricature of the "ignorant, pugnacious and even drunken Irish buffoon" that walked the boards of the Irish stage in New York (Ernst 147).

The same held true for popular "Irish" songs, largely written by non-Irishmen, which at best regarded the Irish as a sentimental race, at worse, as a race of sub-humans. This was prevalent in most of the popular works of the day, even some by the Irish themselves. Even Samuel Lover, one of the most popular annotators of Irish music and a stu-

dent of the legendary Thomas Moore (who had originated the prodigious task of collecting oral Irish songs for publication) was not immune to "sentimentalizing" the Irish in his collections of songs. Lover was notorious for "adapting" lyrics in order to sell his work to a wider (British) audience. An Irish-American paper, *The New York Tablet: A Family Journal*, unfavorably reviewed his latest collection "The Lyrics of Ireland," on June 5 1858, complaining that he had "miserably failed to do his country justice" because of his offensive use of stereotypes. The *Tablet* further noted that "We have often wondered whether the exaggerated absurdities that he imparted to English audiences descriptive of Irish habits and character, were the result of his own beliefs, or merely a well-devised scheme to traffic for money on the credulity of England at the expense of his own country" (*Tablet* 10).

The popular Irish song was not looked upon favorably by the republican hierarchy. In the *Irish Citizen*, in a preamble titled "Purpose of the citizen" editor John Mitchel grumbled that "too much energy had been wasted on songs." Not that there was anything wrong with a good republican ditty

now and then, mind you. It was just that there were more important things to do, and in the hierarchy of dedication to republicanism, as Mitchel also wrote, "singing of songs is by no means the highest service to Ireland" (Zimmerman 10).

However, it was not merely the oral characteristics of the Irish that most New York residents found strange and alarming, but their religion as well. When the Irish were few, their allegiance to the pope could be overlooked and even grudgingly tolerated; however, the sheer numbers that fled to New York guaranteed that the level of tension would increase dramatically.

Catholicism was anathema to many in New York City in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Glazer and Moynihan, new immigrants were categorized "depending on color, on religion, on how close the group was felt to be to the Anglo-Saxon center" (15). Accordingly, the Irish Catholics found themselves ranked very low. It was feared that the influx of hordes of Roman Catholics "jeopardized the very foundations of Protestant civilization" (Jenkins 8). In 1850, the Reverend Daniel Parsons could still find over ten thousand hardy souls to attend a lecture on the evils of the Irish and their Roman Catholic Church (McCaffery 100). John Orr, known as "the Angel Gabriel", also had a sizable audience for his anti-Catholic rants every Sunday on the steps of city hall (Sante 253). Anti-Catholic orators in the aptly named Know-Nothing Party, along with allies in the Order of United Americans and the Order of the Star Spangled Banner (Finson 40), unapologetically identified themselves as being "Anti-Romanism, Anti-Bedism, Anti-Papalism, Anti-Nunneryism, Anti-Winking Virginism, and Anti-Jesuitism" in their public rallies (Sante 253). Catholicism was not only alien, but seditious and "incompatible with American ideals" (Bodnar 1978, 2). In "Romanism and Its Worship" in the *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* in 1856, Frederick H. Hodge noted that "It was Luther who laid the corner-stone of these United States. Without the Protestant revolution the Constitution of the United States would be impossible as the Christian church without Christ, the corner-stone. Every conversion that takes place from the Protestant faith to that of Rome is a blow aimed at the Constitution" (Grimes 27).

Even as late as 1871, *Harper's Weekly*, already a popular American magazine, was able to



Illustration: A front page of Harper's Weekly published during 1871.

scold that "If Ecclesiastical Rome has conquered Ireland, she will not be suffered, even with the aid of her captor to conquer America" (Greeley 117). The Irish not only had strange (oral) customs, but were probably seditious as well.

However vitriolic the rhetoric against Irish Catholics, there was an element of truth in the allegations. The very nature of the Protestant Reformation was its literacy and the reformation was the first religious movement to use the printing press to get its message to the masses. In her book *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Elizabeth Eisenstein identifies the widespread use of print by Protestant reformers as having "contributed more to destroying Christian concord and inflaming religious warfare than any of the so-called 'arts of war' every did" (158). The

Protestant revolution, with its notion of "Bible Literacy," where each household would own and interpret scripture, was antithetical to the Catholic practice of faith mediated through the clergy. Protestants had a greater need for literacy on a daily basis than Catholics, and as Fallon notes, "Protestantism provided a greater link to literacy than Catholicism" (58). America had been founded on Protestant ideals, ideals that were based on the mindset fostered by literacy. The Catholicism of the new Irish immigrants, while effective as a force for social cohesion, also reinforced the oral nature of the Irish immigrant. This oral nature made the Irish immigrant stand out as a strange, suspicious buffoon. How could the Irish possibly assimilate

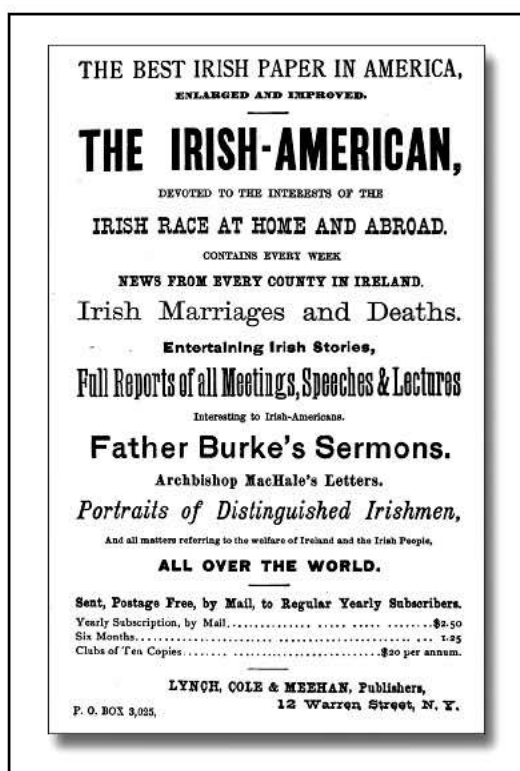


Illustration: Advertisement for The Irish-American. Courtesy of John Ridge.

into mainstream American culture when their religion, values and lifestyle marked them as the antithesis of the hardworking Protestant, educated American? The answer would be provided by a new class of exiles who saw America as a good place as any to rally support for a free Ireland. The raw manpower was present, the only question that remained was how to shape the thoughts and aspirations of immigrants whose main concern was surviving in a hostile environment. In order to

do this the very definition of what it meant to be Irish itself would need to change.

Part 3. Newspapers, Nationalism and Education

NEWSPAPERS AND INTELLECTUALS

Newspapers were hardly a novelty to the Irish who immigrated to America. Dublin and most major Irish cities either produced a local paper, or imported one of the major English or Irish papers. The largely literate upper classes supported a variety of papers, both nationalist and otherwise. While Irish nationalism had flourished among the upper classes, and diffused to the uneducated masses, as evidenced by the crowds present at O'Connells "monster" rallies, newspapers had never been an important part of this revival. For the most part newspapers in Ireland were "irrelevant to the Irish peasant" (Joyce 74). While Republican papers (when allowed) had sold well in Ireland, with many of the uneducated "gathering at the houses of readers to hear it" (MacManus 595), there nonetheless was some suspicion between the classes that might account for the newspapers lack of popularity. Francis O'Neill, the famed Chicago police Chief and annotator of Irish song scoffed, "The upper class are of a different race—a race who possess no national music, or if any, one essentially different from that of Ireland" (126). In this quote O'Neill illustrated the gulf that yawned between those who had time to plot revolution back home in Ireland, and those who found it revolutionary to have a plot of land to till. As Thomas McBrown noted in *Irish-American Nationalism*, the revival of education and the nationalism it helped to spread led to a different world view between classes, one where the "peasant and the nationalist conceived of Ireland in different ways" (13). Many peasants, too concerned with putting food on the table, had no time to ruminate on larger political issues. However, once in the puzzling and often hostile environs of New York City, the need for social cohesion, and hence newspapers, became more apparent. As McBrown also noted "the Irish-American newspaper was the chief instrument of nationalist influence. Newspapers in Ireland were largely irrelevant to the fixed life of the peasantry. To the uprooted Irish of America, they were all but a necessity" (37). The abort-

ed revolution of 1848 sent to America the men who would provide that necessity.

The mid-eighteenth century saw a massive growth of Irish American newspapers in every city with a large Irish population. During the 1850s New York had almost a dozen Irish papers including *The Irish-American*, *The Citizen*, *Irish News*, *Freeman's Journal*, *The American Celt* and *The Nation*. Boston boasted *The Pilot*, *The American Celt* (Boston), and *Illustrated Irish Nation*, among others. Philadelphia and San Francisco also were the homes of several Irish weeklies (Joyce 196). Papers ranged from the ardent republicanism of the *Citizen*, to the moderate Catholic oriented *Freeman's Journal*, but regardless of the degree of patriotic fervor of the papers editorials, all shared a vision of a free and united Ireland, and of an audience who would be receptive to that message. To many of the editors of these papers, it was a message worth exile and possible imprisonment.

The aborted uprising of 1848 caused most of the editors and writers of Irish newspapers to suddenly and fortuitously "find" themselves in America. Some were forced to flee the country, like Thomas D'arcy McGee, who arrived in 1848 disguised as a priest. Others, such as John Mitchel, escaped from banishment to Australia. But however they had managed to make their way to America, they immediately began to agitate in the way they knew to be most expedient, through newspapers. McGee declared that the first issue of the *Nation* in 1848 in New York City would be an "American sequel" to the *Dublin Nation*, the paper he had been forced to abandon (Joyce 55). The major difference between the two papers would be the receptiveness of the audience.

The Irish-American papers were started in somewhat of a vacuum. While there were thousands of Irish men and women arriving seemingly on a daily, or even hourly basis, there were serious problems in achieving social cohesion. For the most part the Irish did stick together, settling in the same enclaves and helping each other find work. However there was no voice outside of the Catholic Church that could be said to represent the Irish in New York. Archbishop Hughes was a staunch defender of his largely immigrant flock and provided a powerful impediment against nativist attacks, but his main emphasis was on the salvation of his parishioners souls in the hot-

VOL. V.	
Publications.	
CONTENTS OF NO. 105.	
Editorial.	
IRELAND AND THE DERBY ADMINISTRATION.	
THE LATE MONEY PANIC—WHAT CAUSED IT.	
THE ORPHAN'S BALL AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.	
THE WAGES STRIKE OF THE BROOKLYN WATER WORKS.	
LATEST FROM EUROPE AND INDIA.	
THE LAST FOLLOWERS! (A POEM, BY ENUL)	
Topics.	
Literature.	
Thomas Byrne; an Irish and American Jacobite Tale, by the Wicklow Dattier.	
The Lyrics of Ireland—Communicated by 'Thomastown'.	
The Round Towers of Ireland, &c.	
A Word on Irish Surnames, by Cormac.	
Correspondence.	
Letter from Dublin by Kilmaham.	
The Dublin Nation vs. Kilmaham.	
Kilmaham vs. the Dublin Nation.	
Smith O'Brien's Address to the People of Ireland.	
Letter to John Martin from John Mitchel.	
Miscellaneous.	
Symptoms of War between England and France—The French Emperor's Manifesto—Execution of Orant and Piers—Murder of young Mr. Samuels—Irish, European, Indian and American news.	
THE IRISH NEWS.	
EDITED BY THE PROPRIETOR.	
THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER	
DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF THE	
IRISH PEOPLE.	
AT HOME AND ABROAD.	
For readers and carriers, 24 per hundred.	
For advertising.—Each square of eight lines.	
Transient	25
Monthly	20
Quarterly	15
Yearly	10
N. B. Four lines or under, constitutes half a square.	
Agents or Postmasters who interest themselves in procuring and sending subscriptions, may retain for themselves or such agents one-third of all communications of a private nature should always be marked so. Those connected with the editorial department are to be addressed to Thomas Francis Meagher, and those on business to	
Richard J. Lalor,	
PUBLISHER.	
109 NASSAU STREET, N.Y.	
INDEX TO VOL. IV.—CONTINUED	
and Days of the East India Company	219
of Distinguished Irish-Americans	221
General Instructions on Youngman Affairs	223
to Army of the Confederacy	225
to Indians at the White House	227
Anniversary Hail to the Anniversary of New Orleans	229
to Knowlton's Lecture	231
Caution to Young Ladies	233
to Anna Jones	235
of Colonel Anderson	237
Biographical Table of Irishmen in America	239

Illustration: Thomas Francis Meagher escaped imprisonment in 1852 and became editor of The Irish News on Nassau Street in New York City.

bed of anti-Catholicism that was New York. Hughes preferred to concentrate on local politics and while sympathetic to Republican aims, he was suspicious of some of its proponents. The paper he founded, and controlled even after selling it, the *Freeman's Journal*, was noticeably suspicious of Republicanism because of its roots in radical European politics, and was always watchful of the inherent anti-clericalism of radicals such as McGee and Mitchel (Joyce, William 55). Hughes' main issue, strong support of separate Catholic schools as a defense against Protestant domination, "preserved the faith, but aided in isolation" (Cogan, J. 5). As a result, the Catholic Church in New York provided defense, shelter and sustenance for the mostly poor Irish immigrants, but little sense of cohesion as an Irish community. To create and shape such a community was exactly what men such as McGee and



Mitchel wanted. As Harold Graff noted in his book, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*,

by the late 18th century "European working class radicals had come to associate literacy with social and political goals" (324). In most European countries reading had "helped the working class establish a point of view of themselves in culture" (324). Perhaps because of the strong association in Ireland of the clergy with Republicanism, Irish radicals "rejected the anti-clericalism of the radical movements in Europe, but accepted nationalism" (Cogan J. 3). The moderation of the Catholic Church and the relative weakness of Irish social organizations of the time (Nilsen 275) had left a gap that the largely republican newspapers would fill.

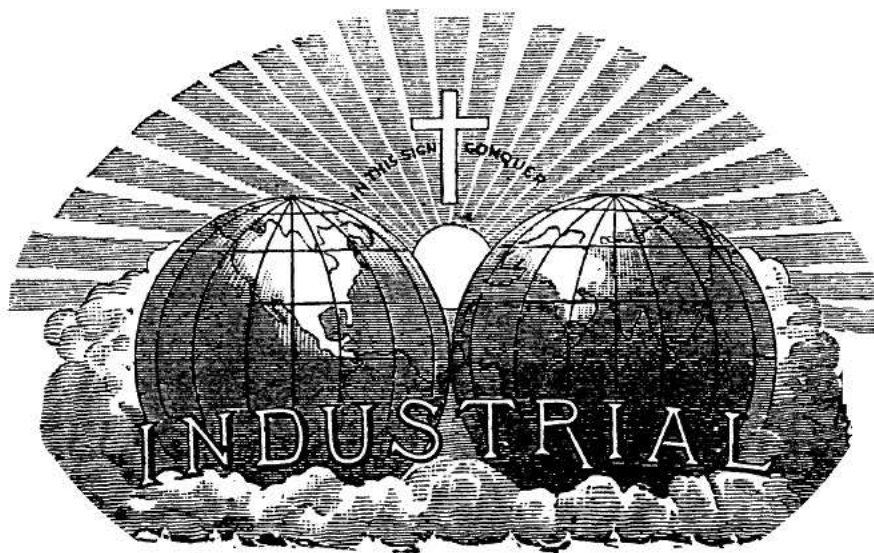
The Irish newspapers were quickly popular. *The Irish-American*, the most popular and best docu-



Illustration: Details (pp 38 & 39) from the New York Freeman's Journal and from The Irish World.

mented paper, had over 20,000 subscribers in 1850 when the Irish population in New York City was 133,000. By 1861 circulation had doubled to over 40,000 out of 200,000 Irish living in New York City (Jackson 600). The exact circulation of the other papers is more difficult to document but it is clear that they were almost as popular (Joyce 10). The widespread illiteracy of the Irish population in New York doubtlessly limited the initial impact of the Irish-

the strange forbidding world of New York City, it made perfect sense to reaffirm one's identity as Irish, and to embrace the fervent republicanism that the ethnic newspapers supported. For the disenfranchised immigrants, who "sought a degree of meaning and control" (Bodnar 206), nationalism seemed an empowering tool. Regular newspapers, while necessary for news of the city, were less useful in covering issues of interest to the city's ethnic



American papers, but it seems reasonable to conclude that as in Ireland, the papers were meant to be experienced in a group setting, perhaps read aloud to households or entire blocks of immigrants (MacManus 595). While the papers' widespread appeal to the Irish immigrant stemmed from numerous reasons such as loneliness and the presence of the shipping news, with its lists of arriving and departing ships to Ireland, it was most likely the affirmation of identity that proved the most attractive feature. In Ireland there was an unspoken sense of community and social order regardless of which oppressive landlord or aristocrat dominated the community. The local Irish community could afford the luxury of avoiding the wider stage of national politics. Whether Ireland was free or not mattered less than feeding a family.

In New York the Irish were made only too aware of their status as outsiders. Their Catholicism, customs, language (to some extent), and sheer numbers made them an easy target. Their essentially oral nature, in a country that increasingly valued literacy, made them incomprehensible. In

minorities (Stephens 151). An audience was ready for the nationalism the ethnic papers preached, and the editors of the papers were not about to disappoint their audience. As Robert Ernst noted in *Immigrant Life in New York City 1825-1863*, the 1850s saw a massive upsurge in the popularity of Irish-American newspapers, largely due to the exiled editors who "beat the drums for an Irish republic" (151). However, the syncopation of the newspapers "beat" was not merely for nationalism simply by itself, but was a call to arms to the immigrants of the city to truly join the struggle. The only way the immigrants could join the struggle was by abandoning their old oral way of life and by embracing literacy and education. Therefore the intertwined focuses of the Irish-American press were Irish nationalism and immigrant education.

NATIONALISM

To a certain extent most Irish-American papers expressed the nationalistic sentiments of Republicanism towards Ireland. Some were more mod-

erate, such as the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Irish-American*, but the goal of a united Ireland was certainly considered a worthy cause for the papers, and one that their readership supported. Editors like John Mitchel, Francis Meagher and

Thomas D'arcy McGee had left Ireland because of their active participation in the aborted rebellion of 1848 and were only too eager to resume their editorializing. The influence of the singular vision of these men on their papers, and hence on the discourse of their readers was considerable, and remarked upon within their life span. In an article "The Irish in New York" in the January 27th, 1877 issue of *McGee's Illustrated Weekly*, the influence of Mitchel, McGee

and the other editors was acknowledged: "The influence which this class of men, whether acting as editors, or in a more subordinate position,

exert on the public mind of this country is incalculable, and as far as our experience goes, healthful" (291).

Nationalism was also spread via other means, such as conversations in the pubs, at dances, socials and through republican organizations. But as Thomas Brown noted in *Irish American Nationalism*, "the Irish press was the chief instrument of nationalist influence" (37). The purpose of spreading the message of Irish nationalism permeated each issue of the Irish-American press and was stated quite explicitly by the editors. John Mitchel stated on the front page of each issue of the *Irish Citizen* that his purpose was "To develop and exalt the sentiment of Irish nationality, especially on this continent, where the citizens of Irish birth will have it in their power one day to redeem their kindred at home from oppression and raise up Ireland as an independent nation" (1).

Although Daniel Moynihan and Nathan Glazer dismissed Irish nationalism as a "hodgepodge of fine feelings and bad history with which immigrants filled a cultural void" (241), clearly it proved to be an important factor in Irish cultural cohesion. The republicanism of the papers helped to give focus and voice to a movement that may have seemed incomprehensible to the average worker, concerned primarily with survival. However, the Irish press was able to make the analogy between English domination and the conditions of the average Irish worker in New York City (Bodnar 111),



Illustration: Another New York newspaper, The Irish World, was also widely read in nationalist circles in Ireland. Irish-Americans contributed to a "Spread the Light" fund that purchased papers for shipment to Ireland through the port of New York.

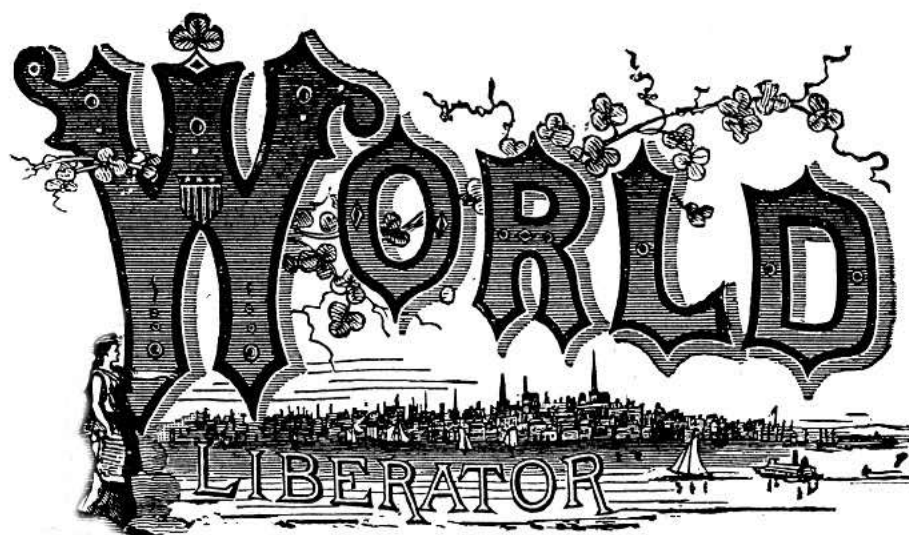


Illustration: Detail from The Irish American, 1887. Courtesy of John Ridge.

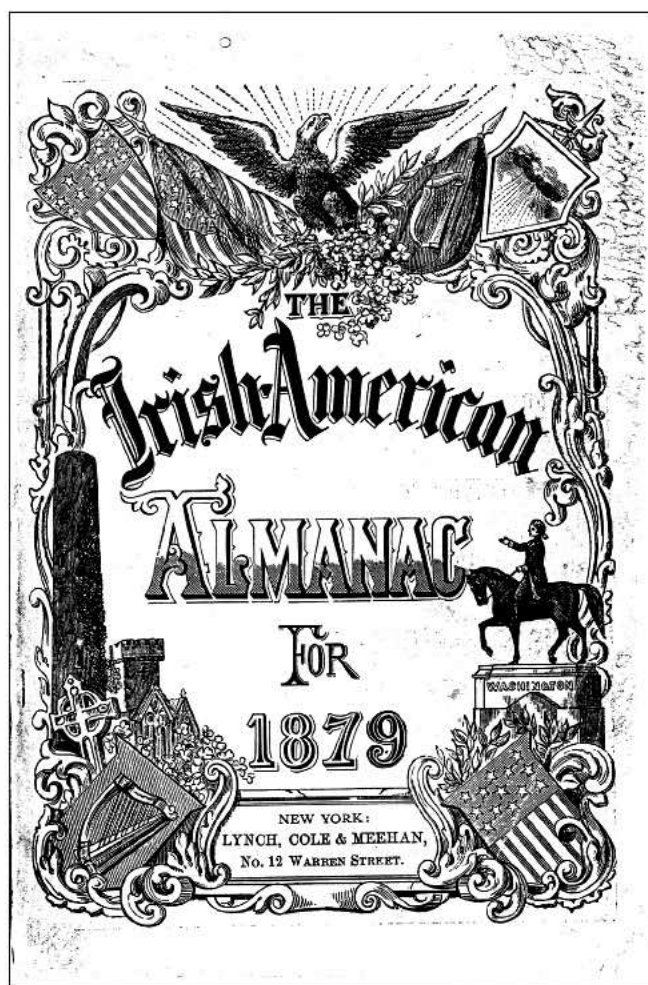


Illustration: Detail from an almanac published by The Irish American. Courtesy of John Ridge.

adding “structure to working class resentments” (Glazer and Moynihan 242). The influence of the papers in fanning the flames of Irish republicanism is evidenced by the increasing popularity of the movement itself. At home the Fenians were a small but dedicated group, but in New York City in 1866 they were able to attract 100,000 participants to a rally in Jones Wood. This was at a time when the total number of Irish in New York City numbered slightly over 200,000. (Glazer and Moynihan 242). Although hindered by infighting and power struggles with the less radical New York clergy, the editors had seen the result of decades of planning finally pay off. Mitchel and others had assumed that their American brethren only needed some gentle prodding to embrace the principles that they had largely ignored at home in Ireland. Joseph O’Grady noted that every means available

was used by the editors of the Irish press to inculcate the masses with the message of Irish republicanism. In his book *How the Irish Became Americans*, he writes:

The remnants of the Young Ireland movement had spent the decade creating plans to forge the Irish in America into a powerful force which they could use in the centuries old anglo-Irish struggle. At first they founded newspapers to reach the masses, organized, lecture tours, held picnics and parades and started to use the power of the vote to embarrass the British government whenever possible. (41)

Lectures, parades and the power of the vote were all well and good, as long as the masses were capable of receiving the intended message.

Facing a citizenry who still clung to their oral ways, this would not be easy. Although it was doubtlessly effective that the papers were read out loud to groups in the homes and pubs, clearly the potential audience would need to be convinced that literacy was necessary. It would be far more expedient for the cause of republicanism if the Irish masses received an education.

EDUCATION

The illiteracy of the majority of the Irish had been a persistent problem for the republicans even back in Ireland. In Dublin the *Irish Penny Magazine* had noted in 1841 that the purpose of journals like itself was for “refining the tastes of people, calming their passions, awakening their dormant genius...” (iii). Dublin’s version of the *Nation*, on January 1st 1848, had exhorted the masses to “follow your destiny, Work! Write! Preach to arouse!” Once in America, the main theme of the papers was to encourage Irish citizens to take advantage of the educational opportunities of the new world (Ernst 152). The only way to become a republican, and hence a “true” Irishman, would be to acquire the literacy skills necessary for following the arguments set forth in newspapers such as the *Citizen*. Reading was not encouraged as a skill for “mere amusement,” as the *Emerald* noted on February 15, 1868. Reading was for improvement in understanding the principles of republicanism. As the Irish lacked a “home, country or flag,” they should use the powerful skill of literacy to help make themselves “better Irishmen, better men and better Christians” (88). The very contents of the papers, when not devoted to news from Ireland, reported on lectures, books, and meetings that would help increase the literacy of the reader. It was surely not just for filler that the *Citizen* on January 28, 1854, reported on a lecture whose theme was “educate, that you may be free” (62), or that on January 7 it reported on playwright Dion Boucicault’s “winter evenings” literary association, which conducted evenings “made memorable by the literate men that filled them” (11). The *New York Tablet* of February 12, 1859, reported on the meeting of the St. Patrick’s literary association and concluded that they hoped the literacy association “would be a means of spreading among all classes a love for knowledge and instruction” (4). It is unclear how well Irish literary societies cut across class lines, but the Irish press by virtue of the number of papers and

their circulation must have affected a broader strata of the immigrant population. Age differences were important as well. Archbishop Hughes had helped to popularize Catholic schools where the Irish young could learn, but for their parents “the real educator was the newspaper” (Ernst 145).

For newly arrived immigrants, newspapers served as a cohesive force, a force that bound the community of exiles, branded aliens by their new home, together into a community of Irish in America, a community united by a love of the idea of Ireland. Uniting the Irish community in New York was also a step in a progression away from orality and towards literacy. Peter Fallon noted that while the oral nature of the Irish had allowed for cultural homogeneity, it did not allow for political cohesiveness (217). This could only be achieved by changing the way the immigrant in New York looked at the world.

The shift from a primarily oral culture to one based on the written word involves not merely a shift in habit, but in mindset as well. As Neil Postman noted, “The printed page revealed the world, line by line, page by page to be a serious coherent place, capable of management by reason, and of improvement by logical and relevant criticism” (62). The nature of a printed page affected the way one organized and processed information. By promoting literacy, the editors of the Irish-American newspapers also promoted a different way of thinking. By encouraging the immigrants to become literate, the editors were also encouraging the development of a distinctly literate mindset, a mindset that as it turned out, was not only readily adaptable to the ideals of Irish republicanism, but to the assimilation of the Irish into America society. Thus the transformation of the Irish in America into ardent republicans was also the transformation of the Irish into Americans. Irish-American newspapers, while desiring their Irish countrymen to be more accepted, still held on to the belief that they were raising an army that would return to save Ireland. The army they did raise had no such intentions. Ireland was a fine and wonderful place, but it was far away. The real action was in New York, and the Irish, once awoken from their oral slumber into the wakefulness of literacy, were to make sure that they would have a sizable slice of that action. By attempting to raise a force that would free Ireland, the papers also started a

process that would allow the Irish not to reconquer Ireland, but the city where they were considered incomprehensible: New York.

Part 4. *Assimilation*

NEWSPAPERS AS AGENTS OF ASSIMILATION

In his book *Editors and Ethnicity: a History of the Irish-American Press* William Joyce identifies the press as the pre-eminent agent of aiding "immigrants in the process of their adjustments to American society" (4). A secondary message that underlined the republicanism of the Irish-American papers was the need to act more like an American.

"having no government to which they might swear allegiance, they naturally and easily become American citizens and assume with alacrity all the duties which that high position entails" (293).

McBrown noted that Irish-American newspapers were a key factor in informing immigrants of what was expected of them in a new country, adding that "it taught them the customs and manners of bourgeois America" (37). America was a land of hard work, industry, literacy, and Protestantism. If the Irish could not adopt the latter, they could adopt the former. It was obvious that "Knowledge and the ability to gain it through literacy, was one of the promises of the republic

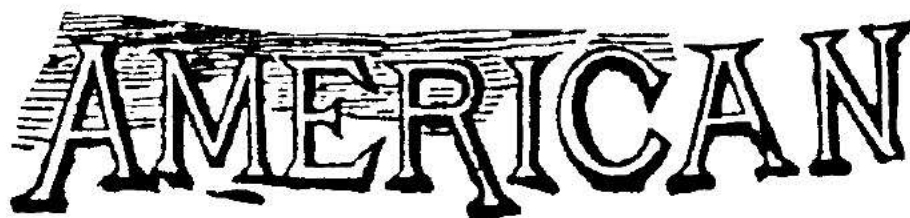


Illustration: Detail from The Irish World. Courtesy of John Ridge.

After all, in that way the papers could also appeal to the more assimilated, and presumably patriotic Irish, already in America, as well as the new immigrants. Fanning love of Ireland, while at the same time pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States of America was an ideal compromise. Glazer and Moynihan noted that the nationalism preached in the Irish-American papers was "not an alternative to American nationalism, but a variety of it. Its function was not to alienate the Irish immigrant, but to accommodate him to an often hostile environment" (241).

It was a republican strategy from the 1850's onward to establish allegiance to both America and Ireland as a necessary duty for the Irish in New York (Williams 109). Instead of throwing out old traditions to assimilate, the Irish in New York became more Irish but more literate, and hence, more American. There was no apparent contradiction between the two loves. Patrick Collins, editor of the *Boston Pilot* said that he could love both "Mother Ireland" and his "Wife America" (Williams 116). The Irish-American newspapers during the mid nineteenth century were a major factor in establishing this dichotomy of twin loves of home and adopted countries (Ernst 150). *MGee's Illustrated Weekly* of March 31st, 1877 noted that the Irish immigrants

itself..." (Graff 1987, 356). If the Irish were to benefit from this promise, they would have to act more like the citizens who "greeted" them upon their arrival. As Andrew Greeley noted in *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish*, "if the Irish were to be accepted in American society they must be sober, industrious and ambitious, like the Protestant immigrants who had come before them" (118). The Irish-American papers urged their readers to take advantage of not only educational opportunities, but entrepreneurial opportunities, as well (Miller 326). Many of the Irish at the time could see that assimilation into the larger work force would lead to greater opportunities for economic advancement (Bodnar 1985, 209). By learning to be literate the Irish were merely learning what was expected of Americans at the time (Glazer and Moynihan 239).

POLITICS AND OTHER FACTORS

The Irish in New York did not assimilate in a vacuum and other factors were clearly at work in the Irish assimilation into the mainstream of New York City. Changes in the new political landscape during and after the Civil War, the growth in power of the Catholic Church, the rise of social organizations, increased urban growth and development, and the



sheer number of Irish flooding into New York are all important factors in how the Irish rose to power in the city. Just as these can be seen as factors that encouraged greater involvement in the city's life by Irish immigrants, they were also affected by the change in mindset fostered by literacy.

The Irish undoubtedly did increase their political involvement in New York for the betterment of the race as a whole. When "Honest" John Kelly became boss of Tammany Hall in 1870 the Irish had effectively taken control of New York's political system (Cogan, J. 11). This meteoric rise would have been impossible in the past. As Peter Fallon noted, while social coherence was encouraged by the oral nature of Ireland, "oral traditions did not allow for political cohesiveness" (217). George Washington Plunkitt, unwittingly the greatest political commentator of his time, believed that the "Irish were born to rule" (30). However they were not "born" to do any such thing. If, as Plunkitt noted, the average immigrant was "on the salary list the morning after he lands" (31), it was only because the Irish had changed as much as they had. In learning Republicanism, they had learned the hard work, and literacy, expected of any who cared to assimilate into Protestant America, and they had learned their lessons well. Even the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, who had spent as much time at odds with his Celtic fellow citizens as any in New York, remarked upon the change. At a speech at the centenary of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick's on St. Patrick's Day 1884 he noted that "if an Irishman can evade whiskey for ten years and vote early and often in the course of fifteen years he is as good a citizen as if he had been born here" (Crimmins 312). Ward was not exaggerating; by 1900 the Irish had achieved a literacy rate of 95%, reaching parity with the national average (Jackson 600). By the 1880s there were far fewer Irish blue-collar workers in New York than 1850 (Meagher 15), despite an increase in population that made almost one third of the entire city Irish. Also by the 1880s the accepted stereotypes of the Irish were beginning to diminish. While Nast would still portray the Irish as apelike for a few more years, the "stage" Irishman had begun to fade away. The caricature of the "jolly, boisterous brawling and sentimental Irishman" was largely

gone from the stage by the 1880s (Joyce 155). When even Harrigan and Hart decided to legitimize their act (and also abandon blackface) (Williams 159), it was clearly demonstrated that the old oral Irish stereotype was becoming less prevalent. The Irish had always been used as fodder for jokes, parody, and mockery in cartoons, on stage and in song. Many of the "Irish" songs of the day were written by men whose families had been in the United States for generations, if they had come from Ireland at all. If music was to be listened to, republican music would do just fine, thank you. As early as 1858, the *New York Tablet* had warned of the dangers of ignoring the national music of Ireland:

You will find everywhere Misses and Masters with unmistakable Irish names sneering at 'Irish Music' as something altogether unsuited to the present age of the world. Little do they know these gems of ancient art, whose value they cannot estimate will delight the world in ages yet to come when they and the noisy blustering 'cut-a-dash' pieces, the polka's, the Scottishes, and all the rest in which they delight to 'showoff' will sleep in the oblivion that awaits everything trashy. (10)

By the end of the nineteenth century, Irish republican music had also enjoyed a spectacular upswing in popularity, entering a "golden age" around the turn of the century (Grimes 183). The Irish controlled city hall and the police force, the stage Irishman had been laid to rest, and Irish music was enjoying a new popularity. The one thing that was declining in popularity was the very ethnic papers that had inspired this dramatic change in the fortunes of the Irish in New York.

By the late 1880s almost all of the popular Irish-American papers had folded their tents. *The Irish Citizen* was gone by 1872, the *Nation* by 1883, even the venerable moderate *Freeman's Journal* was not able to survive into the next century (Joyce 196). The Irish who had absorbed the republican and educational lessons of the immigrant papers had nothing more to learn from them. Besides, with the Irish in charge New York City wasn't that bad a place to live in after all. And what of Republicanism? Well, it had its place, on holidays, parades, popular entertainment and so

on, but to the average Irishman in the 1880s, it was much less important than in previous decades. The reforms of English Prime Minister Gladstone had restored more autonomy to the Irish in Ireland and after the tumult of the land league, there was relative quiet in Ireland for the next decade (Schreir 128). Nationalism for dear old Ireland died down in America at the same time it died down in Ireland. The newspapers, long the strongest supporters of the republican cause, found themselves redundant in a land where everyone had mysteriously become American. Editors like McGee and Mitchel had done everything in their power to transform the Irish in New York into a literate people. In succeeding in their efforts, their cause was ultimately lost.

Sources

"A Literary Career," *The Citizen* 7 Jan. 1854, 11

"A Voice of Encouragement," *Nation* (Dublin) 1 Jan. 1848

Bayor, Ronald. *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews and Italians of New York City*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1978

Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press, 1978

Brown, Thomas. *Irish American Nationalism*. New York: Lippincott, 1966

Cogan, Brian. "Orality in the Fenian Cycle in Irish Mythology." *Critical Issues: The Multidisciplinary Journal of the Graduate Student Organization of the School of Education*. New York University, Vol. 2 (Fall 1994)

Cogan, Joseph. *The Irish in New York City Politics: 1850–1880*. Unpublished article, 1969

Crimmins, John. *Irish-American Historical Miscellany: Relating Largely to New York City and Vicinity, Together with Much interesting Material Reflective to Other Parts of the Country*. New York: (Published by author), 1905

D'Arcy, William. *The Fenian Movement in the United States, 1858–1866*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1947

Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983

Ernst, Robert. *Immigrant Life in New York City 1825–1863*. New York: Octagon, 1979

Fallon, Peter. "Empowerment and Impotence: the Clash of Cultures and Media of Communication in Eighteenth Century Ireland." Diss., NYU 1996

"Features of Immigration" *The Nation* (Dublin) 3 May 1851, 569

Finson, John. *The Voices that are Gone: Themes in Nineteenth Century American Popular Songs*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994

Glazer, Nathan and Daniel P. Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963

Graff, Harvey. *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century City*. New York, Academic Press, 1979

———. *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*. Indianapolis: Univ. of Indiana Press, 1987

Greeley, Andrew. *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972

Grimes, Robert. *How Shall We Sing in a Foreign Land? Music of Irish Catholic Immigrants in the Ante-bellum United States*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1996

Goody, Jack. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963

Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995

Innis, Harold. *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1951

"Irish in New York" *McGee's Illustrated Weekly* 31 March 1877

"Irish Literature" *The Emerald: an Illustrated Literary Journal* 14 March 1858

Jackson, Kenneth, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New York: Yale Univ. Press, 1982

Jenkins, Brian. *Fenians and Anglo-Irish Relations During Reconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969

Joyce, P.W. *Ancient Irish Music: Comprising One Hundred Airs Hitherto Unpublished, Many of the Old Popular Songs and Several New Songs*. Dublin: Gill and Gill, 1873

- Joyce P. W. *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs: A Collection of 842 Irish Airs and Songs Hitherto Unpublished*, Dublin: Longmans Green and Co., 1909
- Joyce, William Leonard. *Editors and Ethnicity: A History of The Irish American Press*, New York: Arno Press, 1976
- Lord, Albert. *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960
- , *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995
- MacManus, Seamus. *The Story of The Irish Race: A Popular History of Ireland*, New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1944
- "Masthead" *The Irish Citizen* 19, October 1867 4
- Meagher, Tim. Ed. *From Paddy to Studs: Irish American Communities at the Turn of the Century Era 1880–1920*, New York: Greenwood, 1986
- McBrown, Thomas. *Irish-American Nationalism*, New York: JB Lippincott Co., 1966
- McCaffrey, Lawrence. "Forging Forward and Looking Back" *The New York Irish*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ., 1996
- Miller, Kerby. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1985
- "Music Columns" *New York Tablet: A Family Journal*, 5 June 1858 10
- Nilsen, Kenneth. "The Irish Language in New York 1850–1900," *The New York Irish*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1996
- O'Grady, Joseph. *How the Irish Became Americans*, New York: Wayne Pub Inc., 1973
- O'Neill, Francis. *Irish Minstrels and Musicians: With Numerous Dissertations on Related Subjects*, Chicago: Regan Printing House, 1913
- Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London: Routledge, 1982
- O'Sullivan, Patrick. "The Irish Joke," *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, London, Leicester Univ. Press, 1994
- "Popular Education in Ireland" *The Emerald: An Illustrated Literary Journal* 15 Feb. 1868 24
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, USA: Penguin Books, 1985
- "Purpose of The Citizen" *The Irish Citizen* 11 December 1869 1
- "Review of a Lecture" *The Citizen* 28 Jan. 1854 62
- "Review of The Lyrics of Ireland" *New York Tablet: A Family Journal* 3 July 1858 10
- Sante, Luc. *Lowlife: Lures and Snares of Old New York*, New York: Vintage Books, 1991
- Schrier, Arnold. *Ireland and the American Immigration 1850–1900*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1958
- Stephens, Mitchell. *A History of News*, New York: Harcourt Brace Pub., 1997
- Williams, William. *It Was Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song*, Chicago, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996
- Zimmerman, Georges-Denis. *Songs of Rebellion: Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs 1780–1900*, Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967



Illustration: Detail from The Irish American. Courtesy of John Ridge.