UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

May 5, 1983

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ENTITLED: Thomas Davis, The Nation and the Failure of Romantic Nationalism

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Bachelor of Arts in History

Instructor in Charge

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF History
THOMAS DAVIS, THE NATION
AND THE
FAILURE OF ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

BY
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THEESIS

for the
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS
IN
HISTORY

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois
1983
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis represents the culmination of my undergraduate education at the University of Illinois. Many influences and considerable assistance went into its preparation and I would like to acknowledge those people now.

The History Department is blessed with many fine and dedicated teachers who, over the years, gave me both the methodological tools and the intellectual discipline necessary for serious academic inquiry. Professors Walter Arnstein, DeLloyd Guth, Paul Schroeder, and Caroline Hibbard have my lifelong respect and appreciation. Additional thanks is due to Professor Arnstein who served as my thesis advisor. His knowledge and critical abilities were the standard against which I measured the quality of my own work. In the long and frequently painful process of researching and writing, Professor Arnstein, like any good parent, gave ample encouragement along with thoughtful criticism. His genuine interest in me and my project made me double my efforts when things looked bleak. My thanks to him include a full measure of affection.

No historian can operate without a good librarian and I would like to thank Betty Hildwein, head of the Newspaper library. Mrs. Hildwein rescued original bound volumes of The Nation from a type of Siberia, commonly referred to as remote storage. Betty now stands guardian over this priceless resource; and her enthusiasm and interest in my research were heartwarming.

To my children go all my love, and apologies for the time taken from them for this work. Their cheerful presence and
unquestioning devotion sustained me more than they can know.
To Wick, my husband, goes the greatest debt. Wick provided
every practical and emotional support imaginable both during the
time of this thesis and throughout my entire undergraduate career.
I am forever grateful that his faith in me far exceeded my own.
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Introduction

Even to the casual observer, Ireland is a country burdened with bitter and divisive political struggle that is periodically marked by bloody tragedy. The situation often appears to be hopelessly complex, and particularly defiant of resolution or compromise, because the attitudes, perceptions, and tactics of the various factions have been hardened and sharpened by history. The past eight centuries of Irish history encrust the present with layer upon layer of suspicion and cultural and religious animosities. Progress toward political stability is hampered at every turn by the intransigent memory of the past.

To fully understand the historical character of modern Irish nationalism and its radical elements would require a study that far exceeds the scope of this thesis. However, one distinctive and important movement in Ireland in the 1840s sheds a piercing light on the difficulty of creating a united Irish political entity.

In Dublin, on October 15, 1842, the first issue of a new weekly newspaper appeared on the streets. The Nation was the result of the determination of three young men: Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy, and John Dillon, to diffuse and inculcate in the Irish people recognition of a unique nationalism that would transcend, and thus conquer, ancient divisions. The journalists' Romantic Nationalism was both an attempt to revive cultural
identity and to use the past to forge a united political movement capable of achieving independence from England and legitimate status among the nations of the world.

The determined, energetic, and thoughtful character of the newspaper reflected, in large part, the personality and steadfast commitment of its intellectual leader, Thomas Davis. It was Davis's idealistic vision and his multitudinous practical suggestions for ways The Nation could realize it that suffused the paper and welded the young men into a cohesive group, later to be called Young Ireland.

Thomas Davis drew on Irish art, music, literature, architecture, and geography to define the beauty and the value of the country's cultural heritage. He also urged, scolded, and exhorted his countrymen to use the Arts to convey The Nation's message of non-racial, non-sectarian nationalism. Davis consistently called upon Irish history to foster national pride and to heighten a determination to achieve political autonomy. It was history that was woven through Davis's poetry, his editorials, and his articles. It was history that was primarily used to restore pride in the past and hope for the future.

The Young Irelanders did not operate independently of the one great figure in contemporary Irish political life. Daniel O'Connell had already won Catholic Emancipation and had embarked on a movement to repeal the 1801 Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain when The Nation first appeared. Compared to the unknown journalists, O'Connell bestrode Irish consciousness like a colossus.
He was the great orator, the "Liberator," and the quintessential Irishman. He was also the only person capable of calling for a great "agitation" and infusing it with purpose. Davis and Young Ireland joined O'Connell's movement, and it is within their relationship that the story of Young Ireland is played out. Where they were in agreement, over what they disagreed, and how their disagreements affected both Young Ireland and Irish politics spelled the failure of Thomas Davis's experiment in romantic nationalism.

Thomas Davis, through The Nation and by personal example, sought to free Ireland from racial and sectarian hatreds that, whatever the tyrannies and exploitations of England might have contributed, had repeatedly thwarted her efforts for full and complete nationhood.

Thomas Davis reached out to a mass audience, and his newspaper was the most widely-read and popular one in the country. He called for pride and enthusiasm for all those things that made Irish culture unique. He pointed the way to political vigor and stability and yet he failed in his stated purpose. Why he failed is more revealing of the burdens of history and the nature of modern Irish nationalism than any of the limited successes that he was able to enjoy.

The rhetoric of The Nation and the character of the political debates of the 1840s was shaped by a keen awareness of the history of Ireland. There was, in both, a consciously developed historical perspective that focused Irish frustrations and aspirations, and provided the rationales for political action. Thus,
it is critical to begin this study with a brief summary of the seven centuries that preceded the era of Thomas Davis. Of course, such a superficial treatment of a rich and complex history has serious drawbacks; but the purpose here is to provide a basis for understanding both Irish political factionalism and the barriers to constructing an ideal of nationality that each faction could share equally.

The actual content of *The Nation* will be discussed at length. The newspaper was the medium through which Davis expressed his romantic ideal of nationhood; and in which he offered numerous suggestions and proposals for recreating Irish national identity and pride. However, *The Nation* also carried very complex political messages and played a vital part in contemporary Repeal agitation. How these messages fit with others concerning a more abstract idealism is a crucial consideration.

Finally, the test of *The Nation*'s real impact on the political climate of its day, and the validity of Davis's vision, are examined in the context of Young Ireland's dramatic quarrel with Daniel O'Connell. To a certain extent, Thomas Davis's premature death abruptly halts the study. However, certain conclusions can be drawn from the conflict of Davis's high-minded experiment and Irish political realities.
Chapter One

It is impossible to understand the messages and purpose of The Nation or the complexity of the political forces which Thomas Davis sought to unite behind a new nationalist ideal without understanding the preceding centuries of Irish history. Ireland's long and unhappy relationship with England, from the twelfth century on, has had a profound influence on virtually every aspect of Irish life. It is, however, the great degree to which the events of history consciously and relentlessly determined the character of political debate and behavior that is most characteristic of the nature of Ireland's quest for national independence and integrity.

The strength and richness of Ireland's ancient Celtic culture plays a relatively small part in the historical argument. To a certain extent, this era has been mythologized. The legendary heroes and the battle victories of warrior-chieftains have become emblems of pride and courage for a demoralized and oppressed people. The glories of ancient artistic and intellectual achievements served to define a distinctive Irish-Gaelic identity free of contamination by English language and culture. Together these elements identify a separate nationality that is enlightened, heroic, and noble. However significant and powerful the impact of this history might be, it is very different in quality from
the obsession with the detailed political realities of Anglo-Irish relations.

From the time of Henry II, Ireland had been treated as a dependent country by its English neighbor. The amount of control England was able to exercise varied with the times; but, nevertheless, English domination was pervasive if not total.

The royal government in Ireland, from the twelfth century on, was modelled on that in England. Policy for Ireland was made in the English Council and carried out in the country by a chief governor, who was the representative of the crown. The Irish council, parliament, and law courts all followed the English pattern in everything except their power and autonomy. The Elizabethan conquests of the late sixteenth century sealed the fate of any lingering Gaelic system and, from 1603 on, Ireland was governed by the common law of England and according to the "statutes of force" in that realm.¹

There was, furthermore, a determined effort to insulate the English population in Ireland from "contamination" by the native Irish. A Parliament held by Edward III's son, the Duke of Clarence, enacted the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366. Among its provisions were the orders that the English and the Irish living among them:

were, under pain of outlawry, to use only the language, customs, fashions, mode of riding and apparel of the English and to eschew all things Irish.²

This law, and others like it over the centuries, thwarted the progress, or even the hope, of cultural assimilation.
The many centuries of war, conquest, and tumult had bred a kind of endemic lawlessness in the country that was characterized by widespread "brigandage." Underlying the outlaws' straightforward desire for booty, however, was a political element of which the English were well aware: the threat of insurrection. Thus, Ireland was governed as a conquered country with an army maintained not to repel foreign invasion, but to insure order at home. The cost of supporting such a standing force had two results: economically, it kept Ireland impoverished; and politically, it led to a determination in England that Ireland would never be secure until it had been Anglicized.

The seemingly inexorable progress of English legal and institutional supremacy was halted in a critical area, however, and this helps explain one great dividing line in Irish culture. The English reformed church lacked both the vitality and the clergy to spread the faith adequately in Ireland; while, by contrast, the Roman Catholic clergy in the seventeenth century were "numerous, zealous and efficient." The people remained thoroughly Catholic, and religion became the distinguishing label between the conquered and the conqueror.

The vigorous "plantation" policy of the Stuarts was, in essence, Anglicization by colonization. In Ulster, the strong Gaelic traditions were gradually overlaid, if not totally extinguished, by transplanted English and Scottish Protestants; and further plantations were developed in Connaught, Mayo, Sligo, and Galway.

The Puritan Revolution in England had a lasting effect on
Ireland. By 1641, Charles I was in serious, and ultimately fatal, trouble at home. There was spreading fear in England that Charles was going to use Irish Catholics to threaten, and thus control, English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians. The political situation was tindery at best when the Irish insurrection broke out.

In Ulster many English settlers were killed in the fury of the rising. A thousand Irish grievances resulted in excesses and atrocities. Many prisoners were murdered, others were stripped and left to find refuge or to perish. These were ugly events indeed, but they were dwelt upon and exaggerated in English accounts to the degree that they became "proof" of an Irish plan to massacre the entire Protestant population.

The insurrection staggered on for a number of years but the rebel forces, made up of native Irish and a number of "Old English" recusant nobles, were poorly armed, poorly trained, and, most critically, without real unity. Oliver Cromwell's arrival in 1649 abruptly changed the character of the war. He combined superior resources and military genius with efficient, ruthless, and brutal tactics epitomized by the infamous sack of Drogheda. Cromwell departed Ireland in 1650, and the work of "pacification" was completed by 1652: the insurrection was broken, English fear and loathing had intensified, and Irish hatred was more implacable.

The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was quickly followed by the restoration of the former constitutional relationship between England and Ireland. Now, however, English politicians
were more involved with Irish affairs and the Viceroy had to deal with both King and Parliament. But relations between the monarch and Parliament were far from secure and trusting due to fear of Charles II's Catholic toleration and his brother, James II's outright Catholicism.

Once again, Ireland became a focus of English Protestant paranoia. Suspicion of James II's "Catholic design" seemed confirmed in Ireland where Roman Catholics were, at last, finding their way into the army, the administration, the council, and onto the Bench. Then James brought Irish troops into England. It is possible that nothing "hastened James II's overthrow more than the conviction that he meant to use Irish Papists to destroy the Protestant constitution."

In 1688, William of Orange and his wife, Mary Stuart, were received as King and Queen in England and duly proclaimed by Protestant leaders in Ulster. James fled to France and then proceeded to land in Ulster, forcing many Protestants to escape to safer areas. However, James's siege of Londonderry failed and in July, 1690 he was left no other option but to take the field against William. The Battle of the Boyne was one of the decisive battles of modern Ireland for it destroyed the power of the Roman Catholic nobility and gentry and insured the unchallenged rule of the Protestant Ascendancy.

The political acts of the Protestant Ascendancy were shaped by a deeply-rooted fear of a Catholic insurrection. The era of the Penal Laws began. Roman Catholics, by acts of government, were deprived of every means by which they might threaten the
rule of the Protestant minority; in other words, Catholics were placed in a position of social, economic, and political inferiority. The laws themselves covered everything from refusing the native Irishman the right to bear arms to making it impossible for him to pass his land on intact to his eldest son, as long as that son remained a Catholic. They were laws "enacted by intolerance to facilitate plunder." Thomas Davis was to speak of their lasting impact on Irish society in the pages of *The Nation*: "Time has reached us bearing their poison in his stream—too diluted to kill, strong enough to wither us."

It would be a mistake to assume that the Irish political configuration split neatly along Protestant/Anglo-Irish and Roman Catholic/Native Irish lines. Between 1719 and 1725, certain constitutional and economic issues sparked a nascent Protestant nationalism. Protestant Ireland's concern was not so much for their oppressed Catholic countrymen as it was for the equality of their own status with other Englishmen. Nevertheless, resentment against English policies caused a slight but definite political realignment. Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, did unite, in a few concerns, against England.

The constitutional dispute was provoked by the case *Sherlock v. Annesley*. One of the parties appealed successfully to the Irish House of Lords; the other appealed to the English House of Lords at Westminster. The English Lords reversed the decision of the Irish Lords; and the Irish asserted their right to final jurisdiction in the case. In response, the English Parliament
passed a Declaratory Act affirming that it had full authority to legislate for Ireland and that the Irish House of Lords had no appellate jurisdiction. This act, "The Sixth of George I," came to be a standing grievance in Anglo-Irish relations.\textsuperscript{17}

The economic resentments were legion. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, published pamphlets and the \textit{Drapier's Letters} to attack English practices as the cause of Ireland's poverty.\textsuperscript{18} Swift and others had good cause for concern--eighteenth century Ireland was miserably poor.

The land was one of Ireland's richest resources, but its economic potential was perverted by a system of absentee landlordism. The landlord, in England, simply wanted the highest possible steady income with the least amount of trouble. Thus, he generally rented out his estate in large parcels and for relatively long periods of time. The problems developed with the middleman, rarely a working farmer, who subdivided and sublet the land. Frequently, there was a series of such middlemen. The tracts of land got steadily smaller, and the proportionate rate of rent steadily larger, as the process finally reached the level of the working farmer, who ended up with little or no security of tenure and burdened with a heavy rent.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, there was little development of more efficient and productive agricultural methods for the landlords and the middlemen were interested only in immediate profits, not in long-term gains. Further, there was little incentive for the farmer to improve his operation. His lease was short, so he perpetually ran the risk of being evicted or having
his rent raised. In fact, any improvement that he might make would only increase the probability of one or the other disaster befalling him.20

Dependence on the land became increasingly great due to the failure of Irish manufacture to thrive. The primary causes of this failure were lack of capital, which was drained away by payments to absentee landlords, and English restrictions on Irish industries. Competition from the Irish woollen industry had led the English Parliament to pass a law prohibiting export of woollen goods to any country except England and had thereby stifled its growth. Similar measures were used against the potentially successful brewing and glass industries.21 The condition of the peasantry declined even more when increasing amounts of land were used for pasture and the amount of land available for tillage decreased.22

These untenable circumstances resulted, not surprisingly, in the emergence of a new, disruptive phenomenon by the eighteenth century: agrarian crime. In protest over the increase in pasture land, bands of men wearing white smocks over their clothes destroyed fences and killed cattle in nighttime raids. The "White-boys" committed few murders but they did resort to some torture, and managed to damage an immense amount of property. Government efforts to stop this activity proved relatively fruitless, for the rural population remained silent through either fear or sympathy.23 Agrarian crime became endemic in Ireland, subsiding in times of reform and prosperity, and reviving in times of hardship and oppression. The government usually chose to deal with it by
passing repressive laws, preferring to send desperate men to the
gallows rather than to attack the root of the disease. As an
element in Irish culture, agrarian violence underscores an ubiqui­
tous tradition of armed protest that influenced later popular agi­
tation for political reform.

The increasing cohesion of Protestant nationalist concerns
became apparent in the Parliament that assembled in 1761 after
the death of George II. Henry Flood, a man of great fortune and
intelligence, established himself as the leader of the Patriots.24
Though far from a disciplined political party, these Patriots were
bound by agreement on several key issues: the need for a septen­
nial act to limit the length of Parliament; the right for an Irish
national militia, a habeas corpus act, and security of tenure for
judges; and the less defined aim of establishing the position and
rights of Ireland as a distinct kingdom.25

Real political power, however, belonged to "The Castle,"
the center of the English government's administration headed by
a resident Lord Lieutenant. By 1775, Flood had come to the deci­
sion that more could be gained by cooperating with the government
than through opposition. Consequently, in a purely pragmatic poli­
tical move, he accepted the post of Vice-Treaserer. From that
point on, Henry Flood's influence in the House of Commons began
to wither, for the Patriots considered his act a betrayal.26

The leadership vacuum was quickly filled by a young bar­
rister, Henry Grattan, who rallied the dispirited Patriots. Co­
incidentally, the development of the Volunteer movement on a
national scale gave Protestant nationalism a regular organization
through which it could make its presence felt. Grattan, in the Irish Parliament, and the Volunteers, in the countryside, produced the Constitution of 1782.

The army had been weakened by withdrawal of arms and men for service in the American War of Independence. As early as 1776, Irish independent companies had formed to create a virtual volunteer "national guard." Though the initial purpose was defense against a possible French invasion, this volunteer army gave Irish Protestants a sense of unity and strength. Equally important, the Volunteers had a generally relaxed and liberal attitude toward Roman Catholics, and many agreed with Grattan's eloquent statement that "[T]he Irish Protestant could never be free till the Irish Catholic had ceased to be a slave."27

One clear signal of England's vulnerability and the Volunteers' strength was the removal of numerous trade restrictions on Irish commerce. While this success stimulated national enthusiasm, Grattan cautioned that it was more important than ever to secure the parliamentary independence of Ireland. What the British Parliament had removed, it might once again impose when its own circumstances were less difficult.

On April 19, 1780, Grattan brought forward a resolution in the Irish House of Commons: "That the King's most excellent majesty, and the Lords and Commons of Ireland, are the only power competent to enact laws to bind Ireland."28 The Commons, fearful of pressing such demands too strongly, refused to pass the resolution; but the Volunteers seized the opportunity. By February, 1782, a Volunteer convention had assembled at Dungannon. It put
forth resolutions infused with the stirring rhetoric of freedom and backed up with the implicit threat of 25,000 armed men. On April 16, 1782, a declaration of Irish Independence was passed. When the British Parliament repealed the "Sixth of George I" and made major alterations in "Poynings' Law" which had allowed the Castle to alter bills sent from the Irish Parliament to the King, the right of the Irish Parliament to legislate for Ireland and the final jurisdiction of the Irish House of Lords was established. Nevertheless, the administration of the government was still firmly in the hands of the Lord Lieutenant who answered not to Ireland's Parliament but to England's ministers. This crucial fact led to the speedy collapse of all that the "Constitution of 1782" had achieved.

Though the Irish Parliament survived as an independent body for a mere eighteen years, its very existence had a profound influence on Irish political memory. The Constitution of 1782 was to remain the hallmark of an era of freedom, prosperity, and national dignity. Inextricably linked with these noble sentiments, however, was an unsentimental recognition that the armed threat of the Volunteers, not the doubtful steadfastness of the Commons had won the day. The lesson of organized force grimly took its place in Ireland's political arsenal.

There is little doubt that the events of the American Revolution inspired some of the activities of the Patriots and the Volunteers, but it would be a mistake to equate the two in any fundamental way. Ireland, as it had in the past and as it would in the future, was quick to take advantage of England's
difficulties. However, this was an Irish Protestant movement propelled by Irish Protestant concerns. The ruling minority was still overwhelmingly suspicious of the Catholic majority and had no intention of offering them an equal measure of the freedom and rights which they so vigorously claimed for themselves. As a body, the Protestants were enthusiastic in their loyalty to the crown and adamant about the indissoluble link between the two countries. So, when all was said and done, the power of the English administration in Ireland was essentially unimpaired.

The impact of the French Revolution in 1789 was much more significant. In the countryside there was a general, if somewhat naive, enthusiasm for revolutionary principles; and the establishment of the French Republic was applauded even when news of bloody excesses caused a certain amount of disappointment or alarm. Among the leaders of the Protestant minority, however, there was little sympathy for democratic ideas and none for revolution.32

It is a significant truth of Irish history that some of her greatest patriots have been Protestants who have been able to see beyond the barriers of class privilege and religious animosity to an ideal of a strong and united Ireland. Theobald Wolfe Tone, a young Protestant barrister, was appointed secretary of the Catholic Committee in 1791. The Committee's purpose was to work for Catholic political interests; Tone's purpose was much more radical—he was determined to bring about religious equality and a sweeping reform of Parliament. To achieve these ends, Tone had helped found the Society of United Irishmen, which, from 1794 on, was increasingly committed to alliance with France and to a policy
of total separation from England. Tone's efforts to create a broad-based revolution were consistently thwarted by a general fear of violent upheaval and, more importantly, by intensifying sectarian strife between Roman Catholic and Protestant tenants. Competition for land had been increased by a sharp rise in population. Protestant farmers, resentful that their Catholic competitors could underbid them due to a lower standard of living, formed themselves into armed bands, called "Peep O'Day Boys," to raid Catholic homes and frighten them into abandoning the countryside. The Catholics responded by forming the "Defenders" and frequent, bloody clashes between the two groups foreclosed much hope for cooperation.

The struggle slowly polarized between the advocates of revolution and the most reactionary elements of the Protestant Ascendancy who battered down Catholic relief bills in Parliament. Despite the fact that the Ascendancy Irish Parliament granted many significant concessions, including support for education, the right to vote for members of Parliament, and the right to practice law, Irish Catholics measured their freedom, or lack of it, against one standard: "Emancipation." By 1795, "Catholic Emancipation," the admission of Roman Catholics to Parliament, had ceased to be a viable issue and many frustrated Catholics joined the United Irishmen, underscoring the spreading sense of futility of working for reform through constitutional means.

The relentless sectarian hostility reached a new peak in County Armagh in September, 1795. Catholic "Defenders" were completely routed in a battle with "Peep O'Day Boys" who proceeded
to form an Orange Society in protection, and celebration, of the Protestant Ascendancy. Violent persecutions of Catholics followed and the magistrates were unable, or unwilling, to stop the disorder. It was commonly believed that many of the activities of the "Orangemen" had at least implicit government approval and thus the ranks of the Defenders swelled with men who felt the law would no longer protect them. The United Irishmen, hoping to take advantage of the Defenders' growing strength, worked hard to establish ties with the group.

Tone's activities had not gone unnoticed by the government. As the authorities became increasingly alarmed, moves were made to defuse the situation. Tone was allowed to withdraw to America in May of 1795 but he did not stay there long, and in January, 1796, he appeared in Paris.

In Ireland, the government adopted a policy of suppression, suspending habeas corpus and destroying Belfast's most influential radical newspaper, The Northern Star. Further, the Castle's efficient secret service kept the government well informed of the United Irishmen's negotiations with France and their numerous activities in the country. In March, 1798, most of the principal conspirators were arrested and martial law was declared.

The few leaders who remained free decided that the insurrection had to begin right away or not at all; so on May 23, rebellion broke out. It was doomed from the beginning. Only in Wexford did the rebels make any progress and that area was soon subdued along with the other pockets of resistance throughout the country. The revolution had already been crushed when Wolfe
Tone was captured aboard a French ship, part of a force that never made it to aid the Irish. Tone was subsequently tried and condemned to a traitor's death, but he committed suicide in prison before he could be executed.40

The tragedy of Wolfe Tone encompasses more than the martyred death of a vigorous young nationalist. It extends to the degree that he misunderstood the tenacity of long-standing animosities of creed and class that made the name United Irishmen more a wish than an actuality. The deep divisions among the people aborted the rebellion more surely than England's strength or France's failure to provide timely support. A half-century later, Thomas Davis would fail in his own quest for a unified and independent Ireland for the same reason. Davis, perhaps, better understood the reality of the divisions but he was mistaken in assuming that his enthusiastic advocacy of romantic nationalism would significantly diminish the traditional hatreds and suspicions. Further, Davis was burdened with an additional legacy: Wolfe Tone came to personify a new, more volatile tradition of revolutionary violence that influenced all future Irish political struggles.

The 1798 rebellion was the nail in the coffin of Ireland's parliamentary independence. The English Prime Minister Pitt determined that England's security from France and Ireland's tranquillity could be achieved only through a legislative union of the two countries. It was Pitt's intention that the union should be accompanied by Catholic Emancipation, and it is one of the bitter ironies of Irish history that this plan was defeated not as much by English resistance as by Irish Protestant opposition.
Clare, the Lord Chancellor and other members of the ruling minority saw the union as a bulwark of the Protestant Ascendancy and a shield against "popish democracy." There was little organized pressure against the union, for the mass of people in the countryside had scant reason to feel loyal to the Irish Parliament and focused instead on the landlord as the real enemy. The fact that the landlord and the member of Parliament were often one and the same person eroded any sense of dedication to that institution. Further, the Roman Catholic bishops were, as a body, afraid of revolution and provided no center around which opposition to the union could gather.

Significant opposition came from one quarter only, a group of Roman Catholic barristers joined by numerous anti-union Protestants, whose leader, Daniel O'Connell, would dominate Irish politics until his death fifty years later. There was little, however, that this group could do to prevent the union which came into effect on January 1, 1801, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Despite the fact that the Irish Parliament was far from a representative national institution, the manner in which its members docilely voted themselves out of existence earned them a general contempt. The Nation reported the following tale from a "fine old Irish Gentleman":

The morning after the last meeting of the Irish parliament, a placard was found posted on the pillars of the parliament house (one of the finest public buildings, by the way, I ever saw), announcing — "This stable to be let for horses, as the asses who had it did not know how to keep it."
The new Irish representatives in Westminster lacked any national cohesion or "party" discipline and were slowly absorbed into the pattern of British politics, while apathy at home sapped the revolutionary spirit. Nothing illustrates the bankruptcy of Irish nationalism at this time more than the utter failure of Robert Emmet's attempted revival of the United Irishmen and the subsequent revolt of 1803. Emmet's rebellion was poorly timed, lacked popular support and, consequently, was easily crushed. Its only conceivable contribution was to add another martyr to the Irish pantheon.

The Union of 1801, passed without Catholic Emancipation, exacerbated Ireland's sectarian tensions. The Union itself was regarded by many as an act of subjugation rather than meaningful partnership. Ireland's voice in the Westminster Parliament, the only parliament now, was feeble while the control of The Castle in government administration remained intact. Equally important was the fact that the age-old connection between religious and political affiliation became stronger than ever. The Roman Catholic upper classes, granted full political rights, would more than likely have supported government authority and the protection of property. As it was, they were shut out of political participation and "no later concession could efface the resentment and distrust that spread through the whole Roman Catholic population."  

The pattern of attitudes and divisions that hardened with the establishment of the Union endured and ultimately defeated the work of Thomas Davis decades later. The Protestant Ascendancy was firmly if warily tied to England, and only a small segment of
their number remained committed to Irish nationalism. Many Catholics viewed both English and Irish Protestants as oppressors; however, these Catholics were generally the educated, urban element. The Catholic population as a whole had, in itself, significant divisions. The priests were anti-revolutionary and the peasants were much more concerned with the landlord and the tithe enacted to support the Church of Ireland. Peasant agitation was, and always had been, economic, not political. The phenomenon of agrarian secret societies, often generically referred to as Ribbonism, thrived under the threat of evictions and crushing rents. Where Ireland's laws were made was nearly irrelevant to the Catholic peasant. The task of uniting these factions into a common cause for Irish independence was to absorb the genius and energies of both Daniel O'Connell and Thomas Davis.

Daniel O'Connell grasped the opportunity and molded a mass popular demand for Catholic Emancipation. In 1823, he established a new Association dedicated to aggressively seeking political rights for Catholics and to better their situation in all aspects of Irish life. The Catholic Association made a direct appeal to the people by offering memberships at a penny a month. The "Catholic rent" proved to be an adequate source of income to support a well-developed organization; but it was O'Connell's personality that infused the movement with a sense of shared purpose and emotional commitment. He held great popular meetings at which he used fiery and extravagant rhetoric to denounce the Ascendancy and the laws that kept Catholics from equality.

The leverage needed against the British government was
gained when O'Connell won a seat in Parliament in the Clare election of 1828; and Catholics generally became convinced of their political strength. Wellington and Peel decided it was wise to yield and persuaded George IV to accept a Catholic Relief Bill.51

The triumph of Emancipation carried with it a recognition of the circumstances in which it had been won; the British government had yielded only in the face of a demonstration of power:

Irish politics had not gained a "parliamentary character" in the sense that parliamentary democracy requires that the minority should be prepared to accept majority decisions; and this readiness arises from confidence that the majority will not abuse its power. No such confidence existed between the bulk of the Irish people and the majority of the United Kingdom as a whole. . . . The whole situation was complicated by the fact that there was the same lack of confidence between the Irish Protestants and the majority of their fellow-countrymen: in the long run, neither of the two main parties in Ireland was willing to have its fate decided by votes.52

The 1830s proved to be a frustrating time for those who hoped that Emancipation would be quickly followed by a vigorous campaign for repeal of the Union. Though O'Connell started a repeal organization in Ireland, he did not push it, preferring to work from his new position in Parliament on a policy of reform. His lack of success in Westminster increased the disappointment and irritation of Ireland's unfulfilled "great expectations." The agrarian secret societies, relatively inactive during the Emancipation movement, resumed terrorist activities and in some cases, peasants refused to pay rents or tithes. In response, the Parliament passed a particularly stringent coercion bill in 1833 and, in 1834, overwhelmingly rebuffed O'Connell's move for Repeal.53
O'Connell's efforts to work with the Whig ministry of Melbourne, Lord John Russell and Irish Under-Secretary Thomas Drummond did produce some modest reforms but, by the end of the 1830s, he had decided to renew popular agitation for Repeal. This move was prompted in part by the fact that O'Connell knew the Whigs could not last long in power and that Peel, with whom he could not cooperate, would soon be Prime Minister. More to the point, O'Connell's popularity had steadily declined in Ireland. The "Whig alliance" had little appeal among the people at large and the "O'Connell Tribute," voluntary contributions to support "The Liberator" in his political work, had shrivelled to almost nothing. O'Connell well knew that the way to recapture his influence was to lead a popular campaign and Repeal was the one great issue.

In April, 1940, the National Repeal Association was founded and O'Connell began, once again, the slow and wearisome process of lifting Irish popular opinion out of apathy and despair. His success in resurrecting mass agitation for Ireland's political interests was due, in no small measure, to the influence and quality of The Nation and its young writers and editors. O'Connell, the victor of the Emancipation battle, intended to use his stature and awesome powers of rhetoric to force concessions from an "intimidated" British government. Thomas Davis and his associates had a vision of restored Irish pride and an unified nationality. Their combination proved a potent one, for the message Davis sent out through the pages of the newspaper gripped popular imagination even as O'Connell was exhorting belief in popular strength.
Endnotes - Chapter One


3 Beckett, p. 35.

4 Ibid., p. 39.

5 Edwards, p. 104.

6 Ibid., p. 108.

7 Beckett, p. 83.

8 Ibid., pp. 101-3.

9 Ibid., p. 127.

10 Ibid., p. 141.

11 Edwards, p. 129.

12 Beckett, p. 146.


14 Ibid.

15 Edwards, p. 117.

16 Ibid., p. 139.


18 Edwards, pp. 140-1.


20 Ibid., p. 173.

21 Ibid., p. 169.
22 Ibid., p. 173.
23 Ibid., p. 177.
24 Edwards, p. 143.
26 Ibid., p. 204.
27 Edwards, p. 144.
30 Beckett, pp. 222-3.
31 Ibid., p. 225.
32 Edwards, p. 149.
34 Ibid., p. 253.
36 Ibid., p. 257.
37 Ibid., p. 259.
38 Ibid., p. 262.
39 Ibid., p. 263.
40 Ibid., p. 266.
41 Ibid., pp. 270-1.
42 Ibid., pp. 272-4.
43 Ibid., p. 274.
44 Ibid., pp. 279-80.
46 Edwards, p. 156.
48 Ibid., p. 288.
49 Ibid., p. 299.
50 Ibid., p. 300.
51 Edwards, p. 160.
52 Beckett, p. 305.
53 Ibid., pp. 313-4.
54 Edwards, p. 167.
56 Edwards, pp. 169-70.
Chapter Two

Oh, brave young men, my love, my pride, my promise 'Tis on you my hopes are set, In manliness, in kindliness, in justice, To make Ireland a nation yet. Self-respecting, self-relying, self-advancing, In union or in severance, free and strong; And if God grant this, then, under God, to Thomas Davis Let the greater praise belong!

... Samuel Ferguson

The dramatic and enduring influence of Thomas Davis and his newspaper, The Nation, is a phenomenon readily accepted but, in some cases, misunderstood. There is a tendency to emphasize Young Ireland's willingness to accept violence as a legitimate means of winning independence, and the militancy of some of that group's later members in characterizing The Nation's impact in terms of its contribution to a "revolutionary tradition." Certainly, these elements are a part of the story, but to give them overwhelming weight would be to utterly distort the true nature of Davis's work.

Thomas Davis and Young Ireland were not one and the same thing. Whatever Young Ireland became after his death, while Davis was alive to exert influence and give direction, The Nation had, at best, a contradictory message about the use of violence. Davis's aim was not armed insurrection nor did he see himself as a member of a distinct, separate political group. Rather Davis used the newspaper as an instrument to assist in the rebirth of a country.

The Nation operated in two disparate and not always compatible spheres. On one hand, it sought to use art, music,
literature, and history to create a shared view of Irish nationality; on the other, it actively involved itself in the greatest popular movement of the time, the agitation for Repeal of the Union; and, as part of this work, allied itself with Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Association. Of these two aspects it is important to understand first the character of The Nation's conscious, deliberate experiment in romantic nationalism before examining the political reasons why it failed.

On October 15, 1842, the first issue of The Nation was published in Dublin. Its success was immediate and overwhelming, and its three young founders had every reason to believe that their project had touched a responsive chord in Irish society. Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon, and Charles Gavan Duffy sought to inspire "cultural nationalism" in Ireland and to strengthen Irish traditions and values. As a result of this vision, The Nation's articles were more didactic than reportorial. Davis, in particular, preached an ideal of nationalism that would transcend differences of religion, class, and ancestry; and elevated, in the process, nationalism itself into a kind of religion. The fact that Davis was a Protestant and Dillon and their editor, Duffy, were Roman Catholics, lent veracity to The Nation's non-sectarian philosophy.

The decade of the 1840s was a time of resurgent nationalism in Europe, and Davis and his colleagues were inspired by the idealism of Mazzini and Young Italy. They turned to Irish history and to article, ballad, and poem to rekindle nationalism from within. "(I)ndependence was presented as a freeing from bondage
in a mythic sense."7

The undisputed intellectual leader of the enterprise was Thomas Davis whose devoted friend Duffy describes at this time as "middle-sized, strongly built," with "beaming face, deep blue eyes," and a "manly carelessness in his bearing." Duffy also lauded Davis's "self-controlled, generous emotions" and his "composure."8 Duffy's objectivity may be questionable but, nevertheless, Davis is generally characterized as a man of high ideals, justice, and courage who won the admiration of all those who came into contact with him.9

Davis belonged by birth to the minority that enjoyed the monopoly of wealth and power; and the stages by which he came to love and champion all that he had been taught to despise can only be guessed at, for little is known of the details of his early life.10 He was born in 1814 at Mallow, County Cork, the youngest of four children. His father, an Englishman and a surgeon in the Royal Artillery, died before his birth. His mother was descended from an old Anglo-Irish family which traced its line to the great Celtic house of O'Sullivan Beare.11 Davis's Protestantism and his mixed English and Celtic blood made his Irishness "something which he found he consciously needed to work out and acquire."12 Certainly his heritage played a role in leading him to spend his young manhood constructing a coherent theory of Irish nationality.

The Davis family moved to Dublin when Thomas was four years old and he was educated at Mr. Mongan's school in Lower Mount Street. As a child he tended to be "silent, thoughtful and self-absorbed,"13 shunning the rough and boisterous pasttimes favored
by his classmates. This rather withdrawn manner continued during his studies at Trinity College where he entered in 1831. According to Duffy, Davis spent these years "hibernating among his books, slowly gathering knowledge and silently framing opinions." These "opinions" centered around the lessons of Irish history and a developing doctrine that Ireland must not belong to a sect or social class but to the people as a whole. Davis's years at Trinity might seem an unlikely period for the formation of a non-sectarian, nationalist consciousness. Trinity was after all a fortress of the Protestant Ascendancy. However, as Duffy points out, "there was scarcely a man distinguished as an opponent of British supremacy, from Jonathan Swift to Isaac Butt, who was not educated in that institution."14

Davis took his degree in 1836 and, in 1837, was called to the Bar.16 Though he was trained as a barrister, he never practiced regularly for he had already committed himself to what was to be his life's work. As the President of the Trinity College Historical Society, he gave a speech that was to mark the beginning of his public career. In this talk he criticized the classical education favored by Trinity and argued that students should study Irish history and modern languages. This was an explicit statement of the ethnocentrism that shaped all of Davis's thought. He argued that if a man could not master all knowledge, he should strive to know his own nature and duties and the mores of his own society.17 This speech also proved characteristic in its eloquent plea for an open mind and for the free exchange of ideas:
I care little for the fate of any opinions, but much for the fate of free discussion. Accept no opinion, or set of opinions, without examination, no matter whether they be enrobed in pomp, or holiness, or power; admire the pomp, respect the power, venerate the holiness; but for the opinions, strip them; if they bear the image of truth, for its sake cherish them; if they be mixed, discriminate them; if false, condemn them.

The study of Irish history, music, art, and antiquities had long been the province of the scholar and the amateur specialist. Davis was intent on making such matters objects of popular concern and on trying "to link the past with the present as a continuing relevant force." He turned to journalism as the most effective means of forwarding his project; and, in 1840, took up the editorship of a Dublin daily paper, the Morning Register, with John Dillon, his close friend and Trinity classmate.

The Morning Register was an established paper full of statistical articles on finance and industry. Duffy describes it as having "a fixed reputation for respectable mediocrity." It is easy to imagine the confused and irritated reaction of the regular clientele when Davis’s spirited articles on non-sectarian nationality began to appear. The old readers were uncomfortable with these new ideas and circulation actually dropped.

Davis and Dillon, however, gained important experience and some valuable insights from this otherwise inauspicious interlude. They began to consider the idea of a new paper with its own distinct identity. Further, they came to believe that, as national journalists, standing aloof from the Repeal Association which O’Connell had recently re-established at the Corn Exchange, their
position was "waste and anomalous." Davis decided to associate himself with this popular movement and with O'Connell, whom he recognized as the single most influential and charismatic political leader in Ireland. On April 19, 1841, Davis and Dillon became members of the Loyal National Repeal Association. They were welcomed by O'Connell, who immediately perceived the contribution they could make, and they were placed on the Association's general committee.

Davis's affiliation was to have an unexpected benefit for Irish nationalism. It was through the Repeal Association that Davis and Dillon met Charles Gavan Duffy, a Catholic journalist and a man who shared their philosophical commitments. During a talk in Phoenix Park, Duffy proposed that they establish a weekly newspaper to be a forum for their opinions. This idea was quickly propelled into fact and a prospectus for The Nation was published, in which the three young men took the unusual step of disclosing the names of intended writers and contributors as a "guarantee of good faith and personal responsibility." The first issue was awaited with eager anticipation stirred by the obvious idealism and vigor of the young men's stated aims; and it sold out promptly.

Though Duffy was the paper's editor, Thomas Davis was its chief editorial writer and guiding spirit. Davis saw The Nation as a "propagandistic medium" through which he could communicate his ideas about nationalism. The outpourings from his pen were prodigious and created a lasting collection of poems, songs, and essays. In all, Davis wrote over eighty poems in three years as
well as numerous articles on everything from ancient battles to current political issues.\textsuperscript{28}

The Nation, despite its traditional broadsheet size, was clearly something new and unusual. There was the standard advertising section, to be sure, offering everything from ship passage to America to remarkable medicinal aids; and predictable articles headed "Sporting News" and "The Catholic Church." However, news coverage per se was of secondary importance and much of the reporting of ordinary current events was done by reprinting stories from other newspapers.\textsuperscript{29} The talents and the energies of The Nation's writers were given to the overarching goal of cultural revival and political self-determination.

Three distinct features of The Nation illustrate its original character. It purposefully attempted to divorce nationalism from its close connection with Roman Catholicism and consistently solicited contributions from Catholics, Protestants, and Non-Conformists alike.\textsuperscript{30} It used its pages and its editorial columns to forward the aims of the Loyal National Repeal Association including publishing a word-by-word account of that organization's weekly meetings, none of which were noted for their brevity. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it gave literature, the arts, history, and song a defined and powerful nationalistic purpose.

There were many articles that praised the glories of early Christian Irish culture and emphasized the contributions of Irish missionaries in spreading civilization throughout Western Europe. The lack of a vigorous national literature was, however, a recurrent theme and The Nation actively sought out and published the
best in contemporary Irish writing, including work by James Clarence Mangan and William Carleton. In addition, the work of the Irish Archeological Society was applauded and readers were urged to support such projects as the recent publication of ancient manuscripts including "The Battle of Moira" from 637 A.D.

There was rarely an article about Irish literature, however, that was devoid of Davis's political message. Davis did not view literature in some pristine isolation but, rather, saw it as a gauge and a tool of nationalist development. Even as he urged Irishmen to acquire knowledge of continental literature, as part of the process of reviving their own, he counselled that they must look to those people

whose feelings, character, and passions, approach most nearly to our own, and to adopt their literature. Were we asked which of the European nations it is whose literature is best adapted to the character of the Irish people, we would, without hesitation, point to France. Were we asked which of the nations of Europe possesses a literature most repugnant to that character, we would, with as little hesitation, answer England.

Thomas Davis was quite capable of praising Shakespeare, Spenser, and the eloquent language of the King James Bible and, in the same breath, vehemently arguing that English literature must no longer be allowed to suppress the flowering of an Irish one.

One of the most delightful examples of The Nation's attitude toward literature is found in the transformation of the fairy tale "Rumpelstilzchen." This tale is commonly known in its Grimm Brothers version, but it had numerous variations and a wide geographical distribution. In Ireland alone there were 171 different
versions reported by folklore scholars in the early twentieth century. The Nation presented this obviously popular and well-known tale under the heading "The Irish Origin of the Spinning Wheel." The tale seems traditional enough for the major portion of the story: a beautiful but poor young girl is obligated to spin an impossible amount of yarn due to the bragging of her mother. If she succeeds, she will marry the prince; if she fails, she will be cut into pieces and thrown into the bogs. An ugly little man comes to her aid and spins all the flax, but, in return, she must either guess his name or give him her first born son. At the last moment, by lucky chance, she learns his name, in this case, Wallotty Trot. It is at this point that nationalism gains the upper hand:

"You have indeed detected my name," said the old man, "and my business on earth is well nigh finished. Before I disappear, however, I am bound to tell you the secrets of my art." So saying, he went to the forest and returned with the wheels. He then taught the lady their use, showing her that she could spin seven times more with them than with the distaff; after which he disappeared and was never seen again. The prince and princess taught this new branch of industry to their subjects, and so enriched the state, that all the surrounding nations regarded them with envy and admiration.

This version did not originate with The Nation, rather, it was reprinted from Taylor's Hand Book of Manufacture; but it is not surprising that of all the 171 versions, this one was chosen.

Irish music received equally enthusiastic support as well as critical scrutiny. The Nation called for a revival of music that was "truly Irish in every bar," "a genuine National music without any of the twaddling sentimentality which disfigures the modern pseudo Irish ballads." Davis suggested that people
listen carefully and repeatedly to old Irish airs and write words to them. These lyrics were to be, not surprisingly, "intense, passionate, vital, (and) heroic." Only one aspect of the old Irish songs bothered Davis, and that was their "clannishness." Instead of celebrating the deeds of O'Neills or MacCarthys, Davis wanted the common man to sing songs of united Irishmen.

Part of the renewed interest in Irish music was to be a renewed interest in the history and art of the bardic orders of ancient Ireland. Further, Davis urged that lectures in musical history and criticism should be given equal attention along with performances of songs and ballads. Davis's enthusiastic response to a reader's suggestion for a "ballad history" of Ireland demonstrates a great deal about both his view of music and of the uses of history. The object of such a history, according to Davis, would be to make "Irish history familiar to the minds, pleasant to the ears, dear to the passions, and powerful over the taste and conduct of the Irish people in times to come."

Davis had a number of cautions for the ballad historian. He urged that the lyricist know his subject well; that he give full, detailed descriptions; and that he use, whenever possible, primary source material. All of this has a very familiar ring to the modern history student. Davis conceded that prose history, which provides the exact dates, connections, and background rarely found in ballads, is, in this function, far superior. But, he argued, "these are not the highest ends of history." Davis wanted a history that would teach the Irish people a "love of self-denial, of justice, of valour." He wanted examples of "glory
and honour" and of "generous life and proud death." It was the spiritual essence that he strove to extract from Ireland's past and to convey, pure and ennobling, to the people.

The Nation early took up the cause of the preservation of the Irish language. Davis praised Gaelic as "powerful, copious and expressive" and exhorted all classes of contemporary society to join organizations dedicated to its study. The fact that Davis himself knew little or no Gaelic is, in itself, illuminating. His heritage eliminated any chance he may have had of learning the language as a child; but he recognized, as an adult, Gaelic's significance in keeping alive the sense of identity and the cultural traditions of a suppressed people:

To impose another language on the Irish people is to send their history adrift among the accidents of translation -- 'tis to tear their identity from all places -- 'tis to substitute arbitrary signs for picturesque and suggestive names -- 'tis to cut off the entail of feeling, and separate the people from their forefathers by a deep gulf -- 'tis to corrupt their very organs, and abridge their power of expression.

However, it is important to note that Davis's interest in Gaelic stemmed primarily from its symbolic function. He was not aware of, or he did not pay attention to, the enormous practical difficulties involved in any attempt to revive a dying language. Further, there is more than a little irony in the fact that Davis was both gifted in the English language and able to reach a far greater audience through it than he could have had he written his editorials and articles in Gaelic. Davis's influence, his ability to implant ideas and stir the emotions, was achieved through his use of the English language. In his short journalistic career, Davis never
attempted to write in Gaelic, rather his concerns were with such things as using ancient Gaelic place-names when identifying a locale rather than the English name. In sum, it must be said that there is a definite contradiction between Davis's philosophy of Gaelic, and his personal use of it.

Davis strongly felt that a nation's "civilisation and renown" depended, in part, on the development of a "national" art. He urged that the best works of Ireland's past and present artists be made known and that artistic endeavor should be honored and encouraged. To this end, The Nation advocated state patronage of artistic work as the best way to insure that great artists and their creations could thrive. Certainly the largesse of Church or Court had provided, for centuries, the freedom for an artist to express his genius; and the world has been enriched by everything from the portraits of Holbein to Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel. But there remains, nevertheless, a tension between aesthetics and propaganda.

Davis argued that artistic integrity and merit were not endangered by using art for the greater glory of Ireland. He published a long list of historical events that would make suitable subjects for paintings; among these were: Brian Boru at Clontarf, Shane O'Neill at Elizabeth's Court, and James II's entry into Dublin. Davis also lectured that the action depicted should be "obvious," and that "dress, arms, architecture and the characters be historically accurate." Davis, true to his dominant goal, accepted and supported that art be subsumed to nationalistic purposes.

The Nation added special, regular sections as ideas were
formed among its writers. The "National Gallery" was devoted to
literary portraits of forgotten or semi-ignored Irish figures; and
included features of writers, poets, and statesmen. Agriculture
came in for greater and greater attention as did reports of activi-
ties in the Irish communities in both England and America. Even
foreign travel was discussed with an eye to its potential benefit
for Ireland. According to Davis, travel was wasted as simple
recreation when knowledgeable observers and attention to detail
might infuse Irish agriculture, for instance, with new ideas and
improved methods:

> Our agriculture is defective, and our
> tenures are abominable. It were well
> worth the attention of travelling members
> of the Irish Agriculture Society to bring
> home accurate written accounts of the
> tenures of land, the breeds of cattle,
> draining, rotation, crops, manures, and
> farm houses, from Belgium, or Norway, Tus-
> cany, or Prussia.52

The aspect of cultural revival that stood foremost in Davis's
vision was the education of the people about their own history. As
has been seen, music, art, poetry, and language were not viewed by
Davis as pure forms, but, rather, as conduits of cultural identity
and pride. Davis sought an emotional recognition of Irish unique-
ness and past glory to provide modern Ireland with the determina-
tion and the strength to combat centuries of political, economic,
and spiritual conquest by England. History would, in Davis's mind,
restore the glory, clarify the national purpose, and harden Irish
resolve.

Numerous history books were advertised and reviewed in The
Nation and many of its writers, including Davis, were actively
engaged in writing history books themselves. The scholar's concern with bias certainly did not seem to be a major influence on most of these works which can be characterized somewhere between diatribe and lament. The uses of history as a means of forming the argument and stirring the emotions for a political movement of the present are especially clear in excerpts published by The Nation from O'Connell's Memoir of Ireland and the Irish. The facts of history definitely seem to take second place to the political message. For example:

> It has pleased the English people in general to forget all the facts of Irish history. They have been also graciously pleased to forgive themselves all those crimes.

> (T)here cannot happen a more heavy misfortune to Ireland than the prosperity and power of Great Britain.

> The worst result of British prosperity is, the protection it gives to the hard-hearted and bigoted class amongst the Irish landlords.

> Cromwell came from England and gorged himself on human blood.

The Nation, as a newspaper, also provided numerous articles on historical events, ancient legends, and old political controversies. Under the heading "Illustrations of Irish History," The Nation announced its intention to reprint "the scarce ballads and other poems connected with the political history of Ireland." A typical example of these selections is the "Wake of William Orr" written in 1797 by a United Irishman, William Drennan. The last three stanzas are the most significant:

> Hapless nation! rent and torn,
> Thou wert early taught to mourn,
> Warfare of six hundred years!
> Epochs mark'd with blood and tears.
Hunted thro' thy native grounds,
Or flung reward to human hounds!
Each one pull'd and tore his share,
Heedless of thy deep despair.

Hapless nation -- hapless land --
Heap of uncrementing sand!
Crumbled by a foreign weight
And by worse -- domestic hate.\

This ballad embodies The Nation's purpose: to restore the past to the people; but, more importantly, to remind them that Ireland's own lack of common goals and unity, their "domestic hate," destroyed her in a way that foreign domination could not.

Whether or not Irish history would be a creative and positive force in the development of Irish nationality or a wedge that would further separate the various groups within Irish society was a question brought dramatically to the surface by The Nation's energetic campaign for historical revival. The valiant deeds of Celtic heroes against invading Danes could provide a common source for pride; but later events involving the defeat and subjugation of a Catholic nation at the hands of a Protestant one, or the humiliation of the ancient Gaelic society by the Anglo-Irish could only exacerbate traditional divisions. Even the exciting new image of a revived Gaelic nationality included a rejection of English language and culture, and thus made Irish nationality "narrow" and defined by a "cultural and racial exclusiveness."\57 Whatever conclusions are to be drawn from the later conflicts between the Young Irelanders and O'Connell, it is clear that Davis was convinced that "the history of a nation is the birth-right of her sons," and that Ireland's past would insure her future success and heal her present wounds.\58
Davis's writings had a real, powerful impact on Irish society; and his reverence for the heroes and sacrifices of the past resulted in an obvious renewed concern for historical monuments. Davis discovered that Wolfe Tone's grave was both unmarked and unvisited; and he wrote a lyrical tribute to the martyred revolutionary. One stanza, in particular, calls shame for Tone's neglect:

For in him the heart of woman combined
With a heroic life, and a governing mind —
A martyr for Ireland — his grave has no stone —
His name seldom named and his virtues unknown.  

This poem sparked pride in Tone and in the Revolution of 1798. An iron rail was placed around the gravesite and a stone slab was laid, inscribed with Tone's heroic deeds and ending with "God Save Ireland."  

Ireland's countryside was dotted with ancient buildings and ruins, and Davis was particularly alarmed at the rate of destruction of these monuments: "(S)hall every nation in Europe shelter and study the remains of what it once was, even as one guards the tomb of a parent, and shall Ireland let all go to ruin?" In this essay on the importance of preserving historical monuments, Davis clearly links the nature of a people's attitude about their past to their ability to direct their own future:

He who tramples on the past does not create for the future. The same ignorant and vagabond spirit which made him a destructive, prohibits him from creating for posterity.  

Davis laid the blame for the unimpeded process of destruction of crosses, tombs, abbeys, castles, urns, and ancient coins on all classes and creeds; and pleaded for an aggressive program to save
these artifacts. He was impatient with talk and demanded action:

We talk much of Old Ireland, and plunder
and ruin all that remains of it — we
neglect its language, fiddle with its
ruins, and spoil its monuments.53

It is amusing to note that Davis had his practical side as well
when it came to preservation. He acknowledged that making museum
pieces out of all the old buildings that existed in Ireland would
be an indulgence that the country could not afford; so he suggested
that they be restored and then given over for such high civic pur-
poses as schools, lecture-rooms, and town halls.64

The Nation's own particularly didactic style of journalism
and Davis's tendency to regard his readers from the perspective of
a schoolmaster dealing with undisciplined but willing pupils, are
manifestations of his profound belief in the value of education for
all classes of Irish society:

We state a truth which universal history
attests, namely, that slavery co-exists
with ignorance, and that knowledge toler-
ates no tyranny.65

Davis wanted both educational reform and a vast expansion of edu-
cational opportunity. Education should no longer be locked into
the narrow confines of classical studies but, in Davis's view,
should encompass local history and modern languages. Further, in
a country of eight million people, where only one-and-a-half mil-
lion could read and, of those, only one-half million could write,
the need to broaden the educational base was acute.66 The signifi-
cance of a more democratic system of education for Irish unity was
emphasized by Davis who argued that "education was to nationality
as match was to fire,"67 and warned that:
An ignorant and turbulent race may break away from provincialism, but will soon relapse beneath a cunning, skilful, and unscrupulous neighbor. England is the one — Ireland must not be the other.44

Parents were exhorted to take an active role in the education of their children by turning family outings into geography lessons and by passing along old stories that gave the history "of every old tower or arch."69 The parents could extend their own education by joining societies that promoted agriculture, manufacturing, art, and literature.70

The Nation's vigorous and inventive style included a policy of encouraging its readers to submit their own ideas for "bettering the condition of the country."71 Under the heading "Popular Projects," the paper passed along a wide variety of suggestions including everything from the building of libraries to the revival of traditional dances and sports, such as reels and hurling.72 People were also encouraged to submit original songs and ballads for publication in The Nation.73

In all these efforts, Thomas Davis was particularly concerned that his countrymen shed any idea of the superiority of English language, literature, education, or manners to their own. Middle and upper class Irish families aped the dress, speech, and behavior of the English and generally held ethnic Irish characteristics in contempt. This attitude was insidiously undermining Irish national pride, and Davis consistently worked to make the people discard the mentality of a conquered race. One of the gentler and more amusing examples of The Nation's exasperation with Anglophilia is a satirical letter from a fictitious Mrs.
O'Rorke, Formerly Miss Biddy Fudge, to her sister Debby, in England:

I write, my dear Deb, in the greatest distress --
How great it must be you will easily guess,
When I tell you I'm just about bidding adieu
To poor Johnny and Jemmy. I'm sending the two
To England to school. Oh! Debby, my heart
Is ready to break, when I think I must part
My dear darling boys; but it's all for their good,
And I'd go through a thousand times more, if I could,
To rear them GENTEEELLY -- for ev'ry sensation
Of mine is in favor of NICE education.
Above all, 'tis the ACCENT I'm anxious about;
Good accent's the main point beyond any doubt.
You remember last year how your dear little Kitty
Delighted us all, her talk was so pretty.
When you asked her to sing about Margery Daw,
And she said with her sweet little frown, "Au Mammou,
"Don't ask me I pray, sure you know that I caun't."
Had she sung it, she couldn't have more pleased her aunt.
Yes! England's the place for an accent -- it's there
One imbibes the pure sounds with the pure English air;
Besides, 'tis the place where a young man will learn
All his mere vulgar Irish attachments to spurn.
While he talks with a tone, he will act with one, too,
That will show he has little with Ireland to do.

I like a young man with an air supercilious,
Looking English, and aristocratic, and bilious --
It shows folk at once he has rank on his side,
When he looks down on all with a cool, conscious pride.74

By the end of The Nation's second year, its founders could point with pride to both the paper's immense popularity and the genuine impact it seemed to have made on Irish nationalist thought and on society's activities. There was a marked increase in works on Irish historical topics, and music festivals and Gaelic societies were flourishing.75 A collection of ballads, poems, and songs published in the paper were reprinted in The Spirit of The Nation which was to go through over sixty editions. There was little doubt that this group of young journalists, and Thomas Davis in particular, had fired the country's imagination with their vision.
Later generations of artists, however, were to criticize certain aspects of Davis's philosophy and even to speak of "the de-Davisization of Irish history and letters." It was charged that an overly-romantic depiction of Irish peasant life, for instance, was "escapist" and hid certain harsh realities. The more serious criticism, however, was expressed by no less an Irish luminary than William Butler Yeats, among others. Yeats charged that Young Ireland had "deliberately subordinated art and letters to political ends." The underlying issue was, of course, whether a writer's energy and genius belonged first to his art or to his country. Davis would have answered one way and Yeats another.

There is no doubt that many of Davis's poems are trite and inept when compared with the rarified art of such a poet as William Butler Yeats. However, Davis never gave his work the constant revision and refinement that Yeats habitually gave his. Thomas Davis dashed off his verse when inspiration struck and usually sent it straight off to the printer. His unique style was the result of the merging of "a poet's soul . . . (into) the role of a nation builder."

Whatever the philosophical intricacies of this debate might be, it is vital to consider Thomas Davis's purpose, for it overwhelmingly shaped his art. He appealed to history, to sentiment, and to an ideal of unity in order to create a national identity that would belong equally to all Irishmen. His poetry and his use of art were the media through which he believed he could most effectively deliver his message. The Fenian leader O'Leary "spoke
for many of his generation when he said that in reading Davis's poems as a young man he had undergone the nationalist equivalent of a religious conversion."\textsuperscript{81} This, not art itself, was Davis's gift to his country; and through his work he was able to touch the shrivelled soul of Ireland's pride:

\begin{quote}
I have thought I saw her spirit from her dwelling, her sorrowing place among the tombs, rising, not without melancholy, yet with a purity and brightness beyond other nations, and I thought that God had made her purpose firm and her heart just.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

The general admiration in which Davis was held and the stirring quality of his writing changed forever the nature of Irish nationalism; but his vision of unity was to be tested in the bruising environment of contemporary politics. In that harsher reality, Davis's contributions were to prove ephemeral.
Endnotes - Chapter Two


3 Ibid.


7 Ibid., p. 268.


9 Rolleston, p. viii.

10 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 27.

11 Ibid., p. 3.


13 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 5.

14 Ibid., p. 6.

15 Ibid., p. 7.

16 Ibid., p. 27.


18 Rolleston, p. 2.

19 Kee, p. 197.

20 Rolleston, p. x.
21 Ibid., p. xi.
22 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 56.
23 Ibid., p. 57.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 64.
26 Ibid., p. 84.
27 Sullivan, p. 11.
28 Ibid.
29 McCaffrey, p. 43.
30 Ibid., p. 42.
31 Ibid.
34 Costigan, p. 194.
37 Ibid.
39 Sullivan, p. 41.
40 Ibid.
41 Rolleston, p. 201.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 Costigan, p. 194.
48. Rolleston, p. 159.
49. Ibid., p. 148.
50. Sullivan, p. 54.
51. Ibid.
53. Rolleston, p. 221.
58. Rolleston, p. 29.
59. Sullivan, p. 68.
60. Ibid.
61. Rolleston, p. 80.
62. Ibid., p. 81.
63. Ibid., p. 82.
64. Ibid., p. 87.
68. Rolleston, p. 208.
70. Sullivan, p. 51.
72 Ibid.
73 McCaffrey, p. 42.
76 Mansergh, p. 271.
77 Ibid., p. 272.
78 Ibid., p. 274.
79 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 120.
80 Sullivan, p. 13.
81 Costigan, p. 192.
82 Rolleston, p. 41.
Chapter Three

The Nation, under the energetic and idealistic leadership of Thomas Davis, raised the mission of a Gaelic cultural revival to the level of national significance. Nevertheless, the vast popularity of this weekly newspaper depended less on its passionate, and slightly pedantic, articles on the arts, language, and history, than it did on the paper's political character. The Nation, and its young writers, were a major element in the influence and progress of the single most important political movement of their age, the agitation for Repeal.

The Nation, Thomas Davis, Daniel O'Connell, and the Loyal National Repeal Association are inextricably linked in Irish history. Daniel O'Connell was the great popular leader, capable of calling forth and commanding massive demonstrations; The Nation was the movement's most intelligent and effective interpreter. It, as much as he, shaped the events and defined the goals of Repeal in the 1840s.

The Nation, from its inception, advocated strategies and aims analogous to the romantic nationalism that was sweeping the Italian nationalist movement. In Ireland this abstract, theoretical ideal, as developed by Davis, was to be tested in the political arena, and its legitimacy destroyed. O'Connell and Thomas Davis shared a vision of Irish independence and united the people
to a degree never before attained. However, their rift, based on ancient religious antagonisms and petty political jealousies, tore unity asunder and left the national movement bereft of leadership. The beneficial possibilities of both men's genius were squandered.

In April, 1840, Daniel O'Connell chaired the first public meeting of the National Association of Ireland, soon to be renamed the Loyal National Repeal Association. Only one hundred people attended and, of those, only five applied for membership; but, despite this apparent apathy, the meeting marked the beginning of a powerful national political movement.

The Association's structure was similar to the earlier Catholic Association which had won emancipation. A penny-a-month subscription, called the Repeal Rent, supported its activities, and O'Connell exerted firm, if flamboyant, control. The Repeal Association's platform was basically that only a native Irish Parliament under the crown would bring about the legislation necessary to change the conditions of everyday life in Ireland. Within a year, this contention had begun to assume the dimensions of a mystical goal for the ordinary Irishman.

O'Connell was immeasurably assisted in his campaign by the journalists who later came to be known as Young Ireland. Thomas Davis, John Dillon, and Charles Gavan Duffy were all members of the Repeal Association, before they founded their newspaper, and they soon realized that O'Connell had the allegiance of the Irish masses upon whom the success of the movement depended. Nevertheless, their enterprise, The Nation, with its unique style
and stirring messages, was to exercise a profound influence from the moment it appeared in October, 1842. Within months, The Nation had the greatest circulation of any newspaper in Ireland; and, the effects of locally established Repeal "Reading Rooms" and the habit of passing the paper hand-to-hand, caused Duffy to estimate that over 250,000 people saw each issue. Duffy may not be the most reliable or unbiased source for circulation figures, but, even if this figure were cut in half, it remains impressive.

If O'Connell was the undisputed master of popular agitation and ruler of the Repeal Association, then Thomas Davis was recognized by his colleagues as the "true leader" of their cause. Davis's decision to wholeheartedly support O'Connell's program through The Nation brought together two very different cultural and political "types." Davis was a Protestant who adhered to a strictly non-sectarian approach to Irish political problems. He was idealistic, intense, and serious; and he preferred to play his part behind the scenes. Daniel O'Connell was his antithesis.

O'Connell's greatest victory had been as the "Catholic champion" of Emancipation. Further, he was a "swaggerer" who encouraged a cult of personality. Though O'Connell was sensitive and kind in his private relationships, his public personality was loud, boastful, and histrionic; and Davis had to overcome a "fastidious repugnance" to O'Connell's style. Each man was able to recognize the value of the other's contribution to the Repeal movement, but the gulf between the quiet Protestant philosopher and the boisterous Catholic political operator was never completely bridged. Charles Gavan Duffy, who never forgave O'Connell for his
later attack on Davis, wrote that the tension was a result of the fact that:

In the midst of the old traditional agitation, grown decrepit and somewhat debauched, a new power claimed recognition.... (These were) men of original ideas and commanding intellect.

If there was any tension between the "old guard" and the "young intellectuals" within the Repeal Association, there was absolutely no evidence of it anywhere in early issues of The Nation. The newspaper was, in fact, dominated by concern for the progress of the Repeal movement and praise for its leader. Even a cursory examination of issue after issue published from 1842 into 1845 reveals an astounding degree of support for the cause. There were weekly reports of the collection of the O'Connell Compensation Fund, or the "O'Connell Tribute," and detailed articles about "The Liberator's" speeches and activities. O'Connell himself was referred to in the most glowing language, such as "the Patriot Chief of swordless glory." Further, The Nation published letters and articles, praising O'Connell, that came from other sources; and repeatedly commented on the importance of O'Connell's growing international reputation. Even making allowance for the partisan characteristics of nineteenth century Irish newspapers, The Nation clearly gave O'Connell unstinting loyalty.

Nowhere was Davis's determination to support the Repeal Association more dramatically expressed than in the weekly inclusion of the remarkable reports of Association meetings. The Nation provided a literally word-by-word account of Repeal meetings from the moment they were called to order till they were adjourned.
The practical effort that such a practice required, long before the age of the tape recorder, was, in itself, enormous; but it was the impact of verbatim reports that was the most important. The Nation gave its readers, many of whom were spread out around the country, the illusion of participation. In a real sense, these reports expanded dramatically the number of people who felt "actively" involved in Association business.

The weekly reports of the Association meetings included the selection of the chairman of the day, usually O'Connell if he was present, detailed reports on the collection of the Repeal Rent, reading of letters, and, of course, all speeches, liberally punctuated with notations of "cheers" and "hear, hear." The following excerpt demonstrates the quality of the "human" information that, added to the political messages, gave the reports their depth and the readers a sense of involvement:

Mr. O'Connell handed in one shilling, the subscription of the eldest son of Charles O'Connell, of Mount-street, who had been born since the last day of the meeting, and whose name was to be Daniel O'Connell (cheers). He was his (Mr. O'Connell's) near and dear relative, and was to be his grandson immediately; and except that was an obstacle to his being enrolled as a Repealer, the meeting would consent to his enrolment (laughter and cheers). His father promised that the first walk he should ever take would be to the Parliament house in College-green. (Cheers).\(^{13}\)

Daniel O'Connell proclaimed 1843 "Repeal Year," and launched a series of public meetings that were conducted in the open-air all over Ireland, often at places of "historic and emotive appeal" chosen by Davis.\(^{13}\) These gatherings proved to be an enormous success, and a perfect stage for O'Connell's theatrical abilities.
He maintained order through the power of his personality; and through his message of the inevitable victory of moral force, and his praise of the qualities of the Irish people. The Times (London) quickly dubbed the demonstrations "monster meetings," and the name stuck.

The Nation gave extensive coverage to the "great Repeal demonstrations" and increased popular enthusiasm through a stunning campaign of original essays and poetry. Thomas Davis, by far the most prolific contributor, was as effective in print as O'Connell was in person:

"The Union"

How did they pass the Union?
By perjury and fraud—
By slaves, who sold for place or gold
Their country and their God—
By all the savage acts that yet
Have followed England's track:
The pitch-cap and the bayonet,
The gibbet and the rack.
    And thus was passed the Union
    By Pitt and Castlereagh;
    Could Satan send for such an end
    More worthy tools than they?

How thrive we by the Union?
Look round our native land:
In ruined trade and wealth decayed
See slavery's surest brand;
Our glory as a nation gone—
Our substance drained away—
A wretched province trampled on,
Is all we've left to-day.
    Then curse with me the Union,
    That juggle foul and base,
    The baneful root that bore such fruit
    Of ruin and disgrace.

And shall it last, this Union
To grind and waste us so?
O'er hill and lea, from sea to sea,
All Ireland thunders NO!
Eight million necks are stiff to bow—
We know our might as men—
We conquered once before, and now
We'll conquer once again;
And rend the cursed Union,
And fling it to the wind—
And Ireland's laws in Ireland's cause
Alone our hearts shall bind!

A new regular feature appeared in The Nation called the "Repeal Dictionary." The following "definition" is typical:

Irish: In England the word Irish is used to denote something "awkward, blundering, rough, coarse and violent." This is not very civil on the part of our dear neighbours; but it is very natural. They have plundered and oppressed us for centuries; and it is in human nature to despise those whom you have with impunity wronged.

Letters from readers were also used to excellent effect, such as the following letter about the inability of an English parliament to legislate for Ireland:

John Milton wrote a very able essay to prove that the bad temper of his wife was a sufficient reason for his obtaining a bill of divorcement.... Ireland might adopt this line of argument, and shew that ever since the Union the temper and bad conduct of England has been such that she finds it impossible to live in the same HOUSE with her.

If the anti-Union campaign of The Nation had to be summed up in one word, that word might well be: relentless.

Though both Davis and O'Connell were dedicated to the Repeal of the legislative Union, they had very different ideas of what "nationality" meant. Daniel O'Connell was a pragmatic politician, and operated brilliantly in the world of public ploy and back-room bargaining. His "nine propositions" are an excellent example of his thinking:
1. The capacity of the Irish nation for an independent legislature
2. The perfect right of Ireland to have a domestic legislature
3. That that right was fully established by the transaction of 1782
4. That the most beneficial effects to Ireland result from her parliamentary independence
5. The utter incompetence of the Irish parliament to annihilate the Irish constitution by the union
6. The Union is no contract—it was carried out by corruption and bribery, force, fraud and terror
7. The Union produced disastrous results for Ireland
8. The Union can be abolished by peaceful and constitutional means—without the violation of law and without the destruction of property or life
9. The most salutary results, and none other, must result from a repeal of the Union.

Davis's views were eloquently expressed in the "Prospectus" that announced the impending appearance of The Nation:

Nationality is their first, great object—a Nationality which will not only raise our people from their poverty, by securing to them the blessings of a DOMESTIC LEGISLATURE, but inflame and purify them with a lofty and heroic love of country—a Nationality of the spirit as well as the letter—a Nationality which may come to be stamped upon our manners, and literature, and our deeds—a Nationality which may embrace Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter,... a Nationality which would be recognized by the world, and sanctified by wisdom, virtue, and prudence.

There can be little doubt that Davis's more abstract and "purist" concepts allow scant room for political maneuver; while O'Connell could cheerfully cross-ruff between Irish public opinion and
parliamentary political tactics. Davis, more than O'Connell, cherished a mystical image of Ireland unfettered and unbound; and praised an ideal of self-reliance:

The work that should today be wrought
Defer not till tomorrow;
The help that should within be sought
Scorn from without to borrow.
Old maxims these — yet stout and true —
They speak in trumpet tone,
To do at once what is to do
And trust OURSELVES ALONE.  

The Nation played its most significant part in the agitation by enlisting the sympathies and, to a degree, the active participation of the educated classes, who might never have listened to O'Connell's boisterous harangues. Davis fully understood the threat of what has been called "the deadly bane of Ireland" — religious division; and set himself the task of bringing Protestants into the fold of an all-embracing nationality. This was, at best, a formidable undertaking. The Nation consistently attempted
to induce the wealthy, well-placed, haughty minority, in possession of whatever the state or the law could bestow, to forego their monopoly, and unite with the trampled multitude in demanding a change which most of them considered revolutionary, and many feared would endanger their church and their possessions.

Among the Roman Catholic population, Thomas Davis was respected for his willingness to embrace Catholic hopes and aspirations, and for his refusal to be patronizing about it. His harshest words were reserved for the denunciation of sectarian hatred, for he recognized that "the man who diffuses religious bigotry is the deadliest enemy of Ireland:"  

Never mind, though fuel be scarce, firebrands are plenty. If employment fail we can drive
a trade in abusing one another, because some ask for forgiveness of GOD in one fashion, some in another. If we have no clothes we will keep ourselves warm with bigotry, and hypocrisy will cover us like a wrap-rascal. So long as we fight about religion, religion will give us plenty to do; and those who care nothing about religion will fatten on our folly.

The "Letters" section of the newspaper gave prominent space to a series of thoughtful messages signed simply, "A Protestant." These letters discussed frankly the Protestant fear that the cry for Repeal was really a cry for a Catholic Ascendancy; but argued that Protestants could be brought to the understanding that their interests would be best served by an Ireland governed "by and for its inhabitants." It is the great tragedy of Thomas Davis's life that the aspect of nationality about which he felt most strongly, and worked the hardest to achieve -- the end of religious hatred -- would be the very weapon used against him.

The quest for an Irish Parliament, however, did not encompass any idea of a constitutional break with the crown itself. Both The Nation and O'Connell kept the position that Irishmen could be loyal to the Queen and loyal to their own country. Banners at O'Connell meetings proclaimed "The Queen, O'Connell and Repeal," and each Repeal banquet ended with toasts drunk to her Majesty. Davis, however, frequently took pains to stress that, outside of affairs that concerned the empire as a whole, Ireland "must bid all whom it concerns to know that her interests are separate and her rights peculiar." Davis, more than O'Connell, feared the tentacles of British government; and this concern eventually
eroded his willingness to support O'Connell's political moves wholeheartedly.

The movement to restore Ireland's national integrity and legislative independence was undermined by the tension between Protestant and Catholic; and between philosopher and politician, not, as has often been asserted, by a disagreement over the use of violence. The "Young Ireland—Daniel O'Connell" quarrel has been oversimplified and presented as a split over the legitimacy of physical force for political ends. The fact is that the "Young Ireland" quasi-party had been attacked, and Davis's ideal punctured, long before the "violence debate."

It was Thomas Davis, more than any other person, who gave the group of young men a coherent voice and common purpose. After his death, that group splintered into two factions: a revolutionary element led by John Mitchel and Thomas Meagher among others; and a much less radical group represented by Charles Gavan Duffy and William Smith O'Brien. The internal tensions had already pulled the Repeal Association apart when the violence issue provided the means by which O'Connell could purge the Association of Young Irelanders. This is not to say that the question of physical force played no part in the relationship between Davis and O'Connell; indeed, it is a major element of the story. The error lies in placing Davis on one side and O'Connell on the other, and labelling that difference the reason for their breach.

O'Connell, in his speeches, and The Nation, in print, were "searching the depths of the nation's memory" and calling powerful emotions up into consciousness. O'Connell's "monster meetings"
represented, implicitly, the threat of an aroused populace; and, despite his repeated statements that he would never support armed insurrection, he did little to dispel the atmosphere of potential rebellion. O'Connell's tactic of openly playing upon the government's fears had worked for Emancipation, and he clearly used the same ploy with Repeal. O'Connell relied on his personal ability to bank Repeal fever into constitutional channels even as he whipped it up with impassioned diatribes against the injustices of British rule and the horrors of past oppressions.

The complexity of the messages sent out by The Nation and by O'Connell is due, in part, to the nature of Irish political rhetoric. What may seem to be emotionally charged and "extreme" language to the modern reader was essentially ordinary fare for the nineteenth century Irish listener. Nevertheless, O'Connell's language could be characterized as "ambivalent" in regard to violence. He would refer to himself as "one who would give the last drop of his life's blood, and smile to see it flow to do any good for Ireland."30

The Nation also purposefully stirred the blood with heated denunciations of British government and full-throated paeans to Ireland's past glories, among them, significantly, the abortive revolution by the United Irishmen in 1798:

Who fears to speak of '98?
Who blushes at the name?
When cowards mock the patriots' fate
Who hangs his head for shame?
He's all a knave or half a slave
Who slights his country thus:
But a true man, like you, man,
Will fill your glass with us.
Then here's their memory—may it be
For us a guiding light
To cheer our strife for liberty,
And teach us to unite!
Though good and ill be Ireland's still
Though sad as theirs, your fate,
And true men, be you, men,
Like those of '98.

...John Kells Ingram

As the series of monster meetings progressed they took on a greater and greater martial quality, which O'Connell actively encouraged. Surveying an immense gathering in County Limerick, O'Connell told them that:

I have power enough--the only question is how to use it. I have more strength and more physical force than gained the battle of Waterloo.

Both O'Connell and Thomas Davis deplored violence, yet both used its rhetoric. The differences between them can, once again, be best understood if we view one as a philosopher, and the other as a politician.

The threat of violence was, for Daniel O'Connell, a potent negotiating weapon, but, he also recognized and warned against its liabilities. While The Nation praised the heroism and patriotism of the revolutionaries of 1798, O'Connell lamented the political consequences:

The disastrous insurrection of 1798, an insurrection which hastened the impending ruin of the country, and by its effects contributed much to the success of the union measure. Far be it from me, sir, to speak harshly of men who were prominently connected with that insurrection. I believe that as pure and honest and patriotic motives swayed them as ever influenced human conduct....
But while I thus feel as to motives, I de­
plore and I condemn the course which they 
adopted."

Thomas Davis, on the other hand, sought to infuse a demoralized people with an heroic spirit, a spirit that was necessarily tied to feats of arms and battle glories. More importantly, he raised liberty and national independence back up to the level of over­
arching values worth dying for. Thomas Davis did not advocate physical force as the only effective means for achieving Repeal, but he did not rule it out as a last resort; and he wrote numer­
ous poems stating Ireland's reluctance to be pushed to that des­
perate point:

We want no swords, no savage swords,  
Our fetters vile to shatter.  
With conquering mind alone we fight--  
'Tis all we need for freedom!

Finally, Davis and O'Connell both strenuously opposed the use of random violence and assassination as a political weapon. Davis's conception of political duty was that actions must be "honourable to yourselves and serviceable to your country," and that base or criminal methods were deserving of the harshest con­
demnation. O'Connell could not have agreed more and warned that "whoever commits a crime gives strength to the enemy." The murder of Mr. John Gatchell, a magistrate, in May of 1843 was labelled by O'Connell as "shocking" and "disgraceful," while The Nation editorialized against the murder of landlords as vile and horrid, not to mention stupid, for the sin would not result in "a landlord the less nor a persecutor the less."

There was an equally shared steadfast stand against secret societies of all kinds and the ubiquitous problem of agrarian
crime. O'Connell emphasized the protection of working for political ends in the open and within the law; and Davis deprecated tactics he deemed dishonourable and disgusting.

Thomas Davis was not in the business of promoting violent revolution, nor did he maintain that "Ireland's freedom would be secured only by armed force." Rather, Thomas Davis wanted to unify Irish factions into a spiritual, not necessarily physical, position of strength.

Certainly, in 1843, the Repeal demonstrations were the single most volatile aspect of Irish political life. The Nation announced meetings planned for the future, and gave detailed coverage to the meetings and post-meeting banquets that had already taken place. In England, Prime Minister Peel adopted the tactic of feigned indifference—he neither attempted coercion nor offered immediate conciliation. Peel clearly hoped that the Repeal movement would collapse when the people saw that O'Connell "could not redeem any of his extravagant pledges."

Though O'Connell and his young supporters commanded the most comprehensive national movement in Irish history, it was far from a universal one. Orange demonstrations in Tyrone, Carland, and Dungannon in June of 1843 aggressively proclaimed "No Popery" and "No Repeal." To this pro-union unrest was added growing concern among English Conservatives that the situation in Ireland had reached a dangerous point.

On September 30, 1843, The Nation announced that yet another monster meeting would be held, this time at Clontarf, the site of Brian Boru's victory over the Danes. The date was set for
October 5th, and The Nation ominously warned that "the clouds are thickening—Heaven only knows with what they are charged." The great anticipation ended, however, with a whimper. Peel's government, moving with dispatch and determination, declared the Clontarf meeting illegal. People from all over Ireland had already begun to assemble, but O'Connell immediately cancelled the demonstration. Though O'Connell's action was completely in accord with his repeated statements that he would never act unconstitutionally, and though his moderate followers approved of his capitulation, the majority came to resent his tame surrender. Clontarf marked the beginning of O'Connell's decline as a popular leader though this was not obvious at the time. O'Connell's revolutionary bluff was called and he folded.

The immediate response to the Clontarf fiasco was a sharp increase in the Repeal Rent in the third week of October, and a general relief that O'Connell's "legal instincts" had averted a potential bloodbath. However, it is probable that both Davis and Duffy realized, earlier than most, that the government had sapped the energy of the Repeal agitation and had undermined confidence in the resolution of its leader. The apprehension of vulnerability was confirmed when, on October 14, 1843, O'Connell, Charles Gavan Duffy, and five others were arrested for "conspiracy."

It was February, 1844 before the state trial of Daniel O'Connell and the six other Repealers dragged to an end. Though sentencing was postponed, the effects of the prosecution had already taken their toll. Within the Repeal Association's committee,
O'Connell had gone to the length of proposing that the Association be dissolved, and "this disaster was only averted by the young men declaring that they could not follow him into a new association if the old one was sacrificed to a panic." In public, his speech and behavior were increasingly characterized by anxiety about the dangers of illegal activity. The trial was a mockery, with a packed jury and questionable procedure, but it served its purpose; it made Daniel O'Connell feel old and afraid.

The date, 30 May 1844, the day of O'Connell's sentencing, was instantly turned into an emblem of martyrdom by The Nation. The editorial section began with the words, "Remember the 30th May, 1844," and O'Connell's heroism was repeatedly lauded. The conditions of his incarceration were something less than onerous, however.

O'Connell and his little band of "co-conspirators" were confined under the control of the Dublin Corporation, and the Governor graciously turned his house over to the inmates. Dinner parties of twenty-four or more were frequent, and visitors were allowed daily.

The Repealers' trial brought the movement one great benefit in the person of William Smith O'Brien. Smith O'Brien was a Protestant, a member of Parliament, and a man of "unstained probity." While he plainly lacked O'Connell's dynamism, his personal dignity and excellent reputation gave the Repealers a figure around which they could gather. Association business was, thus, able to continue without significant interruption; and The Nation, now being edited by Thomas Davis, poured forth encouragement. Davis was
particularly delighted with Smith O'Brien for he represented a living embodiment of his theory that Protestants could, and should, make common cause with Catholics.

Concerns about O'Connell's leadership continued to interject a note of tension into the superficially placid period of imprisonment. Davis worried about a retreat from the "Repeal" demand, and Duffy voiced his apprehensions that O'Connell might be tempted back into a confidential relationship with the English Whig Party. Duffy, in addition, felt that O'Connell was determined to found a dynasty, with his son John as Heir Apparent. John O'Connell, unfortunately, had inherited all of his father's ambition but none of the elder man's wit, grace, or political acumen. Thus resentment and suspicion grew.

Against all expectations, the English House of Lords reversed the decision of the Irish Court. O'Connell and his fellow "traversers" were released that same day but chose to return to prison for one more night so that adequate preparations could be made for a triumphal procession. The next day, two hundred thousand jubilant Irishmen cheered "The Liberator" and basked in the warmth of a moral victory; but, when all the excitement had died down, the nagging question remained of what to do next.

O'Connell was clearly unwilling to risk another attempt at confrontation politics of the sort that had produced the Clontarf fiasco; and The Nation joined him in advocating a steady but more subdued pressure. Davis praised the Irish people for their behavior during the difficult year of O'Connell's arrest, trial, and imprisonment:
The people have shown that their spirit, their discipline, and their modesty, can be relied on; they have but to exhibit that greatest virtue which their enemies deny them -- perseverance -- and all will be well."

Several weeks after O'Connell's release, he wrote a letter to the Repeal Association from his country home in which he discussed the virtues of "Federalism." Sharman Crawford, a Protestant, and an Ulster landlord, had urged Federalism as a compromise position. Under this proposal, Ireland would have an independent, domestic legislature to be concerned with Irish interests only; while all wider responsibilities would be in the province of the Imperial Parliament, in which Ireland would have a reduced representation. Davis and his colleagues did not reject this idea out of hand, but they were concerned that federalism be accepted only as an interim, not a final, solution; and that complete Repeal remain the goal. O'Connell's letter stirred up all their fears of retreat.

Undeniably, O'Connell stated that:

For my own part, I will own, I do at present feel a preference for the Federative plan, as tending more to the utility of Ireland, and to the maintenance of the connection with England than the mode of simple Repeal."

Even Davis was willing to concede that Federalism might be all that Ireland could realistically hope to achieve given the current political situation, but he would never accept it as a settlement. In this instance, he was more attuned to Irish public opinion than O'Connell. The Nation published excerpts from other newspapers, including The Kilkenny Journal, The Limerick Reporter, and the Leeds Times, all of which questioned if acceptance of Federalism
meant giving up on the principle of Repeal.59

The controversy quickly died because the Federalists were unable to agree among themselves on how to respond to O'Connell, and on whether or not they should allow their organization to be incorporated into the Repeal Association. O'Connell escaped from a potentially embarrassing predicament, but the incident left behind an unpleasant residue. The Nation and O'Connell had publicly disagreed, and Duffy's Open Letter to The Liberator had branded O'Connell's "preference" for Federalism as an humiliation that would drive the best men out of the Association.60 Further, Duffy asserted that O'Connell had no right to alter the constitution of the Association, in other words the Repeal platform, under which its members had been recruited.61

Duffy's Open Letter expressed only his ideas for, at the time that the controversy broke, Davis was not in Dublin and not available for consultation. Nevertheless, Davis fully supported Duffy's sentiments that the Repealers must stand as "an unbroken league."62 The Nation even went so far as to praise its own creators' "consuming patriotism" and "ardent spirits."63

The real significance of this episode lies in the fact that latent tensions were beginning to break into the open. O'Connell was surprised and indignant at his unceremonious upbraiding, and he recognized that the question was no longer simply which direction the movement would go, but who would lead it. From this point on, a clash between the political practitioner and the idealist became inevitable.
Thomas Davis had turned The Nation into a powerful funnel for Association propaganda; but, he had also developed and refined a definition of nationalism that became an all-encompassing ideal. The Nation was, first and last, the voice of non-racial and non-sectarian nationality. For years, the goals of Davis and those of O'Connell had run parallel. Now, O'Connell saw his ability to maneuver restricted, and his style of personal rule jeopardized. In attempting to establish political domination over Thomas Davis, Daniel O'Connell repudiated all of Davis's philosophy. Romantic nationalism was to be sacrificed to the expediency of religious bigotry.
Endnotes - Chapter Three

1 McCaffrey, p. 39.
2 Kee, p. 193.
3 McCaffrey, p. 45.
4 Kee, p. 194.
6 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 56.
7 Edward Norman, A History of Modern Ireland, Coral Gables, 1971, p. 68.
8 Denis Gwynn, Young Ireland and 1848, Cork, 1949, p. 5.
9 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 108.
10 Gwynn, p. 10.
14 McCaffrey, p. 49.
16 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 109, November 9, 1844, p. 71.
17 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 122, February 8, 1845, p. 298.
18 Ibid., Vol. I, No. 21, March 4, 1843, p. 322.
19 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 84.
20 As quoted in Kee, p. 199.
21 Gwynn, pp. 11-12.
22 Kee, p. 214.

74
25Ibid.


27Kee, p. 200.

28As quoted in Kee, p. 201.

29Kee, p. 208.

30Ibid., p. 203.


32As quoted in Kee, p. 206.


35Costigan, p. 194.

36Rolleston, p. 39.


39Rolleston, p. 262.

40James J. Brennan, A Catechism of the History of Ireland, Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern, New York, 1878, p. 244.

41McCaffrey, p. 51.


45McCaffrey, pp. 54-55.

46Kee, p. 213.


48Gwynn, p. 15.

49Duffy, Memoirs, pp. 188-9.

50Ibid.
51 Kee, p. 217.
52 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 213.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 237.
55 Ibid., p. 242.
57 As quoted in Kee, p. 229.
58 McCaffrey, p. 45.
60 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 261.
61 Ibid., p. 263.
62 Ibid.
Chapter Four

On October 12, 1844, The Nation, in an article entitled "A Second Year's Work," reflected on the success of the "bold experiment" in romantic nationalism. The Nation was more popular and influential than ever among the Irish population, and its reputation was growing in both France and the United States. Thomas Davis explicitly attributed the strength and durability of the newspaper's popularity to the acceptance of its philosophical messages:

Our success is more honorable to Ireland than to us, for it was by defying evil customs and bad prejudices we succeeded.1

To Thomas Davis, The Nation's extraordinary, and unexpected, success, affirmed his belief in the utility, and nobility, of an all-encompassing Irish nationality. Davis had consistently argued that, in Ireland, it was the mingling of politics and religion that blinded men to their common, secular interests and that rendered "political union impossible and national independence hopeless."2 The Nation had identified and "grappled with the difficulty:"

We left sacred things to consecrated hands -- theology and discipline to churchmen. We preached a nationality that asked after no man's creed.3

The obvious assumption was that the country had listened, and had embraced Davis's ideal with his same ardor.
The year 1845 approached as a time for consolidation and slow, steady advance. O'Connell's imprisonment had recouped for him much of the hero's glory that he had lost after the Clontarf fiasco. To the general public, he appeared as energetic and as fulsomely patriotic as ever. However, he was approaching his seventieth year, had been frightened by his trial and detention; and, more importantly, he had reacted with indignant alarm to criticism over his apparent willingness to accept Federalism. Thus, Daniel O'Connell was just as determined to re-establish his previously unquestioned control over the Repeal Association as he was to maintain the demand for Repeal itself.

Charles Gavan Duffy warned his colleagues and friends that O'Connell would attempt to "punish" The Nation for its critical "Open Letter" about Federalism. Writing long after Davis's and O'Connell's deaths, Duffy argued that Young Ireland had won the right to O'Connell's trust and confidence, but that O'Connell had chosen to view their independent judgment as "incipient treason."

Duffy's contention that Daniel O'Connell was determined to reduce the young men of The Nation to political impotence is, of course, reasonable; but it is difficult to know just how conscious or carefully orchestrated such a campaign was.

For the first time, small items began to appear in various provincial newspapers accusing Davis of anti-Catholic sentiments. If this was the punishment that O'Connell intended to mete out, it came in a form that no one had foreseen. It seemed as though Davis and Duffy were going to be accused of being secret enemies of the church and of The Liberator.
The **Belfast Vindicatoe** was one of the newspapers that attacked Davis with the charge of "indifferentism" in religion. Thomas MacNevin, a contributor to **The Nation**, wrote a letter in rebuttal that was printed on November 2, 1844, and that vehemently reminded its readers that one of the original clauses of the Repeal Association charter was that the practice of religion be free and private. MacNevin went on to warn that such charges might give Irish Protestants and Presbyterians "reason to suppose that we sought to entrap them into a struggle for independence only to make them the victims of sectarian bigotry and ambition."7

There was general outrage among Davis's associates that this particular charge should be leveled at this particular man. Duffy fumed that it would be just about as reasonable to accuse Davis of Anti-Irish sentiments as it was to label him anti-Catholic; and MacNevin cried:

> woe, woe to the country wherein could be found a single tongue to slander so pure, so upright, so earnest a man— one whose ceaseless energy, whose indomitable labour,... whose glorious enthusiasm are devoted, without one thought of ambition or self, to the elevation of Ireland.8

Thomas Davis's greatest fear, that the national cause would be ruined by bigotry and hypocrisy, seemed, incredibly, to be manifesting itself in a personal attack against him. Worst of all, the "dangerous impression" of Davis's "indifferentism" seemed to have been worked up by John O'Connell with, at least, "the tacit sanction of his father."9

Duffy's opinion that John O'Connell "united a stealthy ambition to a narrow intellect"10 can hardly be regarded as a
dispassionate assessment; yet many others, including numerous O'Connellites, were unhappy about the fact that O'Connell was obviously grooming his much less able, or amiable, son to be his successor.\textsuperscript{11} John O'Connell frequently ran Association meetings for his father, and it was apparent that his main interest was in assuring his own political inheritance. John O'Connell's coterie of hangers-on, who ostentatiously referred to him as the "Young Liberator," irritated many of the journalists who worried that the senior O'Connell might sacrifice the interests of nationalism to the interests of dynasty.\textsuperscript{12}

Serious as the tensions were over John O'Connell and over Daniel O'Connell's flirtation with federalism, there was no real rift within the Repeal Association over these issues. The place of the Catholic Church in Irish political life was another matter altogether. Thomas Davis's message of non-sectarian nationalism brought the question of traditional church/political alignments to the fore and asked the Irish people to separate those spheres in a way they never had before. The difficulty of secularizing political life was emphasized by the furor that resulted when the British government was rumored to be seeking a "concordat" with the Court of Rome. England was supposedly negotiating with the Pope who was, consequently, to forbid all Catholics from taking part in any Repeal activities. The Nation condemned the plan as intolerable foreign interference and a vicious scheme to "convert his Holiness into a tool of Peel's hostility to Ireland."\textsuperscript{13} The rumored concordat never materialized but the general reaction demonstrated that the choice between nationalism and religion
presented an unbearable dilemma for the great majority of the Irish people.

The next crisis for Davis, O'Connell, and Repeal also turned on the question of the Church; but, in this case, the issue was turned into a weapon of political domination, and the quest for non-sectarian nationalism was destroyed.

Early in 1845, Robert Peel decided to make several conciliatory gestures to Ireland. Any such gestures were bound to be enormously unpopular in England, but Peel felt they were necessary both to placate Irish nationalist feeling and to sap its energy. The first gesture concerned the annual grant to the Maynooth training college for Catholic priests. Peel proposed that the annual endowment be increased from £9,000 to £26,000, and be made permanent. There were no conditions attached. The college would be left very much as it had been in constitution and discipline, and no effort would be made to increase public control.

The Nation firmly endorsed the bill:

As a general rule, it is important that money votes should be annual. The best guards against the corrupt or negligent use of public money are annual examinations, and the power of the Commons depends on its supplies requiring renewal; but where the sum is small and the discussion rancorous, this reason yields, and a permanent vote is better for the public interests. We are, therefore, glad that Sir Robert Peel has manfully avowed his resolve to confer the increased grant on Maynooth by special and permanent act, thus freeing the country from the evil, and the Commons from the disgrace of an annual eruption of bigotry on the question of this vote.

The Nation printed full transcripts of the lengthy debates on the Maynooth grant that took place in both the Repeal Association and the House of Commons. Despite serious English protest,
Peel was able to secure passage for the bill but unable to eradicate the impression that religious bigotry was alive and well at Westminster. Nevertheless, the grant was generally welcomed in Ireland.17

The Charitable Bequests Bill, however, rekindled suspicion that Peel was attempting to undercut the influence of the Catholic Church by asserting government control over religious bequests, a plan that Davis supported as giving Irish Protestants and Catholics joint authority over such monies. But, it was the third bill, the "colleges bill," that turned controversy into political ambush.

Peel proposed that three colleges be established and endowed in Cork, Belfast, and Galway. These colleges would be totally undenominational in character and would provide "secular" education.18 To Davis, this bill was an "unhoped for realization of a dream."19 He had repeatedly argued that education was essential for combining all religious bodies into a true Irish union;20 and here was a chance to educate together young, middle-class men of all religions, and thus nip prejudice and bigotry in the bud. Davis rejected "separate but equal" educational ideas and stated that only "mixed" education would develop strong national character because it was "consistent with piety and favorable to the union of Irishmen of different sects, for the want of which Ireland is in rags and chains."21

The importance that Davis attached to the Colleges Bill is made clear in his editorial in The Nation on March 29, 1845:

"Age after age has seen Ireland prostrated by religious bigotry, her fortresses surrendered, her generals stopped in mid-career, her
statesmen insulted, her liberation bartered in the name of religion. At this moment our peasantry are in hungry hovels, our artisans in the workhouses, our shopkeepers idle, our name, strength and happiness blighted, because bigotry sunders Protestant from Catholic, and thus keeps us below the level of independence. All wrongs and insults we endure today, all we have endured for centuries, all that roar about our advancing path, are the curses of religious dissension. And it is in this country that separate education for separate sects shall be demanded? Shall the British Minister be petitioned to immortalize our weakness by fostering our disunion?22

Thomas Davis's determination that religion and politics be kept entirely separate ran into the vehement opposition of Archbishop MacHale who equated mixed education with eternal damnation.23 Davis felt he had no choice but to oppose this "bigotry" and "ecclesiastical domination" with every bit of his persuasive power.

Daniel O'Connell had often supported the idea of non-sectarian education but, as the debate heated up, he seemed to show increasing resentment over Young Ireland's criticism of Catholic "sectarian tendencies." Daniel O'Connell's political base was, and always had been, the Catholic masses; and it is probable that he viewed the Catholic Church as a far more indispensable ally than the young journalists of The Nation. O'Connell decided to make an issue out of the Colleges Bill to keep Young Ireland in its place.

Charles Gavan Duffy contends that the Catholic clergy and the Catholic members of the Repeal Association "had suspicion of Young Ireland carefully and systematically sown in their minds;"24 and there is some evidence that supports this view. The Pilot,
widely known as the O'Connellite newspaper, repeatedly accused Young Ireland of being anti-Catholic, "godless and irreligious." It is unlikely that such statements would have appeared without at least the tacit approval of Daniel O'Connell.

In May of 1845, mixed education was debated during two consecutive Repeal Association meetings. John O'Connell denounced the Colleges Bill as a plot against the "faith and morals of the Irish people," and his father supported these statements. Mixed education was also labelled "productive of indifference in religion." Thomas Davis tried to keep the discussion of the Bill out of the Association, reminding that body that its sole constitutional function was Repeal of the Union. This attempt to deflect the issue did not work, however, and the first meeting was adjourned with O'Connell declaring his unyielding antipathy for mixed education.

The Catholic Bishops of Ireland met during the interval between Association meetings in order to make a judgment on the proposed Colleges Bill. While their official reaction was pending, The Nation continued to editorialize:

The objections to separate education are immense; the reasons for it are reasons for separate life, for mutual animosity, for penal laws, for religious wars.

The Nation's vigorous campaign on behalf of the Colleges Bill undoubtedly reduced the possibilities for negotiation and face-saving compromise. This issue touched on both a main element in Davis's nationalistic philosophy and on the newspaper's independence and integrity; and, consequently, it was an issue from which the journalists could not retreat:
It was agreed among us that the object for which The Nation was established would be unattainable if we did not insist on the right to advocate our individual opinions in our own journal upon all questions not fundamental to the existence of the Repeal Party.\textsuperscript{19}

The meeting of the Catholic Bishops resulted in a "memorial" to the Lord Lieutenant professing their "readiness to cooperate with the government on fair and reasonable terms, in establishing a system for the further extension of academical education."\textsuperscript{30} The Bishops made four propositions, all of which Thomas Davis and The Nation wholeheartedly supported:

1. A fair proportion of the professors and office-bearers in the new colleges shall be members of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Bishops of each province shall be members of the Governing Board; and certain subjects must be taught by Roman Catholics to Roman Catholic students because certain subjects cannot be taught by the professors of one creed without probable offence or injustice to the creed of the others. Among these subjects are metaphysics, philosophy, logic and history.

3. There must be a Roman Catholic chaplain to superintend moral and religious instruction of Roman Catholic students.

4. If any President, Vice-President, professor or office-bearer in any of the new colleges shall be convicted before the Board of Trustees of attempting to undermine the faith, or injure the morals of any student in those institutions, he shall be removed immediately by the same board.\textsuperscript{11}

At the very least, the Bishops' Memorial opened the door for compromise. If a fair adjustment between philosophy and politics was genuinely wanted, it was possible within these propositions. The tragedy was that religion was, once again, to be used as a political weapon even though O'Connell himself had often said
that religious dissension was Ireland's curse. The ideal of nationalism lost when Thomas Davis accepted the propositions and Daniel O'Connell did not.

Daniel O'Connell continued to portray the journalists as secularists and anticlericals until the final confrontation over the issue took place in the Repeal Association meeting on May 26, 1845. M. J. Barry, a Young Irelander, spoke in support of the educational benefits of the proposal and declared his utter indifference to the fact that the character of the colleges was to be undenominational. This speech was followed by a stinging harangue by Michael Conway, who had previously been distinguished only by his obsequious devotion to John O'Connell.

Conway charged that Young Ireland knew nothing of the real Irish character and soul so inextricably linked with Christianity and the Catholic Church. The speech was bad enough, but, through it all, O'Connell sat, cheering "every offensive sentence," and, when the speech was over, he "took off his cap and waved it over his head."

Thomas Davis's reply brought about the following dramatic exchange with O'Connell:

Mr. Davis: reply to Conway -- "my Catholic friend -- my very Catholic friend --"

O'Connell: "It is no crime to be a Catholic, I hope."

Davis: "No, surely no, for --"

O'Connell: "The sneer with which you used the word would lead to the inference."

Davis: "No! Sir, no! ... I was brought up in a mixed seminary, where I learned to know, and knowing, to love my Catholic countrymen --"
a love that shall not be disturbed by those casual and unhappy dissensions (hear, hear). Disunion, alas! has destroyed our country for centuries. Men of Ireland, shall it destroy it again (no, no)? Will you take the boys of Ireland in their earliest youth, and deepen the differences between them? Will you sedulously seclude them from knowing the virtues, the genius, the spirit, the affections of each other? If you do, you will vainly hope that they who were carefully separated in youth will be united in manhood, and stand together for their country."

Daniel O'Connell's response was unyielding:

The section of politicians styling themselves the Young Ireland party, anxious to rule the destinies of this country, start up and support the measure. There is no such party as that styled "Young Ireland" (hear, hear). There may be individuals that take that denomination on themselves (hear, cheers). I am for Old Ireland (loud applause). 'Tis time that this delusion should be put an end to (hear, hear, cheers). Young Ireland may play what pranks they please. I do not envy them the name they rejoice in. I shall stand by Old Ireland (cheers). And I have some slight notion that old Ireland will stand by me (loud cheers). We are all agreed as to a condemnation of this measure (hear, hear). When somebody proposes a specific plan of what he calls mixed education, I shall consider it -- I will examine its details, and weigh its merits with all the judgment which I may possess; but I will not be prepared to approve of it, because the Catholic bishops have not condemned it."

Within Conciliation Hall, the meeting place of the Repeal Association and a bitterly ironic rame at this point, there was general alarm at the exposed passions of the disagreement. Davis rose and stated his affection for O'Connell, and declared that there were not two parties in the Association but only one for Irish nationality. Even John O'Connell announced that "there has been no rupture here today," but couldn't resist adding that
he had come to the meeting

fully determined ... not to allow any con­
siderations of peace or of conciliation, at
so important a crisis of our country's history,
to induce (him) to mitigate any expression or
smother any opinion.

Like a stunned warrior, the Repeal Association gathered up its
smashed and bloodstained armour, unaware that it was mortally
wounded.

The effect of conflict within the Repeal Association on both
its supporters and its enemies was a point of obvious concern.
The Nation attempted to turn the disaster into a "victory," in an
editorial titled "Differences in the Association:"

Gratified patriotism, and disappointed malice!
-- The Friends of Ireland had feared, its
enemies had hoped, a rupture among the Repealers.
There was a contest but the result was better
understanding, and closer amity than ever.

But Davis went on to reiterate his stand that the Association was
formed only to repeal the Union and that it could not involve its
members in anything else. Further, Davis pointed out that the
introduction of any topic for discussion was at the discretion of
the Committee, whose practice it had been to keep passionate dis­
putes out of the public eye. In all of this, Davis was continuing
to treat the Association as a constitutional body greater than any
one leader; while O'Connell maintained his insistence on personal
rule. O'Connell's overriding attitude was that he would not "ac­
cept the service of any man who does not agree with me in both
theory and practice."38

Not surprisingly, Duffy marks the Colleges Bill debate as
the moment that O'Connell's popularity began to ebb. Certainly
O'Connell's actions were inconsistent with his previous statements concerning freedom of conscience and Protestant-Catholic harmony; and his personal political motives were transparent. Disillusionment with O'Connell's leadership intensified when *The Pilot* continued its attacks on Davis even after the "reconciliation" and at the same time that *The Nation* was proclaiming increased understanding. 39

Other newspapers in Ireland commented on the quarrel, and a number of their editorials were reprinted in *The Nation*. The *Kilkenny Journal* wrote that:

[Young Ireland] disclaim all sectarian views or pre-possessions; their object was to combine Irish hearts and Irish talents, both Catholic and Protestant, into one sentiment and one struggle for the liberties of Ireland. Of their sincerity of purpose, as of their talents and industry, there is not the smallest room to doubt, but in asserting toleration they went too far, and claimed for a man a right to change his religion any imaginable number of times. Here, in avoiding one extreme, they rushed into another. They were tolerant to irreligion. 40

Nevertheless, the *Journal* stated that the nationalists "could not spare from our ranks the head and heart of Thomas Davis, and the less, that he is a Protestant." 41

*The Pilot* was less willing to forgive the alleged "indifferentism" or the real political challenge:

[The Young Irelanders] were a party of young men, actuated by a morbid self-esteem, who have latterly been assuming an unearned and fancied importance among us ... but their temerity has been checked, and their presumption chastised in a manner that will be, if they bear it in mind, of essential service to them. 41
The Times (London) simply declared that: "Old Ireland has beaten its young rival. The priests have done it." 43

Daniel O'Connell had used Catholic identification and Catholic causes to build Irish nationalism; and it is quite possible that he "doubted that nationalism was strong enough to exist independent of its Catholic connection." 44 Though The Nation and Thomas Davis failed to understand the power of that traditional connection, O'Connell, on his part, failed to recognize that Protestants could be brought to full participation in nationalist agitation only if ties were severed between the Catholic Church and the Repeal Movement. 45 The opportunity to release Irish nationalism from religious dissension had come and had been squandered, and with it the validity of romantic nationalism. No unifying ideal had managed to transcend the ancient sectarian divisions. Though the Repeal movement seemed to settle back into a normal course of speeches, open-air meetings, and newspaper editorials, it was collapsing internally. Thomas Davis, Duffy, and the other Young Irelanders were tainted with "irreligion;" Daniel O'Connell was old and was suspected of favoring Catholic Ascendancy; John O'Connell was mistrusted for his personal ambition and disliked for his arrogance; even William Smith O'Brien could only lamely hold to his centrist position by declaring that he saw no reason to choose between Old and Young Ireland, and that he personally was for "middle-aged Ireland." 46

A series of Orange demonstrations in the summer of 1845, centered around the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, increased sectarian tension. The Nation pleaded for unity, and
an end to feuds and hatreds, to no avail; while reports came
from northern cities of parades with banners that declared "Re-
member 1690" and "No Repeal, No Surrender."47

The most devastating blow fell on September 16, 1845.
Thomas Davis, who just days earlier had written to Duffy that
he was recovering from a slight attack of "scarletina," died at
the age of thirty.48  The Nation's next issue, heavily bordered
in black, called his death "a calamity, beneath which the heart
of the land sinks."49  The loss of Davis's imaginative and pre-
cise intellect, and of his generous spirit, came at a time when
they were most desperately needed; and The Nation was sadly cor-
rect when it stated that "This death is a stern lesson. It has
left [all of us] more to do."50

By this time, the appalling tragedy of the potato famine
had begun to settle over Ireland. The blight that rotted the
potatoes rotted the fibre of Irish nationalism as well. In the
years of the famine, roughly 1845 to 1849 with the peak in 1847,
Irish peasant life became a frantic, daily contest with disease
and starvation. One and a half million people died and another
million fled.51  The last vestiges of Davis's "noble enterprise"
were buried in the graves of the famine.52

For many, Repeal became a secondary priority as Irish
political leaders attempted to keep their citizens from dying
of starvation. Nevertheless, O'Connell worked to keep the agi-
tation alive. However, since the death of Davis, Young Ireland
had taken on a decidedly new and radical character; and O'Connell
was confronted by a more strident and aggressive voice than ever
Thomas Davis had used. The Nation was altered by an infusion of new writers. The Young Ireland newcomers included John Mitchel, Thomas Meagher, T. R. McManus, and Richard O'Gorman, none of whom shared, or even understood the ideal of nationality that Thomas Davis had so eloquently espoused. The quest for romantic nationalism was over.

Young Ireland's historic identification with a philosophy of violent revolution comes from this second generation of writers and activists that succeeded Davis. The political frustration of these men was sharpened by the failure of Britain to ameliorate the effects of the potato catastrophe. Wheat, barley, pigs, cows, and sheep regularly left Irish ports for English harbors and the British government refused to act vigorously to improve relief operations:

Committed to laissez-faire economic dogma, government officials and politicians argued that Famine relief should not interfere with normal commercial activity, compete with private business, discourage personal initiative or make the Irish people dependent on government handouts. The bankruptcy of the assertion of Ireland's equal status in a Union with Great Britain exposed during the Famine increased the militancy of Mitchel and his followers to the point that they advocated the use of physical force. O'Connell seized upon the issue in a successful attempt to drive Young Ireland out of the Repeal Association.

In July, 1846, O'Connell introduced "peace resolutions" that stated that no situation would justify the use of force in the struggle for Irish freedom. It was a purely hypothetical
issue for no one assumed that Ireland had the means, energy, or organization to prepare armed revolt. The real issue was Young Ireland.

Thomas Meagher spoke and declared that:

I dissented from these resolutions for I felt that by assenting to them I should have pledged myself to the unqualified repudiation of physical force in all countries, at all times, and in every circumstance.... I do not abhor the use of arms in the vindication of national rights.**

In the end, it was this abstract principle and untimely debate that caused Young Ireland to walk out of the Repeal Association. The cohesion and strength of unity that Thomas Davis had recognized as essential when he joined O'Connell's Repeal organization was abandoned. But, was it the issue of violence that destroyed nationalist cooperation, or was the issue simply the tool that tipped a dead cause into its grave?

Thomas Davis had fully agreed with Daniel O'Connell on the necessity of peaceful agitation; their conflict belonged in another sphere:

There are two ways of success for the Irish -- arms and persuasion. They have chosen the latter. They have resolved to win their rights by moral force.**

By the time the second generation was directing the voice of The Nation, the cohesion of the Repeal movement had already been destroyed by sectarianism and political competition. There was, no longer, a belief in a shared purpose or a conviction of ultimate moral triumph to bind people together. The Repeal Association itself had shrivelled in membership and vitality. Daniel
O'Connell's death in 1847 was a poignant reminder of the failure of his last, great cause.

The last spasm of romantic nationalism came in the Widow McCormack's cabbage patch in Ballingarry. William Smith O'Brien, inspired, in part, by the French republican revolution of 1848, attempted to raise a rebellion when the British government suspended the Habeas Corpus Act in July, 1848. There was no organization, no military supplies, and no support from John O'Connell, the Protestant leaders, the Catholic clergy, or the Irish masses. The government easily crushed the few rebels who had invaded Mrs. McCormack's property, and quickly tried and transported them. Nowhere had Smith O'Brien been able to find the energy, idealism, and sense of common purpose that had been the heart and soul of The Nation. The spirit of Thomas Davis had long since dissipated.
Endnotes - Chapter Four

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 273.
6 Duffy, Young Ireland, p. 125.
8 Ibid.
9 Duffy, Memoirs, p. 271.
10 Duffy, Young Ireland, p. 125.
12 Kee, p. 253.
14 Gwynn, p. 25.
17 Ibid., Vol. III, No. 132, April 19, 1845, p. 456.
19 Ibid., p. 286.
20 Rolleston, p. xii.
21 As quoted in Sullivan, p. 52.
23 Gwynn, p. 37.
25Kee, pp. 234-5.
28Ibid., p. 520.
29Duffy, *Young Ireland*, p. 60.
32McCaffrey, p. 64.
35Ibid.
36Ibid.
37Ibid.
38Nowlan, p. 110.
39McCaffrey, p. 59.
41Ibid.
42As quoted in Kee, p. 236.
43As quoted in Nowlan, p. 110.
44McCaffrey, p. 63.
45Norman, pp. 70-1.
46As quoted in Kee, pp. 236-7.
48Kee, p. 239.
50 Ibid.

51 McCaffrey, p. 64. This estimate is an "outside" figure. It has proven to be nearly impossible to establish "accurate" death and immigration rates.

52 Rolleston, p. viii.

53 McCaffrey, p. 65.


55 Rolleston, p. 250.

56 McCaffrey, p. 71.
In the brief period between October, 1842 and September, 1845, Thomas Davis preached an ideal of romantic nationalism, and used his eloquence, energy, and love of Ireland to create a newspaper that became the most influential voice for Irish independence that that country had ever known. His lack of political ambition, his gentle manner, and his unswerving integrity earned him the respect and love of all those who knew him; and his call for an end to the bitter class and religious hatreds that had kept Ireland oppressed and divided touched the core of Irish political thought. His message was clear, his gifts prodigious, and his commitment absolute; and he failed because he did not understand the destructive power of Irish history or the intractability of Irish religious animosities.

Thomas Davis sought to restore Irish pride and cultural identity by reclaiming the glories of the past. But the heroism of Celtic warriors and the dignity of the Constitution of 1782 were swamped in political consciousness by the long subjugation to English rule. Irish history did not yield to romanticism and propaganda. Further, Davis himself stoked the fires of resentment as a means of stiffening Irish resistance to English cultural and political domination and, in so doing, kept alive the bitter memory that Irish Protestants had frequently allied with the English against the Roman Catholic masses to protect their minority Ascendancy.
Thomas Davis's vision of an all-encompassing nationality, and his conviction of its political utility, were based on the assumption that Catholics and Protestants could shed their traditional religious animosities. He wrote persuasively and passionately of Ireland's self-inflicted wound and asked for an end to disunion and dissension. He attempted, by personal example and varied proposals, to convince Protestants to entrust their rights, property, and security to the possibility of a truly non-sectarian parliamentary democracy. Davis's great error was in believing that secularizing political life was remotely acceptable to the Irish people. Religion and politics were so inextricably linked that any attempt to excise one resulted in perceived danger to the other. In Ireland, it was impossible to honor religion and practice politics separately. O'Connell knew this, perhaps better than anyone, and used Davis's naive idealism to secure his own authority. Davis's vulnerability was, however, the vulnerability of the Repeal movement, and sectarianism brought O'Connell's house down as well.

The label "Young Ireland" was attached to the group of young men who worked with Davis and shared his philosophy. But it was a label that Davis disliked for its obvious implication that he and his colleagues saw themselves as a separate and independent political party. Davis continually insisted that he was a nationalist, and a nationalist only. He never fully appreciated the fact that his views had created a powerful ideal that was distinct from, and ultimately in opposition to, the pragmatic, "adjustable" politics of Daniel O'Connell.
The common misperception about Young Ireland and Thomas Davis is that they were radical journalists whose acceptance of the legitimacy of armed force led to a breach with O'Connell and, thus, to a systematic weakening of the entire nationalist movement. Young Ireland is, in fact, a name that applies to two separate and disparate groups, though one grew out of the other. The Young Ireland connected with Thomas Davis used the columns of The Nation to foster romantic nationalism. The latter group was, indeed, revolutionary; but they neither espoused romantic nationalism nor enjoyed the earlier group's influence within the Repeal Association. Only Charles Gavan Duffy and William Smith O'Brien maintained Davis's position and they were forced to abandon their centrist position by O'Connell's maneuver with the "peace resolutions." They had to either relinquish their philosophical independence or join the young turks. They chose the latter.

The real schism in the Repeal movement was opened when O'Connell played on religious suspicion and bigotry to undermine Thomas Davis's influence. It was an irrevocable act. Davis's "glorious experiment" was effectively ended, but so too was the hope of united political action. The "deadly bane" was let loose once again.

Thomas Davis remains a figure of veneration in Irish life. His vision, however, stays entrapped by the very forces that brought it down, and non-sectarian nationality still seems an unattainable goal.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

This useful collection of documents includes speeches, statutes, and government reports arranged under topic headings such as "Home Rule" and "Catholic Emancipation."

This is an essential resource for any study of Thomas Davis and The Nation. It is very sketchy on Davis's early life, but is excellent on his years of association with Duffy. The volume includes a large number of Davis's letters, many of which concern his thoughts on The Nation's philosophy and operation.

Duffy, James, ed. Literary and Historical Essays by Thomas Davis. Dublin: James Duffy, 1846.
An excellent resource that provides numerous essays not available in The Nation.

The newspaper is the one indispensable resource. It gives detailed accounts of all the events, arguments, and opinions of the era of Repeal agitation; and it is the major outlet for Davis's philosophy.

This book has an excellent introduction to the collection of Davis's writings, most of which come from The Nation.

Secondary Sources

Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale.* Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1964. This is an exhaustive study of the historical and geographical distribution of hundreds of folktale "types."


Brennan, James J. *A Catechism of the History of Ireland, Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern.* New York: Thomas Kelly, 1878. This volume is excellent for demonstrating the popular prejudices and beliefs concerning Young Ireland and Daniel O'Connell. The "catechism" style of presentation was a popular one, and gives a certain amount of insight into the way history was understood.


Gwynn, Denis. *Young Ireland and 1848.* Cork: Cork University Press, 1949. This is a particularly well-done study of the role of Young Ireland in the revolution of 1848.

Kee, Robert. *The Green Flag, A History of Irish Nationalism.* London: Weidenfled and Nicolson, 1972. This book does a very good job of examining the events and the forces that shaped the character of Irish nationalism from its earliest manifestations to the present. It includes an extensive bibliography which is quite useful.
This book is a good survey of Irish radicalism and the tensions it caused within Irish society.

An excellent history of the years of the Union.

This survey deals very effectively with the impact of Daniel O'Connell on Irish political life.

This is an excellent study of the political relationships between Ireland and Britain during the Repeal movement.

This book is the least valuable of those consulted, but it did provide some important ancient historical background.

This is a literary biography and a fine study of the style and nature of Davis's writings. It is limited in scope but extremely insightful in what it focuses on.