

# Come Out of Such a Land, You Irishmen: Daniel O'Connell, American Slavery, and the Making of the Irish Race.

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## "Come Out of Such a Land, You Irishmen": Daniel O'Connell, American Slavery, and the Making of the "Irish Race"

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**"Come Out of Such a Land, You Irishmen":  
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Charles Lenox Remond, an African American from Salem, Massachusetts, first met Daniel O'Connell in 1840, at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, and was overwhelmed by the encounter. "For thirteen years have I thought myself an abolitionist," he reported to a friend, "but I had been in a measure mistaken, until I listened to the scorching rebukes of the fearless O'Connell." Only then was Remond "moved to think, and feel, and speak" as a true abolitionist thought and felt and spoke.<sup>1</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, the preeminent voice of radical abolitionism in the United States, was no less impressed. He told his wife Helen that the Irishman's words at the convention were "received with a storm of applause that almost shook the building to its foundations. The spectacle was sublime and heart-stirring beyond all power of description on my part."<sup>2</sup> The plain-living, plain-spoken Garrison was no respecter of persons; he vowed to be "as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice" where matters of principle were concerned.<sup>3</sup> But he could not help but tell his wife, with obvious pride, "I have shaken hands with O'Connell repeatedly."<sup>4</sup> **[End Page 58]**

Although O'Connell's fame stretched from Ireland and Britain to the European continent, and from there to the Americas, his reputation derived first and foremost from the campaign for Catholic Emancipation he led in his native country in the 1820s. It was, says Donal McCartney, "the first mass movement of organised democracy in Europe."<sup>5</sup> Catholics made up approximately 80 percent of Ireland's population by this time, and O'Connell used the parish structure and clerical leadership of the Catholic Church as the foundation stone of the movement to achieve the full rights of citizenship for himself and his compatriots. Even before the victory was won in 1829, the Protestant archbishop of Limerick acknowledged that "an Irish revolution has in great measure been effected." It was O'Connell's revolution; he had emerged as Ireland's Liberator.<sup>6</sup>

The quest for Catholic Emancipation prefigured a second major initiative, for repeal of the Act of Union, which O'Connell led under the umbrella of his Loyal National Repeal Association. To stoke the fires of this campaign, he ultimately resorted to a series of "monster meetings," which attracted huge crowds that enthusiastically supported his demand for the return of self-government to Ireland through the restoration of an Irish parliament in Dublin. According to the legend of O'Connell, what stood out about these meetings was not just their size—which allegedly approached a million on several occasions—but the respect, even reverence, the assembled masses showed the "Immortal Dan." This extraordinary "power over the people" led the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay to **[End Page 59]** affirm that "the position which Mr. O'Connell holds in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen is a position such as no popular leader in the whole history of mankind ever occupied."<sup>7</sup>

With O'Connell, however, things were seldom as simple as such plaudits implied. The fact that he earned "innumerable tributes of personal devotion," while also provoking a "frenzy of hatred,"<sup>8</sup> suggests that he was a man of enormous complexity who embodied many of the contradictions of Irish society in his own persona. The unrivaled symbol of Irishness and Irish aspirations for autonomy, he declared that Catholics were ready to become part of the British Empire, "provided they be made so in reality and not in name alone; . . . ready to become . . . West Britons if made so in benefits and justice."<sup>9</sup> The leader of a mass movement for Repeal, who demanded justice for Ireland here and now, he was also a machine politician and parliamentary horse trader who subordinated Repeal to the British Whigs' agenda year after year and, according to his adversaries, "says one thing one day & just the contrary the next."<sup>10</sup> The sincere advocate of religious toleration, he made nationalism synonymous not only with Catholicism, but also—at times—with the priorities of the...

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1. *Liberator*, 16 Oct. 1840.

2. Louis Ruchames, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, II: A House Divided Against Itself, 1836–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 669.

3. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 19.

4. Ruchames, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, II*, 655.



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