

## John O'Mahony

—Architect of irish independence (1815-1877)<sup>1)</sup>—

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### 1. Life

In view of his significance, it is surprising that John O'Mahony has been the most overlooked figure in mid to late nineteenth-century Ireland. As a nationalist leader, O'Mahony built the Fenian Brotherhood into the foremost movement for Irish independence in the nineteenth century, and perhaps ever. This was an event of momentous historic importance, which the British government knew they could not ignore. As a Gaelic revivalist, O'Mahony was a pioneer and a visionary from whom the first President of Independent Ireland, Douglas Hyde, drew inspiration. One may speculate as to the reasons why no historian has attempted a full-length biography of O'Mahony up to now. As well as the disparate nature of the source material to be researched in both Ireland and America, the complex and multifaceted nature of the subject makes any attempt at categorization highly challenging.

In order to understand O'Mahony it is essential to illuminate the various factors that molded him and central to this is the exploration of his family background. It would appear that the earliest O'Mahonys who came to the Mitchelstown tri-county border area first settled in the district of Kilbeheny, County Limerick. We have O'Mahony's word for it that his forebears were in the Kilbeheny district during the mid-seventeenth century when 'as proscribed outlaws they found refuge in the fastnesses of the Galtees.'<sup>2)</sup> This was probably in the glen of Aherlow following the Cromwellian wars.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century John O'Mahony's grandfather, Thomas O'Mahony, was an extensive landholder and middleman in Counties Cork, Limerick and Tipperary. On the relaxation of the Penal Laws we find Thomas O'Mahony renting from the

largest landowners in the region, the King family, over 1,200 acres of the lands of Kilbeheny.

The O'Mahonys were renowned in the district south of the Galtee Mountains for their capacity and readiness to provide local leadership in various national movements down through the generations. During the 1798 rising Thomas O'Mahony's eldest son, Daniel, mobilized the United Irishmen in the district around Rathkeale, West Limerick, where he then lived. Thomas's second son organized those in the Cork-Limerick-Tipperary borderland area near the foot of the Galtees.<sup>3)</sup> It is recorded that Thomas O'Mahony was dispossessed of all his household possessions and farm livestock and that his two eldest sons were imprisoned for a time for their role in the United Irishmen. At length the two brothers were liberated under heavy recognizances and they would appear at sessions and assizes in Cork, Limerick, and Tipperary for some years after.<sup>4)</sup>

Thomas O'Mahony's eldest son, Daniel O'Mahony, married Mary O'Ryan<sup>5)</sup> of Ballycurkeen, County Tipperary. The couple made their home at Clonkilla<sup>6)</sup> near Mitchelstown, County Cork. Daniel and Mary O'Mahony's first son Thomas Daniel was born in 1812. Their second son John (the subject of this lecture) was born three years later in 1815 and their only daughter Jane Maria was born in 1817.<sup>7)</sup>

While Daniel O'Mahony provided a direct example of political action to his sons and daughter, he was also deeply concerned with their formal learning. Daniel O'Mahony had himself received a good education in Harrington's school, Cobh, County Cork.<sup>8)</sup> Private education available to the families of prosperous farmers of John O'Mahony's generation included instruction in Irish and English, as well as Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and often included French. At a certain point Thomas Daniel enrolled in a Classical School in Midleton, County Cork, and was later followed by John.<sup>9)</sup> Both brothers went on from Midleton to Trinity College Dublin: Thomas Daniel in 1830, followed by John in 1833.<sup>10)</sup>

The transcription of Gaelic manuscripts was still a widespread activity throughout Munster well into the nineteenth century. Poets, scribes and teachers freely migrated across the region as did their counterparts in Gaelic medieval Ireland.<sup>11)</sup> A dominant influence in John O'Mahony's intellectual formation was that he grew up in a household where the Gaelic tradition had been cultivated and preserved. Gentlemen farmers such as the O'Mahonys were the strongest class in the cultivation of Gaelic scholarship. This included the commissioning of Gaelic manuscripts as well as their collection and storage.

By O'Mahony's time the Gaelic oral tradition was in danger of being irretrievably lost as the decline in the public appreciation of the Irish language continued. In response to this situation O'Mahony traveled extensively throughout the southern half of the country diligently collecting manuscripts and recording Gaelic songs and poetry recited to him orally.

O'Mahony was part of the Gaelic scholarly community not only in its rural heartland but also involving those active in the urban centers. The instance of a prosperous landholder living simultaneously the life of a gentleman farmer and scholar was not a rarity in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ireland.<sup>12)</sup> All the indications are that O'Mahony could have spent his entire life contentedly following his intellectual interests had not fate and political forces decreed otherwise. O'Mahony's scholarly pursuits would be severely interrupted by events in 1848.

By the Fall of 1847 the effects of the great famine were wreaking havoc among the poorer sections of rural Irish society through death from hunger and its associated diseases. The failure of the potato crop, for the third successive year, and the utterly inadequate response of the British administration to the crisis, left millions facing starvation. Whether through ineptness or deliberate policy, the death toll was maximized by making those in dire need entirely dependent upon relief, which was then withdrawn when the crisis reached its height in 'black '47.'<sup>13)</sup> This ensured the utter catastrophe. Against a background of the starving poor being destroyed by mass evictions, the spectacle of military detachments guarding convoys of grain as it was transported out of the country, stoked the flammable revolutionary material among the hungry masses ready to explode.

O'Mahony was keenly aware of what his community expected of him and his role can be described succinctly as that of the 'Gaelic chief.' This was exemplified by the part played by his grandfather, father and uncle. Moreover it would appear that this tradition of leadership extended back through many earlier generations of the family. Although the Gaelic system had long since collapsed, still in O'Mahony's time the aura of the Gaelic chief persisted. As a phenomenon this was rare in the eighteenth century and even more so in the nineteenth. With the possible exception of the influence of Arthur O'Connor in 1798, there had not been such a rallying point for the Irish speaking population since the arrival of Eoghan Rua Ó Néill to Ireland in 1642. As events would unfold, history would witness in O'Mahony's acts over the ensuing months of 1848 the Gaelic chief personally directing and leading his followers.

For seven weeks in the Fall of 1848 O'Mahony conducted a guerrilla campaign against the military and police in the Tipperary-Waterford-Kilkenny border area. During those weeks his tactics caused panic among the forces of the crown and compelled the police to withdraw from a number of locations. Unfortunately for the insurgents, the lack of experienced lieutenants to execute O'Mahony's plans, together with the failure of the people to obey any leader other than him, precluded the development of a fully disciplined force in 1848. O'Mahony made sure that this situation would not be repeated in Fenian times, when

spontaneous insurrection was replaced by a fully-fledged military organization with an adequate supply of well trained and competent officers to implement his revolutionary policies.

The events of 1848 and the lessons learned therefrom burned deeply into O'Mahony's soul and determined the course that his life would take. Up to the summer of that fateful year he had lived the contented life of a gentleman farmer and scholar. O'Mahony gave up his comfortable lifestyle because of an inherited sense of responsibility towards his people. This resolve forced him from his home and resulted in the loss of the lifestyle that he enjoyed. It also marked the beginning of O'Mahony's lifelong commitment to revolutionary politics.

After the termination of active insurrection in late 1848, O'Mahony escaped to Wales and thence to France where he lived for the next five years. But when he went into exile, O'Mahony left behind a loose revolutionary structure that he could summon in Cork, Limerick and Tipperary, as well as parts of Kilkenny and Waterford, to be the nucleus for any future Irish revolutionary movement. Thus, the revolutionary network nurtured by O'Mahony in late 1848 survived and, almost a decade later, it would become the crucial network of the new revolutionary movement in the region.

O'Mahony was first and foremost an Irish separatist - and the only way of advocating Irish sovereignty for him was as a republican. His republicanism was shaped by the teachings of the United Irishmen and by the local leadership that his father and uncle provided to the insurgents in 1798.<sup>14)</sup> As a consequence it was separatist in thrust and inclusive in aspiration with a strong aversion towards any form of privilege. During his years in France, O'Mahony formed a strong sense of solidarity with French Republicans in the general struggle for a confederation of Republics which would support each other. A true revolutionary, he saw the attempt to achieve a democratic egalitarian republic for Ireland as being an integral part of a broader international movement which embraced as allies all fellow republicans and included hopes for the liberation of the people of Great Britain.

In late 1853 O'Mahony departed France for the United States. Following his arrival in New York in January 1854, O'Mahony enlisted as a private in the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the New York State Militia. He also became the captain of a new Irish military company, 'The Edward Fitzgerald Guard', organized on 7 April of that year. The previous month Great Britain and France had declared war on Russia. In order to take advantage of Great Britain's involvement in the Crimean war, O'Mahony together with other Irish residents in New York City founded a new Irish revolutionary organization - the Emmet Monument Association. A chief component of O'Mahony's revolutionary strategy was to avail of a

potential opportunity to obtain military assistance for an Irish insurrection from any major power at war with Great Britain. In 1854 that power was Russia. Sometime in early 1855, O'Mahony succeeded in initiating negotiations with the Russian consul in New York City with a view to obtaining from the Czar's government the means of transportation to Ireland of an Irish-American expedition of 2,000 men and additional arms for 50,000 more to be landed in Ireland. A memorial outlining these requirements was written under the guidance of the Russian consul and sent without delay to St Petersburg where it was favorably received. These talks were ongoing when the Crimean War came to an end in March 1856.<sup>15)</sup>

With the lull in political activity, O'Mahony began working on his translation of Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*. O'Mahony completed this work of translation in July 1857. In nineteenth century Ireland, as was the case from the early seventeenth century, the Irish language had virtually no recognition in the institutions of the state. Following the establishment of the school system in 1831, the medium of instruction was English for a population which was predominantly Irish-speaking, and most of them were monoglots. When O'Mahony published his translation of Céitinn's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, the only language that the majority of *Irish People* could read was English. This situation made a work of translation a necessity for most *Irish People*.

At this time in the United States the 'Know-Nothings' (strongly anti-Negro, anti-Irish, and anti-Catholic) disseminated the view that the Anglo-Saxons were morally superior to the Celts and others.<sup>16)</sup> This was the environment in which O'Mahony tried to generate a sense of kinship among his fellow countrymen and to re-awaken in them an appreciation of their culture and traditions. O'Mahony directed his work of translation towards this wider readership rather than specifically to Gaelic scholars. The publication of O'Mahony's book was followed one week later by his launching of a Gaelic column in the *Irish American*, the first and only periodical at the time with such a feature.<sup>17)</sup> This would encourage Irish emigrants in the United States to become literate in their native tongue. In the Gaelic columns of the *Irish American* the original Irish was presented side by side with an English translation and accompanied by extensive notes written by O'Mahony.<sup>18)</sup> Much of the material included therein consisted of previously unpublished Gaelic poetry and songs taken from manuscripts in his possession and that of other Irish residents in New York.

In May 1857 a potential opportunity for insurrection in Ireland presented itself as a result of British involvement on another front: an uprising broke out in India as a mutiny of Sepoys in the British East India Company's army. What commenced as a Sepoy revolt soon developed into a widespread insurrection across Northern India. This situation resulted in the foundation of a new revolutionary movement in New York City which aimed at

establishing an independent Irish republic. O'Mahony was elected as its President. He later chose its name - the Fenian Brotherhood - in evocation of the ancient Fianna of popular tradition. An Irish branch of the new revolutionary movement was founded in Dublin in March 1858. This became known as the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB).

Since May 1850 several Irish regiments had been formed in the New York State Militia. In the spring of 1859, a number of the leading officers in these regiments formed the Phoenix Brigade of the Fenian Brotherhood.<sup>19)</sup> Its purpose was to provide military training for Irishmen in America with a view to embracing an opportunity to land enough arms and trained soldiers in Ireland for a coordinated insurrection with the IRB.

In the 1860 presidential election, the Republican Party candidate, Abraham Lincoln, had stood on a platform which strongly opposed the further expansion of slavery in the newly formed states of the western expansion. Following Lincoln's election as President, the issue of slavery came to a head between the anti-slavery states of the North and slave-owning states of the South. This led to the secession which was the immediate cause of the American Civil War.

The outbreak of that conflict on 12 April 1861 would absorb the attention and resources of the most active of the Fenian Brotherhood as vast numbers of its leading military men became actively involved in the war for the four years of its duration. A majority of these officers were in the Union army. Service in the American armies would enable the Fenians to obtain real military experience, which would be crucial to the success of any future operation of landing a military force in Ireland.

During the American Civil War, privateers were built and fitted out in British ports and sold to the Confederacy. The use of these vessels in the destruction of Union shipping caused widespread resentment towards Great Britain in the Northern States and raised the possibility of an Anglo-American conflict.<sup>20)</sup> In late 1865 O'Mahony received assurances from sympathetic American ship-owners in New York, Boston and Philadelphia that they would 'fit out privateers for our cause as soon as we could raise the flag of our country over an Irish army capable of defending it even for a short time.'<sup>21)</sup>

O'Mahony's sympathies were unequivocally with the Union cause. In January 1864 the Phoenix Brigade, composed entirely of Fenians and commanded by O'Mahony, was merged into the 99<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the New York National Guard, thus becoming eligible for war service. O'Mahony was elected Colonel of the 99<sup>th</sup> Regiment but not surprisingly he held this office more nominally than de facto because his responsibilities with the Fenian Brotherhood made full time commitment to military action in the Union Army impossible.<sup>22)</sup> In early August 1864 the Union military authorities called out the 99<sup>th</sup> Regiment for duty to guard

Confederate prisoners at the Union prison camp in Elmira, upstate New York. O'Mahony served with the 99<sup>th</sup> Regiment for three months in Elmira.<sup>23)</sup>

With the ending of the American Civil War came the demobilization of the Confederate and Union armies. The performance of Irishmen on the battlefield had been exemplary. Their steadfast bravery under battle stress greatly enhanced the esteem in which the Irish were held in the United States to a level higher than ever before or for long after. Sworn Fenians were numerous among the officers and men serving in both armies. This was especially evident among those serving in the Union armies, in whose ranks Fenian agents had been permitted to recruit freely.<sup>24)</sup> During the years of the American Civil War, and in its immediate aftermath, there appeared to be support in the highest levels of the United States administration for the aims of the Fenian Brotherhood.

Following O'Mahony's death in February 1877, the Fenian council together with delegates from various other Irish societies decided to send his remains home to Ireland for burial in Glasnevin cemetery Dublin. It was estimated that the turnout at O'Mahony's funeral in Dublin on Sunday 4 March, numbered between 70,000 and 100,000 people.<sup>25)</sup>

## 2. Legacy

'Young Ireland' was the name given to a group of men who were associated with the Nation, a weekly journal founded by Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon in Dublin in 1842.<sup>26)</sup> In contrast to the influences acting on Young Ireland emanating from the cultural contemporary nationalist movements in Europe, O'Mahony was steeped in the culture of the Gailte Mhór district. He had absorbed his native culture through the Gaelic poems and songs recited around him from birth. In that respect O'Mahony was unique among the national figures of his time. This may have been what John Devoy had in mind when he recognized the significance of O'Mahony in stating that 'O'Mahony knew the Irish Question theoretically better than any Irishman of his day.'<sup>27)</sup>

It is clear from the notes that he wrote to accompany his translation of Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, that O'Mahony had a profound understanding of the Gaelic social system. Such a perception undoubtedly made him keenly sensitive to the socialist teachings of his time. Throughout his writings published in Irish newspapers in the United States, O'Mahony was highly critical of the imposed capitalist system that operated against the peoples of Great Britain and Ireland. This was also the basis of the mutual understanding between British radicals and Irish nationalists in the period after 1848.<sup>28)</sup> In the Fenian journal, the *Irish People*, of 17 December 1870, O'Mahony describes the effects of British capitalism unfavorably, even when compared with Czarist Russia:

In an oligarchy, or under any form of mixed government, where Money is the master and Labor the slave, every individual capitalist has it in his power to act the despot; every man who is not fortunate enough to be a capitalist finds a tyrant at his own door. The most cogent examples of the rule of Capital in the hands of a favored few, and of the Absolutism of a single individual, are to be seen in the condition of the working classes of Great Britain and Russia today. The Russian despot protects the industrial classes from the oppression of all kinds of petty tyrants. The workman whose lot is cast under the boasted British Constitution finds himself the slave of some petty tyrant in every village and every workshop; so that nowhere on earth is his condition more miserable and degraded than in Great Britain and the so-called "sister-island" at present.<sup>29)</sup>

This was in tune with John Mitchel and also anticipates the thinking of James Connolly who contended in his *Labor in Irish history* that freedom for the working classes of Great Britain and Ireland had to be preceded by separation from the British capitalist system.<sup>30)</sup> Like Connolly, O'Mahony strongly supported the emergence of trade unionism in the United States and, in that same article published in the *Irish People*, he expressed the view that:

The most healthful sign of the vitality of democratic institutions in the United States is to be found in the rapid and wide spread of Workingmen's Protective Societies or Trades' Unions in our great centers of manufacturing and commercial industry. In them alone we can have hope for any effective barrier against encroachments of the monied monopolists upon the rights, liberties, and social happiness of the industrious toiling masses, who form the overwhelming majority of the citizens of this Republic.<sup>31)</sup>

Of all the leaders of the various revolutionary movements that sprang from Irish grievances since the time of the Cromwellian conquest, O'Mahony stands out as the clearest representative of the native Gaelic tradition. As well as being steeped in his own heritage, O'Mahony was particularly well fitted to embrace the diversity of other traditions. He tried to inspire a national identity embracing all the inhabitants of Ireland, which he envisaged would naturally coalesce into a unified people once the grip of a foreign power was removed. Like Theobald Wolfe Tone and Thomas Davis, O'Mahony's concept of the Irish nation was a pluralist one. The values absorbed by direct experience of his family's political commitment



molded O'Mahony and the policies he formulated, in particular the requirement of building a broad based movement for national independence. His Fenian Brotherhood would aim at being 'an organization which is not composed exclusively of Catholics but open to citizens of every creed and nationality provided they be friends of Irish freedom.'<sup>32)</sup>

In the foreword to his translation of Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, we are given a remarkable insight into the inclusiveness of O'Mahony's nationalism:

He [the translator, i. e. O'Mahony] has, it is true, a strong partiality towards the natives of the Irish soil, and his heart glows with a more kindly heat towards men of ancient Gaelic names - this is part of his instinct; - but he can also hold out the free hand of brotherhood to the Frank and the Saxon. It is only when he becomes an instrument of tyranny that hostility should be felt towards any of one's fellow men. In Ireland, more especially, the foreign element has become so absorbed in the aboriginal, that it would be as just to think of avenging the wrongs of the Danaan or the Belgian upon their Spanish conquerors, as it would be those of the latter upon the followers of Earl Strongbow. These have long since merged into the Gael - so have some of the descendants of the more recent conquerors of them all, the Cromwellians and Williamites of later days. The oppressed natives of Ireland, of whatever name, creed or blood, represent the ancient rights of its aboriginal inhabitants. Their village tyrants, though some of them be of Gaelic name and blood, and a few of them even of the national faith, are now the only foreign enemy.<sup>33)</sup>

Here, O'Mahony acknowledges the contribution of the main traditions - Gaelic, Viking, Anglo- Norman and English/Scottish - to the national history of Ireland. He possessed a strong sense of social justice for the oppressed, of whatever ethnic origin, class or religion. This championing the rights of the downtrodden in society also prefigures James Connolly who pointed out in his *Labor in Irish history* that:

In the evolution of civilization the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must, perforce, keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation.<sup>34)</sup>

O'Mahony had direct experience of the devastating effects of the colonial system on the

*Irish People*, and most particularly on the Gaelic speaking population and their culture. This experience undoubtedly contributed to his strong sense of solidarity with all peoples who were ruled by a tyrannical regime. O'Mahony's genuine humanitarianism placed his feelings of fraternity with the oppressed even above his sense of national commitment.<sup>35)</sup> In the New York *Irish People* of 8 July 1871, the breadth of O'Mahony's vision is clearly evident:

No national or domestic prejudice should ever coerce us to take sides with tyranny. Human Liberty goes before Irish patriotism; or, to make myself more clearly understood, if Ireland had an independent government today, and if that government were the upholder of tyranny and oppression either at home or in any other land, it would be incumbent upon every liberty-loving Irishman to aid in the overthrow of that government. Humanity before Irish patriotism, but Irish patriotism before the adopted civism of any foreign country. No merely national consideration, either with respect to Ireland or America, should ever be allowed to obstruct for one moment the forward march of Human Liberty.<sup>36)</sup>

O'Mahony lived his life for the cause of Irish independence and implicit in this was his total commitment to democracy. In O'Mahony's perception, ever since the destruction of the Gaelic aristocracy, the only flag under which Irish independence could be achieved was that of a Republic. This was the one regime which could give the *Irish People* the right to have a voice to determine their own affairs. In this respect a union of Great Britain and Ireland could never be democratic. Irish nationalist MPs would always be outvoted in the British House of Commons, where their only potential of limited political leverage was to hold the balance of power. In an epistle to his sister, Jane Maria Mandeville, dated 16 November 1863, O'Mahony referred to 'the ultra democracy of my political philosophy.'<sup>37)</sup> In the *Irish People* of 10 December 1870, O'Mahony expressed his opinion that:

The true Democrat believes firmly that far more can be done towards the extirpation of ignorance, vice and misery from among nations and communities under a well regulated system of popular self-government than under any other form. He sees that kings, hierarchs and aristocrats have been trying their hand and regulating the affairs of the world for, who knows how many thousands of years, while the relative proportion of the criminal, miserable or degraded portion of mankind to the more virtuous, happy and

honored has not been lessened during all this time in any very sensible degree.<sup>38)</sup>

O'Mahony was in favor of a democratic egalitarian republic, based on universal suffrage, for an independent Ireland. However he did not outline his social revolutionary program or how the Irish egalitarian republic would operate specifically - it never got that far. His social policy is left without final comment. As an egalitarian democrat, O'Mahony believed that it was one's ability applied towards the commonweal that counted in public life. This conviction was reflected in the structure of the Fenian Brotherhood, which was an open organization whose leadership at all levels was by democratic election. In this respect the Fenian Brotherhood differed from all previous revolutionary movements for Irish independence, which were organized from the top down. While the democratic constitution of the Fenian Brotherhood facilitated those whose activities led to the split in the movement, nevertheless it was the same egalitarian form that ensured its survival so as to ultimately bequeath the dedication to Irish independence to the Clan na Gael. The Clan na Gael was a secret Irish revolutionary movement founded in New York in 1867.

A major contribution by O'Mahony to Irish revolutionary thinking was his formulation of the prerequisites for any future attempt at insurrection: in particular the necessity for external factors providing 'some powerful pressure from without'<sup>39)</sup> - preferably a major international conflict involving Great Britain. This component of his revolutionary thought, formulated in late 1848, became embedded in the thinking of the IRB in Ireland and of the Fenian Brotherhood and its later successor the Clan na Gael in America. It was also the blueprint in the IRB's planning of the rising that finally came in 1916.

O'Mahony never guaranteed victory - he promised 'a brave stand-up fight,' which he knew would have to bring in another power as a final arbiter.<sup>40)</sup> During his years in France and subsequently in the United States, O'Mahony watched for an opportunity to obtain military assistance from any potential adversary of Great Britain. Such activity involved serious negotiations at various times with the governments of France, Russia and the United States. In a later generation this policy would be re-enacted when, within days of the outbreak of the First World War, in August 1914, a Clan na Gael committee made contact with the German ambassador in Washington, D C, with a view to obtaining military assistance from Germany.<sup>41)</sup> Following the loss of 'the *Aud*' - the German ship that carried the arms to Ireland for the 1916 rising - and Eoin MacNeill's subsequent countermanding order, any hopes for a successful insurrection evaporated. Against all the odds, the IRB

military council made the critical decision to go ahead with the rising. The events of Easter week 1916 and the subsequent War of Independence (1919-1921) would signal the beginning of the end for British Imperial dominance.

The Fenian Brotherhood had been established by O'Mahony as an organization through which the American political system could be instrumental for Irish ends and this he considered his life's work. O'Mahony's most enduring contribution and legacy to the Irish national cause was that ever since the time when Fenianism was in the ascendant in the mid-1860s, it was to prove advisable for any American government to give serious consideration to Irish nationalist aspirations. The three United States administrations that spanned the rise (1860-65), highpoint (1865-66) and decline (1866-77) of Fenianism accepted and trusted O'Mahony as the key figure of influence in the Fenian Brotherhood and as the spokesman for Irish freedom in America. Throughout that entire period, O'Mahony's longtime friend and colleague John Savage and his (O'Mahony's) later loyal friend Bernard Doran Killian had direct access to the Oval Office.

O'Mahony's greatest lifetime achievement was that he organized the first mass movement of Irishmen in America and forged them into an effective force in the struggle for Irish independence. In his estimation, when the Fenian Brotherhood had reached its greatest strength in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War: 'Its enrolled members must have amounted at that time to some TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND men, who represented the predominant wishes of FOUR MILLIONS of Irish-born citizens and of at least SIX MILLIONS of American of Irish blood and Irish feelings.'<sup>42)</sup> This powerful element made the Irish question a crucial factor in Anglo- American relations for the first time in history. Even after seeing the Fenian Brotherhood split into two factions, and having resigned from office, O'Mahony was still confident enough to write to his nephew Francis Mandeville, on 4 December 1866, in these prophetic terms:

The work I have done here will tell in its own due time. The great Irish *element of this Republic is in motion Ireland-wards*. It will not be turned backwards until our sireland is free. This element holds the *balance of power* between the two great parties that rule the United States; so that neither of them could long hold the reins of power, if the Irish element unanimously joined its opponents. ...The Irish element knows now, that it is a *power* in this *greatest country in the world*. It knows too, that it can bring that *power* to bear on England in a thousand ways. Being a power here it is, from its situation, a *power* among the great ones of the world.

The proving of this great and important truth has been *my peculiar work*. Having proved it is worth all I have endured, were I to end my life here. *The Irish element of America is able to free Ireland and must do it ere long.*<sup>43)</sup>

O'Mahony always thought of the movement rather than himself. He did not consider his own political position important and in fact he proved inept in retaining it. In a postscript to that same letter, O'Mahony asked his nephew to:

Tell my "friends" not to despair, whatever may happen. The movement is no longer *tied to the fate of an individual* or even to that of an organization. Henceforth it is the movement of the greater Irish nation in America - it is irrepressible. That nation has the power and its manifest destiny<sup>44)</sup> is to liberate Ireland.<sup>45)</sup>

Thus, O'Mahony even anticipated the possibility of the Fenian Brotherhood being succeeded by another revolutionary movement. The effective successor to the Fenian Brotherhood - the Clan na Gael - was established in New York six months after this letter was written.

The most significant event in nineteenth century Ireland, if not in modern Irish history, was the great famine. In the aftermath of the great famine, native capitalists, whom O'Mahony dubbed 'land-jobbers'<sup>46)</sup>, purchased the estates of bankrupted landlords at low prices.<sup>47)</sup> The land question was an inescapable issue for any mid-nineteenth century Irish nationalist leader and O'Mahony could not fail to delineate his views on the subject. In the preface to his translation of Céitinn's *Foras feasa*, O'Mahony noted that:

Throughout the work it has also been a desired object with him [the translator, i. e. O'Mahony], to fix the minds of the disinherited sons of the Clanna Gaedhail, wherever scattered, upon that green land which is their ancestral birth-right, so that they may never forget that Ireland is their proper home, and that it is they themselves, not the land- jobbers who now devour its people and its fruits, that have any just claim to possess its soil. Their restoration to such birthright has been the aim of his most longing and fondest ambition, since first he began seriously to consider their present fallen condition, and for that end he will strive until he shall have

ceased to think.<sup>48)</sup>

These sentiments would have strongly resonated with those fortunate enough to have escaped the horror and degradation of the great famine and to have survived the appalling conditions on the 'coffin ships' to America. It can be inferred from the above quotation that O'Mahony envisaged that after the attainment of national independence, the land of Ireland would be restored to the dispossessed famine emigrants who returned to re-claim their ancestral birthright. This was the one way to bring about social justice, since the only means of survival for the vast majority of *Irish People*, before, during and after the great famine, was access to land. That calamity had proven that without it they starved to the death.

Although O'Mahony had definite views as to the redistribution of resources after Irish independence was achieved, there is no indication of any personal or social aversion to the landlords in his writings. In this latter respect he was of the same mind as the IRB leader Charles Joseph Kickham and the heritage they shared. O'Mahony's criticism was levelled exclusively against the imposed system and those participating in it as necessarily agents of a foreign power.

Two years after O'Mahony's death, the Land League was founded in County Mayo. As would be the case with subsequent Irish nationalist movements, it looked to the United States for support. When the President of the Land League, Charles Stewart Parnell, went on a fundraising trip to America in 1880, he found the necessary organizational structures and leadership in place that allowed him to collect substantial funds for the movement at home.<sup>49)</sup> It could be argued that the indispensable foundation that ensured the success of the Land League had been laid by O'Mahony.<sup>50)</sup> His nephew, John Mandeville, would play a prominent role in the Land War in the Mitchelstown district and suffer grievously for it.<sup>51)</sup>

The Act of Union had been engineered by British Imperialism to make certain that all decisions relating to Ireland were made in London. O'Mahony ensured that the British administration would have to take Irish America into account. This remained a critical component in Anglo-Irish relations throughout the twentieth century. It is a measure of the consistency and durability of O'Mahony's vision that in all future phases of the struggle for national independence the influence and support of the 'Irish nation in America'<sup>52)</sup> would be of crucial importance to the home front. Patrick Pearse, James Connolly and the other framers of the 1916 Proclamation acknowledged the enormous debt that the Irish nation owed to 'her exiled children in America.'<sup>53)</sup> Their combined efforts culminated in the 1916 rising, which marked the birth of the independent Irish state.

In revolutionary politics O'Mahony was the man of action *par excellence* who always led by practical example. His lifetime of dedication to the cause of Irish freedom was inextricably linked with his unwavering commitment to the revival of his native language and its importance in the national rebirth. In 1859 O'Mahony and others founded the New York Ossianic Society as a branch of the parent society in Ireland. The New York Ossianic Society would take the lead in organizing Irish language classes in the United States.<sup>54)</sup> John Devoy later recalled that 'all who knew him [O'Mahony] were well aware that he looked forward to the restoration of Gaelic as one of the certain results of the achievement of National Independence, and he expressed this hope in many of his speeches.'<sup>55)</sup> O'Mahony's efforts to promote and develop the Irish language clearly show his belief that with the spread of literacy in Irish the population would embrace its Gaelic heritage. In his perception the arrest of Anglicization would have to be undertaken by the government of an independent Irish republic. O'Mahony would become an inspirational force in the Irish language and cultural revival in the late nineteenth century inspired by Douglas Hyde, the first President of Independent Ireland. Considering the fact that Hyde resisted political alignment of any kind, in so far as Gaelic League activities were concerned, it is notable that he composed a Lament for John O'Mahony. This is the only lament that Hyde wrote and it is also his sole poetical composition in English. In the final verse, O'Mahony is made to express the sense of a lifetime of toil going unrecognized:

Through a long life contriving, hoping, striving,  
 Driven and driving, leading and led;  
 I have rescued nought but my honor only,  
 And this aged, lonely, and whitening head.<sup>56)</sup>

## [Notes]

- 1) This is a modified version of a paper delivered to the Japan Ireland Society, Hosei University, Tokyo, on 18 October 2014.
- 2) John O'Mahony, 'Fenianism as it was' in *Irish People* (New York), 14 Dec. 1867.
- 3) Letter to the editor from John O'Mahony published in *Irish News* (New York), 19 June 1858.
- 4) *Irish People* (Dublin), 21 Jan. 1865.
- 5) Mary O'Ryan's paternal family home was at Bansha Castle in South Tipperary.
- 6) There is an entry for Daniel O'Mahony's landholding of 121 acres at Clonkilla in the Tithe Applotment Book for the parish of Kilgullane, barony of Condons and Clangibbon, County Cork, 1825 (NAI, book no. 6/12),
- 7) The Mitchelstown parish registers do not list the baptisms of Thomas Daniel, John and Jane

- Maria O'Mahony, but there are gaps in this register. We do have a record of the time and date of their births in a document written by their father, Daniel. This is reproduced in Mainchin Seoighe, 'The O'Mahonys of the Galtees' in *Iris Mhuintir Mhathúna* (1978), p. 23.
- 8) *Irish People* (Dublin), 21 Jan. 1865.
  - 9) Entry for 'John O'Mahony' written by John O'Leary in Sidney Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of national biography* xlii (London, 1895), p. 167; Entry for 'John O'Mahony' in Dumas Malone (ed.), *Dictionary of American biography* xiv (New York, 1934), p. 35.
  - 10) George Dames Burtchaell and Thomas Ulick Sadleir (eds.), *Alumni Dublinenses* (Dublin, 1935), p. 638; Trinity College records (TCD MUN/V/23/5).
  - 11) L. M. Cullen, 'Patrons, teachers and literacy in Irish: 1700-1850' in Mary Daly and David Dickson (eds.), *The origins of popular literacy in Ireland* (Dublin, 1990), pp 15-44.
  - 12) The lifestyle of the Gaelic scholar Pádraig Ó Néill, described in Eoghan Ó Néill's *Golden vale of Ivowen* (Dublin, 2002, pp 321-465) typifies that of John O'Mahony during the 1830s and 1840s.
  - 13) Peter Gray, *The Irish famine* (London, 1995), pp 46-7; Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the famine 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1990), pp 203-4.
  - 14) Letter from John O'Mahony to Fr Patrick Lavelle, dated 22 July 1862, printed in *Irishman* (Dublin), 16 Aug. 1862.
  - 15) Thomas Clarke Luby, 'Personal reminiscences' in *Irish World* (New York), 10 Mar. 1877; John O' Mahony to William M. Curry, 23 Nov. 1876, box 9, file 2 (William J. Maloney collection of Irish historical papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, NYPL).
  - 16) Thomas N. Brown, 'The origins and character of Irish-American nationalism' in *Irish nationalism and the American contribution* (New York, 1976), pp 341-3.
  - 17) *Irish American* (New York), 25 July 1857; Kenneth E. Nilsen, 'The Irish language in New York, 1850-1900' in Bayor, Ronald H. and Timothy J. Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, Maryland and London, 1997), p. 262 (hereafter cited as Nilsen, 'The Irish language in New York' in Bayor and Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish*).
  - 18) The font used in the Gaelic columns of the *Irish American* was made by James Conner and Sons' foundry, New York City.
  - 19) The Phoenix Brigade later evolved into the 99<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the New York National Guard.
  - 20) Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American relations during reconstruction*, pp 36-8.
  - 21) O'Mahony, 'Fenianism' in *Irish People* (New York), 28 Mar. 1868.
  - 22) *Irish American* (New York), 6 Feb. 1864; John O'Leary, *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism* (2 vols, London, 1896), i, p. 195; John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish rebel* (New York, 1929), p. 268 (hereafter cited as Devoy, *Recollections*).
  - 23) United States Military Records (National Archives building I, Washington, D C).
  - 24) W. S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (Pennsylvania State University and London, 1975), pp 10-11; Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American relations during reconstruction*, p. 26; Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia and New York, 1966), p. 40.
  - 25) *Irish World* (Dublin), 17 & 31 Mar. 1877.
  - 26) Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: a fragment of Irish history, 1840-1850* (London, 1880), p. 291.
  - 27) John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish rebel* (New York, 1929), p. 268 (hereafter cited as Devoy, *Recollections*).
  - 28) John Newsinger, 'Old Chartists, Fenians and new Socialists' in *Éire-Ireland*, xvii, no.2 (Summer 1982), pp.19-46.



- 29) John O'Mahony, 'Labor and Capital' in *Irish People* (New York), 17 Dec. 1870.
- 30) D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth-century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin, 1990), pp 256; James Connolly, *Labor in Ireland: Labor in Irish history, the re-conquest of Ireland* (Dublin and London, 1922) (hereafter cited as Connolly, *Labor in Irish history*).
- 31) John O'Mahony, 'Labor and capital' in *Irish People* (New York), 17 Dec. 1870.
- 32) John O'Mahony to Jeremiah Quinn, 6 Oct. 1864 (NYPL Manuscripts and Archives Division, William J. Maloney collection of Irish historical papers, box 9, file 9, item 2).
- 33) *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn... the History of Ireland, from the earliest period to the English invasion, by the Reverend Geoffrey Keating, D. D. Translated from the original Gaelic and annotated by John O'Mahony* (New York, 1857), pp 11-12 (hereafter cited as O'Mahony (transl.), *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*).
- 34) Connolly, *Labor in Irish history*, p. xxxvii.
- 35) O'Mahony (transl.), *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, p. 12.
- 36) John O'Mahony, 'The Fenian's first fealty' in *Irish People* (New York), 8 July 1871.
- 37) John O'Mahony to Jane Maria Mandeville, 16 Nov. 1863, in James Maher (ed.), *Chief of the Comeraghs: a John O'Mahony anthology* (Mullinahone, Tipperary, 1957), p. 79.
- 38) John O'Mahony, 'Social reform' in the *Irish People* (New York), 10 Dec. 1870.
- 39) John O'Mahony, 'Arms raids in Ireland' in *Irish People* (New York), 24 June 1871.
- 40) John O'Mahony, 'Fenianism - an exposition' in *Irish People* (New York), 4 July 1868.
- 41) Leon Ó Broin, *Revolutionary underground: the story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood 1858-1924* (Dublin, 1976), pp 158-9.
- 42) John O'Mahony, 'Fenianism - an exposition' in *Irish People* (New York), 18 July 1868.
- 43) John O'Mahony to Francis Mandeville, 4 Dec. 1866 (MS 5018, NLI). Reproduced courtesy of the Board of the National Library of Ireland.
- 44) Frederick Merk, *Manifest destiny and mission in American history* (New York, 1963), p. 27. The phrase 'manifest destiny', first used by the journalist John L. O'Sullivan in 1845 on behalf of American expansionists, had a special resonance in the United States. John O'Mahony's use of the term in the above quotation illustrates the linkage in his mind between the growth of Irish-American power and the prospect of Irish independence.
- 45) Postscript of letter from John O'Mahony to Francis Mandeville, 4 Dec. 1866 (NLI, MS 5018).
- 46) O'Mahony (transl.), *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, p. 7.
- 47) Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the famine, 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1990), pp 222-3; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and beyond: the great Irish famine in history, economy and memory* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1999), pp 114-5.
- 48) O'Mahony (transl.), *Foras feasa ar Éirinn*, p. 7.
- 49) Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American relations during reconstruction*, pp 319-20.
- 50) It may be worth noting that Stephen Joseph Meany, George Cahill and Patrick Andrew Collins, all steadfast supporters of John O'Mahony, became leading figures in the Land League of America, established to support the parent organization in Ireland. See Joe Power, 'Stephen Joseph Meany' in *Dal gCais: the Journal of Clare* (1991), p. 45; William D'Arcy, *The Fenian movement in the United States, 1858-1886* (Washington DC, 1947), p. 400.
- 51) John Mandeville was the fourth son of Jane Maria O'Mahony and James Mandeville. By the mid 1880s John Mandeville lived the life of a gentleman farmer at the old O'Mahony homestead in Clonkilla, near Mitchelstown, County Cork. At Land league meetings held in Mitchelstown in August 1887, Mandeville urged the local tenants to resist evictions. This resulted in his arrest and trial before the magistrate's court in Mitchelstown under the new Crimes Act, on the charge

of inflammatory speechmaking. The crown prosecutor was Edward Carson, who was later to make his most notable pitch in the militarization of the anti-Home Rule faction. On 22 September Mandeville was sentenced to two months imprisonment. When released from jail on Christmas Eve, he was in very poor health. Mandeville died at his home in Clonkilla on 8 July 1888, at the early age of 38 years. Nine days later, on 17 July, a formal inquest on his death began in the Market House, Mitchelstown. The verdict of the jury on the cause of his death was unanimous: Mandeville had died as a direct consequence of his 'brutal and unjustifiable treatment' in jail. On 9 September 1906 a monument was unveiled to Mandeville in the New Market Square, Mitchelstown, by his friend William O'Brien, MP for Cork. See Colman O' Mahony, 'John Mandeville and the Plan of Campaign at Mitchelstown in the 1880s' in *Iris Mhuintir Mhathúna* 13 (Summer 1989), pp 5-17.

- 52) John O'Mahony, 'Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!' in *Irish People* (New York), 1 July 1871.
- 53) *Poblacht na h-Eireann: the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the people of Ireland* (Dublin, 1916) reproduced in John O'Connor, *The 1916 Proclamation* (Dublin, 1986), p. 10.
- 54) See *Phoenix* (New York), 26 Jan. 1861; See also Nilsen, 'The Irish language in New York' in Bayor and Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish*, p. 264
- 55) Devoy, *Recollections*, pp 262-3.
- 56) Douglas Hyde, 'Death lament of John O'Mahony: Bron caoineadh Sheaghain Ui Mathghamhain' in *Poems and ballads of Young Ireland* (Dublin, 1888), pp 28-9.

(平成28年12月13日受理)