In moving from the age of La Guardia and Poletti to the age of Impellitteri and Gerosa, the Italian Americans have moved from the working class to (in increasing measure) the middle class, from the city to the suburbs, and from secularism to Catholicism. Young Italian intellectuals do not find this a very congenial atmosphere. But there are as yet not enough of them to develop any steady criticism of the style of Italian-American life; and the few who might do this have neither the organs nor the audience that would make such an enterprise worthwhile. If they are novelists, they celebrate the rich content of the old proletarian, city life. They know this is disappearing, and is being replaced by a new middle-class style, which is American Catholic more than it is anything that may be called American Italian. But it is still too new to have found anyone to record it, to criticize it, and perhaps transcend it.

the Irish

New York used to be an Irish city. Or so it seemed. There were sixty or seventy years when the Irish were everywhere. They felt it was their town. It is no longer, and they know it. That is one of the things bothering them.

The Irish era began in the early 1870's, about the time Charles O'Conor, "the ablest member of the New York bar," began the prosecution of Honorable William March Tweed. It ended in the 1930's. A symbolic point might be the day ex-Mayor James J. Walker sailed for Europe and exile with his beloved, but unwed, Betty.

Boss Tweed was the last vulgar white Protestant to win a prominent place in the city's life. The Protestants who have since entered public life have represented the "better element." Tweed was a roughneck, a ward heeler, a man of the people at a time when the people still contained a large body of native-born Protestant workers of Scotch and English antecedents. By the time of his death
in the Ludlow Street jail this had all but completely changed. The New York working class had become predominantly Catholic, as it has since remained. The Irish promptly assumed the leadership of this working class. "Honest John" Kelly succeeded Tweed as leader of Tammany Hall, formalizing a process that had been steadily advancing. In 1868 the New York diarist George Templeton Strong had recorded, "Our rulers are partly American scoundrels and partly Celtic scoundrels. The Celts are predominant, however, and we submit to the rod and the sceptre of Maguires and O'Tooles and O'Shanes. . ." But the American scoundrels disappeared, and soon Strong was writing only of the city's "blackguard Celtic tyrants." A note of helplessness appears: "we are to Papistical Paddy as Cedric the Saxon to Front de Boeuf." 

In 1880 Tammany Hall elected the city's first Irish Catholic mayor, William R. Grace of the shipping line. This ascendency persisted for another half century, reaching an apogee toward the end of the twenties when Al Smith ran for President and Jimmy Walker "wore New York in his buttonhole."

The crash came suddenly. In June 1932 Smith was denied the Democratic renomination. The Tammany delegates left Chicago bitter and unreconciled. Two months later Mayor Walker resigned in the face of mounting scandal, and decided to leave the country with his English mistress. A few days before his departure, Franklin Roosevelt had been elected President. The next man to be elected Mayor of New York City would be Fiorello H. La Guardia. Next, a Jewish world heavyweight champion. DiMaggio became the new name in baseball; Sinatra the new crooner. So it went. The almost formal end came within a decade. In 1943 Tammany Hall itself, built while Walker was Mayor at the cost of just under one million dollars, was sold to Local 91 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Tammany and the New York County Democratic Committee went their separate ways. The oldest political organization on earth was finished. So was the Irish era.

This is not to say the Irish have disappeared. They are still a powerful group. St. Patrick's Day is still the largest public observance of the city's year. On March 17 a green line is painted up Fifth Avenue and a half-million people turn out to watch the parade. (In Albany the Legislative Calendar is printed in green ink.) The Irish have a position in the city now as they had before the 1870's, but now, as then, it is a lopsided position. "Slippery Dick" Connoly and "Brains" Sweeney shared power and office with Tweed, as did any number of their followers. But, with few exceptions, they represented the canaille. With the coming of the Gilded Age, middle-class and even upper-class Irish appeared. For a period they ranged across the social spectrum, and in this way seemed to dominate much of the city's life. The Tweed ring was heavily Irish, but so was the group that brought on its downfall. This pattern persisted. The Irish came to run the police force and the underworld; they were the reformers and the hoodlums; employers and employed. The city entered the era of Boss Croker of Tammany Hall and Judge Goff of the Lexow Committee which investigated him; of business leader Thomas Fortune Ryan and labor leader Peter J. McGuire; of Reform Mayor John Purroy Mitchel and Tammany Mayor John F. "Red Mike" Hylan. It was a stimulating miscellany.

All this is past. The mass of the Irish have left the working class, and in considerable measure the Democratic party as well. But the pattern of egalitarian politics which they established on the whole persists, so that increasingly the Irish are left out. Their reaction to this is one of the principal elements of the Irish impact on the city today.

THE BASIS OF IRISH HEGEMONY IN THE CITY WAS ESTABLISHED by the famine emigration of 1846-1850. By mid-century there were 135,750 Irish-born inhabitants of the city, 26 per cent of the total population. By 1855, 34 per cent of the city voters were Irish. By 1890, when 80 per cent of the population of New York City was of foreign parentage, a third of these (409,924 persons of 1,215,469) were Irish, making more than a quarter of the total population. With older stock included, over one-third of the population of
New York and Brooklyn at the outset of the Gay Nineties was Irish-American.

The older stock went far back in the city's history. Ireland provided a continuing portion of the emigration to North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of it was made up of Protestants with English or Scottish antecedents, but there were always some Celtic Irish of Protestant or Catholic persuasion. The city received its first charter from Governor Thomas Dongan, afterwards Earl of Limerick. In 1683 Dongan summoned the first representative assembly in the history of the colony, at which he sponsored the Charter of Liberties and Privileges granting broad religious freedom, guaranteeing trial by jury, and establishing representative government. He was nonetheless suspected of plotting a Catholic establishment, and with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 the Catholics of New York were disfranchised.

This was a basic event. The Catholic Irish were kept out of the political life of the city for almost a century. It began a long tradition of denying rights to Irish Catholics on grounds that they wished to do the same to English Protestants. To this day the most fair-minded New York Protestants will caution that Irish Catholics have never experienced the great Anglo-Saxon tradition of the separation of church and state, although indeed they have known nothing but.

At the first New York Constitutional Convention in 1777, John Jay even proposed that Roman Catholics be deprived of their civil rights and the right to hold land until taking an oath that no Pope or priest could absolve them from sin or from allegiance to the state. This proposal was rejected, but Jay did succeed in including a religious test for naturalization in the constitution which remained in force until superseded by a federal naturalization statute in 1790. It was not until 1806 that a similar oath required for officeholders was repealed, permitting the first Irish Catholic to take his seat in the Assembly.

After the Revolution Irish emigration began in earnest. Writing in 1835, de Tocqueville reported: "About fifty years ago Ireland began to pour a Catholic population into the United States. . . ." He estimated that with conversions the number of Catholics had reached a million (which was three times the actual amount.)

In 1798 another of the native Irish revolts took place, and failed. In its aftermath came the first of a long trail of Irish revolutionaries, Catholic and Protestant, who disturbed the peace of the city for a century and a quarter. These were educated professional men who had risked their lives for much the same cause that had inspired the Sons of Liberty in New York a generation earlier. In general they were received as such. A few such as Dr. William J. MacNeven and Thomas Addis Emmet, became prominent New Yorkers. Emmet served in 1812 as the state's Attorney-General. Mr. Justice Story described him as "the favorite counsellor of New York."

In the early nineteenth century a sizable Irish-Catholic community gathered in New York. By the time of the great migration it was well enough established. Charles O'Connor, John Kelly, and W. R. Grace were all native New Yorkers. For some time prior to the potato famine the basic patterns of Irish life in New York had been set. The hordes that arrived at mid-century strengthened some of these patterns more than others, but they did not change them nearly so much as they were changed by them. They got off the boat to find their identity waiting for them: they were to be Irish-Catholic Democrats.

There were times when this identity took on the mysteries of the Trinity itself; the three were one and the one three. Identity with the Democratic party came last in point of time, but it could have been received from the hands of Finn MacCool for the way the Irish clung to it.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

TAMMANY WAS ORGANIZED IN NEW YORK A FEW WEEKS AFTER Washington was inaugurated at Federal Hall on April 30, 1789. The principal founder was one William Mooney, an upholsterer and apparently by birth an Irish Catholic. Originally a national organization, from the first its motif was egalitarian and nationalist; the Sons of St. Tammany, the American Indian chief, as against the foreign ties of the societies of St. George and St. David (as well, apparently, of the Sons of St. Patrick), or the aristocratic airs of the
Sons of the Cincinnati. Its members promptly involved themselves in politics, establishing the New York Democratic party. (Until recently Tammany officially retained the Jeffersonian designation “Democratic-Republican” party. Far into the twentieth century the Phrygian cap of the French Revolution was an important prop in Tammany ceremonies; it will be seen atop the staff of Liberty in the New York State seal, contrasting with the crown at her feet.)

The original issues on which the New York political parties organized concerned the events of the French Revolution. Jefferson and his Democratic followers were instinctively sympathetic to France. Hamilton, Jay, and the Federalists looked just as fervently to England. This automatically aligned the Irish with the Democrats: the French Revolution had inspired the Irish revolt of 1798, and the French had sent three expeditions to aid it. The Federalists reacted with the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, designed in part to prevent the absorption of immigrants into the Jeffersonian party, but which only strengthened their attachment to it. In 1812 the Federalists bitterly, but unsuccessfully, opposed the establishment of more-or-less universal white suffrage, certain it would swell the immigrant Irish vote of New York City.11

So it did, and in no time the Irish developed a powerful voting bloc. In the 1827 city elections, a prelude to the contest between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, the Irish sided mightily with Jackson, himself the son of poor Irish immigrants, and thereupon entered wholeheartedly into the politics of the Jacksonian era. By 1832 the Whig candidate for President found himself assuring a St. Patrick’s Day dinner that “Some of my nearest and dearest friends (are) Irishmen.”12

The contest for the “Irish vote” became an aspect of almost every New York election that followed. A week before the election of 1884 a delegation of Protestant clergymen waited on the Republican candidate James G. Blaine, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, to assure him, in the words of Reverend Samuel D. Burchard, “. . . We are Republicans and don’t propose to leave our party, and identify ourselves with the party whose antecedents have been ruin, Romanism, and rebellion.”13 Blaine, who had been making

headway with the Irish, lost New York by 1,077 votes, and thereby the election, which ended the Republican rule of post-Civil War America.

By this time the New York City Irish were not only voting for the Democratic party but thoroughly controlled its organization. Apart from building their church, this was the one singular achievement of the nineteenth-century Irish. “The Irish role in politics was creative, not imitative.”14

New York became the first great city in history to be ruled by men of the people, not as an isolated phenomenon of the Gracchi or the Commune, but as a persisting, established pattern. Almost to this day the men who have run New York City have talked out of the side of their mouths. The intermittent discovery that New York did have representative government led to periodic reform movements. But the reformers came and went; the party remained. The secret lay in the structure of the party bureaucracy which ever replenished and perpetuated itself. It is only in the past decade, when the middle class at length discovered the secret and began themselves to move into the party bureaucracy that the character of the New York City government has begun to change. Even here, the party complexion persists: of the twenty-six members of the City Council, twenty-four were Democrats in 1963.

In politics, as in religion, the Irish brought many traits from the Old Country. The machine governments that they established in New York (as in many Northern cities) show a number of features characteristic of nineteenth-century Ireland. The exact nature of the relationship is not clear: much that follows is speculative. But the coincidence is clear enough to warrant the proposition that the machine governments resulted from a merger of rural Irish custom with urban American politics. “Politics,” in Charles Frankel’s words, “is a substitute for custom; it becomes conspicuous wherever custom recedes or breaks down.”15 But in nineteenth-century New York events did not permit one system gradually to recede as the other slowly emerged. The ancient world of folkways and the modern world of contracts came suddenly together. The collision is nicely evoked by the story of Congressman
Timothy J. Campbell of New York, a native of Cavan, calling on President Grover Cleveland with a request the President refused on the ground that it was unconstitutional. "Ah, Mr. President," replied Tim, "what is the Constitution between friends?" 10

There were four features of the machine government which are particularly noticeable in this context.

First, there was an indifference to Yankee proprieties. To the Irish, stealing an election was rascally, not to be approved, but neither quite to be abhorred. It may be they picked up some of this from the English. Eighteenth-century politics in Ireland were—in Yankee terms—thoroughly corrupt. George Potter has written,

The great and the wealthy ran Ireland politically like Tammany Hall in its worst days. Had they not sold their own country for money and titles in the Act of Union with England and, as one rogue said, thanked God they had a country to sell? ... A gentleman was thought no less a gentleman because he dealt, like merchandise, with the votes of his tenants or purchased his parliamentary seat as he would a horse or a new wing for his big house.17

But the Irish added to the practice, from their own social structure, a personal concept of government action. Describing the early period of Irish self-government, Conrad M. Arensberg relates that

... At first, geese and country produce besieged the new officers and magistrates; a favourable decision or a necessary public work performed was interpreted as a favour given. It demanded a direct and personal return. "Influence" to the countryman was and is a direct personal relationship, like the friendship of the countryside along which his own life moves.18

Second, the Irish brought to America a settled tradition of regarding the formal government as illegitimate, and the informal one as bearing the true impress of popular sovereignty. The Penal Laws of eighteenth-century Ireland totally proscribed the Catholic religion, and reduced the Catholic Irish to a condition of de facto slavery.

Cecil Woodham-Smith holds with Burke that the lawlessness, dissimulation and revenge which followed left the Irish character, above all the character of the peasantry, "degraded and debased."

His religion made him an outlaw; in the Irish House of Commons he was described as "the common enemy," and whatever was inflicted on him he must bear, for where could he look for redress? To his landlord? Almost invariably an alien conqueror. To the law? Not when every person connected with the law, from the jailer to the judge, was a Protestant. ...

In these conditions suspicion of the law, of the ministers of the law and of all established authority "worked into the very nerves and blood of the Irish peasant," and since the law did not give him justice he set up his own law. The secret societies which have been the curse of Ireland became widespread during the Penal period... dissimulation became a moral necessity and evasion of the law the duty of every God-fearing Catholic.19

This habit of mind pervaded Tammany at its height. City Hall as such was no more to be trusted than Dublin Castle. Alone one could fight neither. If in trouble it was best to see The McManus. If the McMane were in power in City Hall as well as in the Tuscarora Regular Democratic Organization of the Second Assembly District Middle—so much the better.

Third, most of the Irish arrived in America fresh from the momentous experience of the Catholic Emancipation movement. The Catholic Association that the Irish leader Daniel O'Connell established in 1823 for the purpose of achieving emancipation is the "first fully-fledged democratic political party known to the world." Daniel O'Connell, Potter writes, "was the first modern man to use the mass of a people as a democratic instrument for revolutionary changes by peaceful constitutional methods. He anticipated the coming into power of the people as the decisive political element in modern democratic society."20 The Irish peasants, who had taken little part in Gaelic Ireland's resistance to the English (that had been a matter for the warrior class of an aristocratic society) arrived in America with some feeling at least for the possibilities of politics,
and they brought with them, as a fourth quality, a phenomenally effective capacity for political bureaucracy.

Politics is a risky business. Hence it has ever been the affair of speculators with the nerve to gamble and an impulse to boldness. These are anything but peasant qualities. Certainly they are not qualities of Irish peasants who, collectively, yielded to none in the rigidity of their social structure and their disinclination to adventure. Instead of letting politics transform them, the Irish transformed politics, establishing a political system in New York City that, from a distance, seems like the social system of an Irish village writ large.

The Irish village was a place of stable, predictable social relations in which almost everyone had a role to play, under the surveillance of a stern oligarchy of elders, and in which, on the whole, a person’s position was likely to improve with time. Transferred to Manhattan, these were the essentials of Tammany Hall.

By 1871 the Irish were playing a significant role in Tammany. Working from the original ward committees, they slowly established a vast hierarchy of party positions descending from the county leader at the top down to the block captain and beyond, even to building captains. Each position had rights and responsibilities that had to be observed. The result was a massive party bureaucracy. The county committees of the five boroughs came to number more than 32,000 persons. It became necessary to hire Madison Square Garden for their meetings, and to hope that not more than half would come. The system in its prime was remarkably stable. Kelly, Richard Croker, and Frank Murphy in succession ran Tammany for half a century. Across the river Hugh McLaughlin ran the Brooklyn Democratic party and fought off Tammany for better than forty years, from 1862 to 1903. He was followed shortly by John H. McCooey, who ruled from 1909 until his death a quarter century later in 1934. Ed Flynn ran the Bronx from 1922 until his death in 1953.

The stereotype of the Irish politician as a beer-guzzling back-slasher is nonsense. Croker, McLaughlin, and Mister Murphy were the least affable of men. Their task was not to charm but to administer with firmness and pre-

dictability a political bureaucracy in which the prerogatives of rank were carefully observed. The hierarchy had to be maintained. For the group as a whole this served to take the risks out of politics. Each would get his deserts—in time.

In the intraparty struggles of the 1950’s and 1960’s no one characteristic divides the “regular” Democratic party men in New York City from the “reform” group more than the matter of taking pride in following the chain of command. The “reform” group was composed overwhelmingly of educated, middle-class career people hardened to the struggle for advancement in their professions. Waiting in line to see one’s leader seemed to such persons slavish and undignified, the kind of conduct that could be imposed only by a Boss. By contrast, the “organization” regulars regarded such conduct as proper and well-behaved. The reformers, who tend to feel superior, would have been surprised, perhaps, to learn that among the regulars they were widely regarded as rude, unethical people. As Arensberg said of the Irish village, so of the political machine, “Public honour and self-satisfaction reward conformity.”

It would also seem that the term “Boss” and the persistent attacks on “Boss rule” have misrepresented the nature of power in the old machine system. Power was hierarchical in the party, diffused in the way it is diffused in an army. Because the commanding general was powerful, it did not follow that the division generals were powerless. Tammany district leaders were important men, and, right down to the block captain, all had rights.

The principle of Boss rule was not tyrannical, but orderly. When Lincoln Steffens asked Croker, “Why must there be a boss, when we’ve got a mayor and—a council and —” “That’s why,” Croker broke in. “It’s because there’s a mayor and a council and judges—and a hundred other men to deal with.”

At the risk of exaggerating, it is possible to point to any number of further parallels between the political machine and rural Irish society. The incredible capacity of the rural Irish to remain celibate, awaiting their turn to inherit the farm, was matched by generations of assistant corporation counsels awaiting that opening on the City Court bench. Arensberg has described the great respect for
rank in the Irish peasantry. Even after an Irish son had taken over direction of the farm, he would go each morning to his father to ask what to do that day. So was respect shown to the “Boss,” whose essential demand often seemed only that he be consulted. The story goes that one day a fellow leader of Thomas J. Dunn, a Tammany Sachem, confided that he was about to be married. “Have you seen Croker?” Dunn asked. In 1913, when Governor William Sulzer refused to consult the organization on appointments, Murphy forthwith impeached and removed him. Rival leaders fought bitterly in the courts for the privilege of describing their club as the “Regular” Democratic Organization.

The narrow boundaries of the peasant world were ideally adaptable to precinct politics. “Irish familialism is of the soil,” wrote Arensberg. “It operates most strongly within allegiances to a definite small area.” Only men from such a background could make an Assembly district their life’s work.

The parallel role of the saloonkeeper is striking. Arensberg writes of the saloonkeeper in Ireland:

... the shopkeeper-publican-politician was a very effective instrument, both for the countryside which used him and for himself. He might perhaps exact buying at his shop in return for the performance of his elective duties, as his enemies charge: but he also saw to it that those duties were performed for the very people who wished to see them done. Through him, as through no other possible channel, Ireland reached political maturity and effective national strength.

Among the New York Irish, “the saloons were the nodal points of district organization...” It used to be said the only way to break up a meeting of the Tammany Executive Committee was to open the door and yell “Your saloon’s on fire!” At the same time a mark of the successful leaders was sobriety. George Washington Plunkitt, a Tammany district leader, related with glee the events of election night 1897 when Tammany had just elected—against considerable odds—the first mayor of the consolidated City of New York.

Up to 10 P.M. Croker, John F. Carroll, Tim Sullivan, Charlie Murphy, and myself sat in the committee-room receivin returns. When nearly all the city was heard from and we saw that Van Wyck was elected by a big majority, I invited the crowd to go across the street for a little celebration. A lot of small politicians followed us, expectin’ to see magnums of champagne opened. The waiters in the restaurant expected it, too, and you never saw a more disgruntled lot of waiters when they got our orders. Here’s the orders: Croker, vichy and bicarbonate of soda; Carroll, seltzer lemonade; Sullivan, apollinaris; Murphy, vichy; Plunkitt, ditto. Before midnight we were all in bed, and next mornin’ we were up bright and early attendin’ to business while other men were nursin’ swelled heads. Is there anything the matter with temperance as a pure business proposition?

As a business proposition it all worked very well. But that is about as far as it went. The Irish were immensely successful in politics. They ran the city. But the very parochialism and bureaucracy that enabled them to succeed in politics prevented them from doing much with government. In all those sixty or seventy years in which they could have done almost anything they wanted in politics, they did very little. Of all those candidates and all those campaigns, what remains? The names of two or three men: Al Smith principally (who was a quarter English, apparently a quarter German and possibly a quarter Italian), and his career went sour before it ever quite came to glory.

In a sense, the Irish did not know what to do with power once they got it. Steffens was surely exaggerating when he suggested the political bosses kept power only on the sufferance of the business community. The two groups worked in harmony, but it was a symbiotic, not an agency relationship. The Irish leaders did for the Protestant establishment what it could not do for itself, and could not do without. Croker “understood completely the worthlessness of the superior American in politics.” But the Irish just didn’t know what to do with their opportunity. They never thought of politics as an instrument of social change—their kind of politics involved the processes of a society that was not changing. Croker alone solved the problem. Having become rich he did the thing rich people in Ireland did: he bought himself a manor house in England, bred horses, and won the Derby. The King did not ask him to the Derby Day dinner.
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The story goes that in the last days of one of his campaigns Al Smith was on a speaking tour of the northern counties of the state. Sunday morning he and all but one of his aides got up and trekked off to Mass, returning to find the remaining member of the party, Herbert Bayard Swope, resplendent in his de Pinna bathrobe and slippers, having a second cup of coffee, reading the Sunday papers. As the Catholics stamped the snow off their feet and climbed out of their overcoats, Smith looked at Swope and said, "You know, boys, it would be a hell of a thing if it turned out Swope was right and we were wrong."

That sums it up. The Irish of New York, as elsewhere, have made a tremendous sacrifice for their church. They have built it from a despised and proscribed sect of the eighteenth century to the largest religious organization of the nation, numbering some 43,851,000 members in 1969. This is incomparably the most important thing they have done in America. But they have done it at a price.

In secular terms, it has cost them dearly in men and money. A good part of the surplus that might have gone into family property has gone to building the church. This has almost certainly inhibited the development of the solid middle-class dynasties that produce so many of the important people in America. (Thomas F. O'Dea speculates that the relative absence of a Catholic rentier class has much inhibited the development of Catholic intellectuals.) The celibacy of the Catholic clergy has also deprived the Irish of the class of ministers' sons which has contributed notably to the prosperity and distinction of the Protestant world.

These disadvantages have been combined with a pervasive prejudice against Catholics on the part of Protestants that has not entirely disappeared.

The Catholic Church does not measure its success by the standards of secular society. Many of its finest men and women disappear from the great world altogether. This is well understood and accepted by Catholics. What troubles a growing number of persons within the Church is the performance of the great bulk of Catholics who remain very much a part of the world in which they live. For a

Church notably committed to the processes of intellect, the performance of Catholic scholars and writers is particularly galling. In the words of Professor O'Dea, formerly of Fordham:

The American Catholic group has failed to produce... both qualitatively and quantitatively an appropriate intellectual life. It has failed to evolve in this country a vital intellectual tradition displaying vigor and creativity in proportion to the numerical strength of American Catholics. It has also failed to produce intellectual and other national leaders in numbers appropriate to its size and resources.

It is notorious that Catholics have produced hardly a handful of important scientists. But this seems to be true of Catholics everywhere. The failure of the American Catholics seems deeper than that. Neither have they produced a great poet, a great painter, a great diplomatist. None of the arts, none of the achievements that most characterize the older Catholic societies seem to prosper here. "Is the honorable adjective 'Roman Catholic' truly merited by America's middle-class-Jansenist Catholicism, puritanized, Calvinized, and dehydrated...?" asked the Protestant Peter Viereck. What he perhaps really wanted to know is whether Irish Catholics are Roman Catholics.

It is impossible to pull the terms apart in the reality of American life. Thus Time magazine was apparently not conscious of having said anything odd when it referred, in 1960, to "The City's Irish-Catholic population, 1,000,000 strong and predominantly Roman Catholic..." Since the early nineteenth century the American Catholic Church has been dominated by the Irish. This is nowhere more true than in New York, the preeminent Catholic city of the nation.

Obviously, the Irish Church in America was established in the nineteenth century in the sense that parishes were organized and the churches built at that time. But it is also apparent that certain essential qualities of the religion itself derive from the world that followed the French Revolution. The English in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries practically destroyed the Irish Church. The faith remained, but the institution practically disappeared; Catholics had almost no churches, few clergy, hardly
any organization. Mass was said in the mountains by priests who were practically fugitives. The Irish Church did not even have a seminary in Ireland until Pitt established Maynooth in 1794—to obviate the training of Irish priests in revolutionary France.

The Church that grew from this beginning was something different from the historical Roman Catholic Church, not in theology, although there was a distinct Jansenist flavor, but in culture. It was a church with a decided aversion to the modern liberal state. This aversion began with the French Revolution (the Irish hierarchy had been trained in France and gave refuge to any number of émigré French clerics) and was confirmed by the events of Italian unification. It was a church that was decidedly separatist in its attitude toward the non-Catholic community, which for long, in America as in Ireland, was the ascendant community. It was a church with almost no intellectual tradition. Ireland was almost the only Christian nation of the middle ages that never founded a university. With all this, as Kevin Sullivan writes, “Irish Catholicism, in order to hold its own in a land dominated by an English Protestant culture, had developed many of the characteristics of English sectarianism: defensive, insular, parochial, puritanical. . . .”

It emphatically did not, however, acquire the English fondness for royalty. In a passage which Father C. J. McNaspy has said “speaks volumes,” de Tocqueville noted that Father Power, the pastor at the time of St. Peter’s, the first Catholic Church in New York, “appears to have no prejudice against republican institutions.” This was surely because the Irish had no great fear of republican institutions, which far from disestablishing their church had had the effect of raising it to equality with Protestant churches. Moreover, republicanism had raised Irishmen to a kind of equality with Protestants: one man, one vote.

Beginning with Bishop John Hughes, who came to the city in 1858, the New York Catholic Church became anything but passive in asserting this equality. In 1844, when the good folk of Philadelphia took to burning Catholic Churches, Hughes issued a statement that “if a single Catholic church were burned in New York, the city would become a second Moscow.” None was burned.

Accepting republicanism did not entail accepting liberalism. From the first the Irish Catholic clergy of New York have been conservative. The Revolutions of 1848, which involved European liberals in a direct physical attack on the Papacy, produced a powerful effect on the American hierarchy. Bishop John Hughes of New York put his flock on guard against the “Red Republicans” of Europe,” as he called them. At this point the Church began to find itself in conflict not only with primitive, no-Papery Protestants who burned convents, but also with liberal, educated, post-Calvinist Protestant leadership. An early episode involved the Hungarian revolutionary Kossuth. As Hughes reported to Rome in 1858, “The enthusiasm and admiration in which Kossuth was held by the American people were almost boundless.” Dreading the influence such liberalism might have on Catholics, Hughes denounced Kossuth prior to his appearance in New York City, with the result, the Bishop felt, that the visit was a failure.

The divergence between liberal Protestant and Catholic views in New York grew when Catholics generally declined to support the movement for the abolition of Negro slavery. In July, 1863, the New York Irish rioted against the newly enacted draft. For four bloody, smoke-filled days the mobs ranged the city. They attacked Negroes everywhere, lynched some, and burned a Negro orphanage. Strong’s diary records absolute revulsion:

The fury of the low Irish woman . . . was noteworthy. Stalwart young vixens and withered old hags were swarming everywhere, all cursing the “bloody draft” and egging on their men. . . . How is one to deal with women who assemble around the lamp post to which a Negro had been hanged and cut off certain parts of his body to keep as souvenirs? . . . For myself, personally, I would like to see war made on Irish scum as in 1688.

In the post-Civil War period, when much Protestant energy turned to the issues of social reform, the Catholic Church continued to remain apart and, in the view of many, opposed. The New York diocese was notably alert to the perils of socialism. One widely popular priest, Father Edward McGlynn, was temporarily excommunicated in a controversy that followed his support of Henry George who
ran for mayor in 1897. (George had made headway by linking his single tax proposal to the problems of Irish land reform.) Bishop Corrigan even tried to get Progress and Poverty placed on the Index of Prohibited Books, although without success other than to have George's theories declared "false." 37

These developments strengthened the separatist tendencies in the Church, although again, the basic decisions had been made prior to the great migration. Foremost of these was the decision to establish a separate school system.

In New York City, as elsewhere, education was largely a church function in the early days of the republic. In 1805 a Free School Society was formed, "for the education of such poor children as do not belong to, or are not provided for, by any religious society." 38 Its first address to the public proclaimed that "... it will be a primary object, without observing the peculiar forms of any religious society, to inculcate the sublime truths of religion and morality contained in the Holy Scriptures." 39 That year the state legislature established a fund for the support of common schools which was distributed in New York City to the trustees of the Free School Society and "of such incorporated religious societies in said city as now support, or hereafter shall establish charity schools..." 40 Under this system Catholic schools, along with Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Reformed Dutch, German Lutheran, and Scotch Presbyterian ones, among others, received state aid.

In 1823 it developed that the Baptist schools were padding their enrollment books and requiring teachers to turn over part of their salaries. In the upshot, the distribution of state aid was turned over to the City Common Council, which thereafter channeled most of the public funds to the Free School Society, renamed the Public School Society. By 1839 the Society operated eighty-six schools, with an average total attendance of 11,789. 41

As the Society was strongly Protestant, most Protestants could accept this development, but Catholics did not. They persisted with their own schools. By 1899 there were seven Roman Catholic Free Schools in the city "open to all children, without discrimination," with more than 5,000 pupils attending. 42 (Thus parochial school attendance equaled almost half the average attendance of the "public" schools, a proportion not far different from that of today.) Nonetheless, almost half the children of the city attended no school of any kind, at a time when some 94 per cent of children of school age in the rest of the state attended common schools established by school districts under direction of elected officers.

This situation prompted the Whig Governor William H. Seward to make this proposal to the legislature in his message for 1840:

The children of foreigners, found in great numbers in our populous cities and towns, and in the vicinity of our public works, are too often deprived of the advantages of our system of public education, in consequence of prejudices arising from difference of language or religion. It ought never to be forgotten that the public welfare is as deeply concerned in their education as in that of our own children. I do not hesitate, therefore, to recommend the establishment of schools in which they may be instructed by teachers speaking the same language with themselves and professing the same faith. 43

Instead of waiting for the rural, upstate legislature to ponder and act upon this proposal of an upstate Whig governor, the Catholics in the city immediately began clamoring for a share of public education funds. 44 The Common Council declined on grounds that this would be unconstitutional. In October, 1840, the Bishop himself appeared before the Council, even offering to place the parochial schools under the supervision of the Public School Society in return for public aid. When he was turned down, tempers began to rise.

In April, 1841, Seward's Secretary of State John C. Spencer, ex officio superintendent of public schools, submitted a report on the issue to the State Senate. This was a state paper of the first quality, drafted by an authority on the laws of New York State (who was also de Tocqueville's American editor). Spencer began by assuming the essential justice of the Catholic request for aid to their schools:
It can scarcely be necessary to say that the founders of these schools, and those who wish to establish others, have absolute rights to the benefits of a common burthen; and that any system which deprives them of their just share in the application of a common and public fund, must be justified, if at all, by a necessity which demands the sacrifice of individual rights, for the accomplishment of a social benefit of paramount importance. It is presumed no such necessity can be urged in the present instance.46

To those who feared use of public funds for sectarian purposes, Spencer replied that all instruction is in some ways sectarian: “No books can be found, no reading lessons can be selected, which do not contain more or less of some principles of religious faith, either directly avowed, or indirectly assumed.” The activities of the Public School Society were no exception to this rule: “Even the moderate degree of religious instruction which the Public School Society imparts, must therefore be sectarian; that is, it must favor one set of opinions in opposition to another, or others; and it is believed that this always will be the result, in any course of education that the wit of man can devise.” As for avoiding sectarianism by abolishing religious instruction altogether, “On the contrary, it would be in itself sectarian; because it would be consonant to the views of a peculiar class, and opposed to the opinions of other classes.”

Spencer proposed to take advantage of the diversity of opinion by a form of local option. He suggested that the direction of the New York City school system be turned over to a board of elected school commissioners which would establish and maintain general standards, while leaving religious matters to the trustees of the individual schools, the assumption being that those sectarianists who so wished would proceed to establish their own schools.

A rivalry may, and probably will, be produced between them, to increase the number of pupils. As an essential means to such an object, there will be a constant effort to improve the schools, in the mode and degree of instruction, and in the qualification of the teachers. Thus, not only will the number of children brought into the schools be incalculably augmented, but the competition anticipated will produce its usual effect of providing the very best material to satisfy the public demand. These advantages will more than compensate for any possible evils that may be apprehended from having schools adapted to the feelings and views of the different denominations.47

The legislature put off immediate action on Spencer’s report. But Catholics grew impatient. When neither party endorsed the proposal in the political campaign that fall, Bishop Hughes made the calamitous mistake—four days before the election—of entering a slate of his own candidates for the legislature. Protestants were horrified. James G. Bennett in the New York Herald declared the Bishop was trying “to organize the Irish Catholics of New York as a district party, that could be given to the Whigs or Locofocons at the wave of his crozier.” The Carroll Hall candidates, as they were known, polled just enough votes to put an end to further discussion of using public funds to help Catholics become more active citizens.

At the next session of the legislature the Public School Society was, in effect, disestablished. Spencer’s proposal for an elected Board of Education in New York City was adopted. Each city ward was to have elected commissioners, inspectors, and trustees to run the common schools in its area. But the Protestants, foreseeing the numerical supremacy of the Catholics, blocked Spencer’s proposal for local option on religious instruction. “In a word, the Protestants disliked secularism, but they disliked the Pope more. . . .” 48 The 1842 law provided that “No school . . . in which any religious sectarian doctrine or tenet shall be taught, inculcated, or practised [sic], shall receive any portion of the school moneys to be distributed by this act. . . .” Thus the sectarian position that the Spencerian analysis would describe as “non-sectarian” won out. New York became the first of the original thirteen states to prohibit the teaching of religion in public schools. The New York Catholic Church thereupon set about establishing its own school system. In 1850 Hughes declared, “the time has almost come when it will be necessary to build the schoolhouse first, and the church afterward.” 49

Along with the great effort of building and operating parish facilities and charitable institutions, the Church proceeded to establish a vast private school system.
THE IRISH

But it seems clear that the high intellectual tradition was slighted. In the New York dioceses today, for every fifteen students in Catholic schools, there is but one in a Catholic college.

Monsignor John Tracy Ellis has suggested that development of the parochial schools swamped an incipient Catholic intellectual movement which stemmed from the educated offspring of the Maryland gentry and was powerfully reinforced in the 1840's by the conversion of prominent Protestants, corresponding to the Oxford movement in England. A century later Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston was to tell a CIO convention "... in all the American hierarchy, resident in the United States, there is not known to me one Bishop, Archbishop or Cardinal whose father or mother was a college graduate. Every one of our Bishops and Archbishops is the son of a working man and a working man's wife." 49

It seems clear that the prestige of the Church declined as it became more Irish. In 1783, the dedication of St. Peter's, with hardly 200 parishioners, could command the presence of the Governor of New York and the President of the Continental Congress. Rome itself was not seen as the traditional threat to Anglo-Saxon liberties. But as the Irish question got in the way, some of this sympathy and esteem disappeared. The Irish were the one oppressed people on earth the American Protestants could never quite bring themselves wholeheartedly to sympathize with. They would consider including insurgent Greece within the protection of the Monroe Doctrine, they would send a warship to bring the rebel Kossuth safe to the shores of liberty, they would fight a war and kill half a million men to free the Negro slaves. But the Irish were different.

THE WILD IRISH

"THE IRISH," WROTE MACAULAY, "... WERE DISTINGUISHED by qualities which tend to make men interesting rather than prosperous. They were an ardent and impetuous race, easily moved to tears or laughter, to fury or to love." 50 His words evoke the stage Irishman, battered hat in hand, loquacious and sly, proclaiming "Faith, yer Honor, if I'd of known it was Hogan's goat . . . ."

There was little in Gaelic culture, "exclusive, despotic, aristocratic," as Sean O'Faolain described it, to evoke the stage Irishman, but by the nineteenth century Gaelic culture had all but disappeared. The peasant Irish character that remained did have within it contrasting impulses to conformity and to fantasy, to the most plodding routine and the wildest adventure. This was overlaid with a kind of fecklessness with which the Celts survived the savagery of the English in eighteenth-century Ireland. Thus there was some truth in the caricature. The peasants who poured into America brought with them little by way of an Irish culture but a definite enough Irish character. It is not surprising then that in America they learned to act as they were expected to act. Within weeks of landing they were marching in the Mulligan Guards. Within a generation the half-starved people who had produced Blind Raftery were eating meat twice a day and singing about the "Overhals in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder."

Prior to the great immigration, the Irish community in New York was reasonably symmetrical. There was a base of laborers and artisans surrounded by levels of tradesmen, professional men, entrepreneurs, and even aristocrats. The top layers were a mixture of Celt and Saxon, Catholic and Protestant. The first president of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, organized in New York in 1784, was a Presbyterian. Speakers at today's session of the Friendly Sons can recount the mercantile triumphs of their first members. "As you undoubtedly know," a Fordham professor told a recent meeting, "most of the founders of your society were merchants, who formed the aristocracy of New York in olden days."

With each successive shipload of famine stricken peasants, the Irish community became more unbalanced. The "wild Irish," as Henry II had called them, in just the sense Americans would describe the wild Indians, poured into the city to drink and dance and fight in the streets. These were not merchant adventurers. They were Paddies for whom the city had shortly to provide paddy wagons. They felt neither relation to nor respect for the business leaders of their colony. Rather than waiting until they might be asked to join the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick,
in perhaps two or three generations, they founded the Ancient Order of Hibernians. St. Patrick was a Briton, a peer of St. David, St. Andrew, and St. George. Hibernians were plain Irish Catholics.

The result was the Protestants ceased being Irish. For a while they became "Ulster Irish" and took to celebrating the Battle of the Boyne. (Orange Day riots in New York began in the 1850's. That of 1871 killed fifty-two persons and wounded hundreds.) But before long the Protestant Irish blended into the composite native American stock that had already claimed the Scots.

These developments robbed the New York Irish of middle-class leadership at the very moment they most needed it. Just when it was important for the enterprise among them to start going into the counting houses, the signs went up that "No Irish need apply."

The detachment of the Protestants from the Irish community was unquestionably hastened by the rise of nativism. In 1834 Samuel F. B. Morse published in the New York Observer a dozen letters which subsequently appeared as a book entitled Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States. He propounded the existence of a conspiracy between the Holy Alliance and the Papacy to gain control of the nation.

Morse ran for mayor of New York in 1841 on the Native American ticket, in the same election with Bishop Hughes' Catholic candidates. The Know-Nothing party, which emerged from this, almost won the 1854 state elections. It disappeared after 1856; most of its members went into the new Republican party—and helped confirm the allegiance of Irish Catholics to the Democrats.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the cultural and religious separation of the Irish Catholics from Protestant New York was intensified when the groups split on just that issue that had originally established a bond of sympathy between them: British rule in Ireland.

In the days of the American Revolution, the Irish and the American causes seemed very much the same. At Valley Forge Washington ordered grog for the entire army on St. Patrick's Day. As much as 40 per cent of his men appear to have been of Irish or Scotch-Irish stock. In the century and a quarter that followed, America came repeatedly to the brink of war with England. While Anglo-American hostility prevailed, Irish nationalism and American patriotism were easily reconcilable. But as the nineteenth century passed, each successive crisis with England was somehow resolved, and, as new empires emerged in Europe and Asia, England and America drew closer together. Irish nationalists in America, who in 1776 had been looked upon by George Washington as stalwart patriots, were looked upon by Woodrow Wilson in 1916, when the last Irish revolution began, as traitors. Wilson, to be sure, was Ulster Presbyterian.

The cruel part of this history is that by 1916 Irish nationalism in America had little to do with Ireland. It was a hodgepodge of fine feeling and bad history with which the immigrants filled a cultural void. Organized campaigns for Irish freedom, centered in New York, began early in the nineteenth century and grew more rather than less intense. "Indeed," Thomas N. Brown writes, "it was the ruling passion for many of the second and third generation who knew only of America." 102

... Irish nationalism was the cement, not the purpose of Irish American organization. Essentially they were pressure groups designed to defend and advance the American interests of the immigrant. Nationalism gave dignity to this effort, it offered a system of apologetics that explained their lowly state, and its emotional appeal was powerful enough to hold together the divergent sectional and class interests of the American Irish. This nationalism was not an alternative to American nationalism, but a variety of it. Its function was not to alienate the Irish immigrant but to accommodate him to an often hostile environment. 58

For the Irish, nationalism gave a structure to working-class resentments that in other groups produced political radicalism. A group of Irish managed to combine both. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, whom Theodore Dreiser described as "An East Side Joan of Arc," was part of an Irish socialist movement that was active in New York at the turn of the century. Her autobiography begins with a chapter "Paddy the Rebel," which captures some of the atmosphere of the Irish-American home in the 1890's.
The awareness of being Irish came to us as small children through plaintive song and heroic story... We drew in a burning hatred of British rule with our mother’s milk. Until my father died at over eighty, he never said England without adding, “God damn her!” Before I was ten I knew of the great heroes—Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, Michael Davitt, Parnell and O’Donovan Rossa, who was chained hand and foot, like a dog, and had to eat from a tin plate on the floor of a British prison.  

Flynn notes that her second-generation father felt much more strongly about Ireland than her mother, who was born there.

The nineteenth-century Irish discovered they were Celts, locked in ageless struggle with Saxons. The most bizarre notions evolved from this discovery: hardly credible, were it not a time when American cotton farmers were organizing tournaments and civilized Scotsmen were appearing in kilts. But somehow the contrast between Irish reality and pretense was more pitiful than ludicrous. The proceedings were, as George Templeton Strong declared, “full of gas and brag and bosh.” Referring to an exiled leader of the 1848 revolt, Thomas F. Meagher, Strong noted: “‘Meagher of the Sword’ they call that commonplace decent attorney-at-law. ‘Tis he will sheathe that battle axe in Saxon gore.”  

The speeches were grand; the rallies grander. One hundred thousand persons attended a Fenian gathering in Jones’ Wood in New York in 1866—against the wishes of the Archbishop! The Fenians hoped to free Ireland by capturing Canada. From their New York headquarters they raised an army, and prepared for the invasion, with the full regalia of a modern government-in-exile.

They pledged their lives and honor and beseeched the intercession of the Saints:

By the old rebel Pike  
By the waving sunburst  
By the immortal shamrock  
By the sprig of fern  
By the bayonet charge  
By the Irish hurrah  

We beseech thee to hear us,  
O’Toole  

Nothing came of it. A thousand men or so marched into Canada. And marched right out again. In the one battle of the whole fiasco, eight Irishmen were killed. With what contempt did Strong record: “Their raid into Canada is a most ridiculous failure... Had there been an Old John Brown among them they would have failed less ignominiously, at least. But there are no Celtic John Browns, and there never will be, I think.”  

Strong was mistaken. The Celtic John Browns did appear. The foremost of them, Eamon de Valera, like Old John Brown himself, was born in New York.

The Irish issue all but dominated English politics in the last third of the nineteenth century. Then, as earlier, many of the Irish leaders were Protestants. The principal Irish objectives were land reform and home rule. By 1914 it appeared these had all but been obtained, despite the obstinate stupidity of the Conservative party. But in the meantime a far more intransigent group had grown up, the Sinn Fein party, dedicated to the establishment of a Gaelic, Catholic republic. It received much of its inspiration and money from Irish-Americans.

In 1869 the New York Irish established a secret society, Clan-na-Gael, dedicated to a radical, violent course in Ireland. This remained a vigorous, nationwide organization for half a century, led in the New York area by a Fenian exile, John Devoy, and a Tammany judge, Daniel Cohalan. During much of this time the Irish issue seemed to dominate New York as well. During the middle years of the century the arrival of Irish patriots in the port were occasions for great public celebrations. The exiles enhanced a tendency, apparent from the time of O’Connell, for Irish-Americans to be more extreme in their attitudes toward England than were the native Irish.

At the turn of the century, when an Anglo-American entente was becoming evident, a number of German- and Irish-Americans began to work together against it. When World War I came, this collaboration became an earnest, perilous affair. “A comparison of such Irish papers as The Gaelic-American and the Irish World with the
German-language press indicates how closely they followed a common propaganda line,” writes Carl Wittke. The fateful move was that of Clan-na-Gael, which actively participated with the Germans and Sir Roger Casement in plotting and financing the uprising in Dublin in Easter Week, 1916. It was at best a minority act, despite all the provocations to revolt. In the curious words of a recent Irish-American historian:

The age-old hope of securing Irish Independence through physical force had been abandoned by most Irishmen and was cherished chiefly by some stout-hearted men of the I.R.B. [Irish Republican Brotherhood] who would stage the rising of 1916. The uncertain solution in the Irish national test tube could be precipitated only by the blood of heroes who were not afraid to die in order that a nation might live.60

The Easter Rebellion established the leaders of Irish-American nationalism as among those who wished to see Germany defeat England. This position was barely tolerated in America in 1916. In the election campaign that year such Irish were scorned by both sides as “hyphenated Americans.” President Wilson came to regard Cohalan as little better than a traitor, refusing even to enter the same room with him.61 The efforts of Irish-Americans, in which the Catholic hierarchy took part, to obtain Wilsonian self-determination for Ireland at the peace conference, received little sympathy and no real help from the Wilson administration.

After the war, in a sequence that was to become familiar, Irish affairs went from insurrection, to independence, to civil war, to neutrality. When Irish bases were refused even American forces during the Second World War, Ireland was off America’s conscience for good, if indeed she had ever been on it.

The shame of it from the point of view of the New York Irish was that Irish nationalism went sour just when they themselves were becoming almost a symbol of American nationalism. Just when issues of Irish-American newspapers were being banned from the mails as seditious, “Wild Bill” Donovan was leading the Fighting Sixty-Ninth into the Argonne and George M. Cohan was proclaiming

to all the world: “I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy . . . Born on the Fourth of July.”

Red, White and Blue,
I am for you,
Honest you’re a grand old flag.62

The Irish-American character had formed, and no longer needed Irish nationalism to sustain itself. This is not to say that most Irish-Americans had such a character, but the image had jelled and in the manner of such things began to verify itself.

The Irish-American character was not very different from that which Macaulay described, save in two respects: it was urban and it was egalitarian. Where the Irish had been wild, they now became tough. Where they had been rebellious, it now became more a matter of being defiantly democratic. In the words of Thomas Beer, “an infinitely pugnacious, utterly common and merry animal.”63

Picture John Morrissey: heavyweight champion of the world, Member of Congress, principal owner of the Saratoga race course, proprietor of gambling houses, husband of a famous beauty, and a leader of the “Young Democracy” that helped overthrow Tweed. In 1875 a respectable enough Mayor named Wickham, who had been elected by the new Tammany group, posted a man in his anteroom at City Hall to receive the calling cards of visitors. Shortly thereafter, Morrissey, having no card, was refused admittance to the Mayor’s office. As recounted by Morris R. Werner:

A few days later, a friend met John Morrissey in City Hall Park. He was dressed in a swallowtail coat, patent leather boots, white kid gloves, and he carried a light coat over his arm. In his other hand was a thick book. His friend, John B. Haskin, said: “Hello, John, what’s up now? Going to a wedding?” “No,” answered Morrissey, “not so bad as that. I’ve just bought a French dictionary to help me talk to our dandy Mayor. I’m going in full dress to make a call, for that is now the style at the Hotel Wickham,” pointing to the City Hall. “No Irish need apply now,” Morrissey added.64

Fifteen thousand people followed him to his grave.
Let it be said that the Irish gave style to life in the slums:

Boys and girls together, me and Mamie Rorke,
Tripped the light fantastic on the sidewalks of New York.

They became the playboys of this new Western World. "None can Love Like an Irishman" was a favorite song of Lincoln's day. By the turn of the century it had become equally clear that none could run like them, nor fight like them, nor drink as much, nor sing as well. When it came to diving off the Brooklyn Bridge or winning pennants for the Giants, it took an Irishman. And who could write such bittersweet songs as Victor Herbert? Or enjoy life like "Diamond Jim" Brady? All was "bliss and blarney."

Much was forgiven them. Their failures, as they themselves said of their principal one, were "A good man's weakness." A certain compassion pervaded even their wrongdoing. Jimmy Walker was nothing so much as P. T. Barnum in a speakeasy: predatory, not evil. At their best such Irish had a genius for getting through to the people: no one in the history of New York has ever been able to explain state government to the voters in the way Al Smith did. Nor have they ever quite forgotten the compliment he paid their intelligence.

By degrees the Irish style of the gaslight era became less and less Irish, more and more the style of the American city. Al Smith came close to being for the people of the Lower East Side of America what Lincoln had been for the Frontier. Better still, what Jackson had been—two Irishmen, a century apart. When the comic strips began, the principal urban characters—Maggie and Jiggs, Moon Mullins, Dick Tracy—were Irish. When the movies began to fashion a composite picture of the American people, the New York Irishman was projected to the very center of the national image.

For whatever reason, perhaps because of the influence of New York Jews in the film industry, when Hollywood undertook to synthesize the Christian religion, they found it most easy to do in the person of an Irish priest: Pat O'Brien as Father Duffy in the trenches. When it came to portraying the tough American, up from the streets, the image was repeatedly that of an Irishman. James Cagney (a New Yorker) was the quintessential figure: fists cocked, chin out, back straight, bouncing along on his heels. But also doomed: at the end of the movie he was usually dead. The contrast with Chaplin tells worlds.

By the time the New York journalist, John O'Sullivan, coined the phrase "Manifest Destiny" as a compact apologetic for American expansionism, the Irish were seasoned nationalists. Their exploits, or their accounts thereof, in the Mexican and Civil Wars established the American institution of the "Fighting Irish." Thomas Beer recalled,

This dummy figure of the Irishman had become deeply sacred with Americans; in 1898 a group of young journalists went hunting the first trooper to reach the blockhouse on San Juan Hill, assuring each other... that he would be a red-haired Irishman and warmly disappointed when he proved an ordinary American of German ancestry... Nineteen years later, another group of journalists went hunting a red-haired Irishman who fired the first shot of the American Expeditionary Force in France.65

Success went to their heads; it also undermined the character of many. It is to be noted, as Beer says, that "The Irish were at once established as a tremendously funny, gay, charming people and concurrently were nabbed." 66 There was a touch of Sambo in the professional Irishman: he was willing to be welcomed on terms that he not forget his place. There was also more than a bit of mucker in the man-of-the-people pose. Derision of the hifalutin all too easily shaded into contempt for intelligence and learning, particularly on the face-curtain fringe. The Irish were flirting with the peril Whitehead pointed to in his remark that in the conditions of the modern world the nation that does not value trained intelligence is doomed.

This was painfully manifest in the Irish-American response to the extraordinary flowering of Irish literature in the late nineteenth century. The emigrant Irish may have brought with them a certain peasant respect for learning—"Isle of Saints and Scholars"—but two generations in the slums of New York killed it, if it ever existed. Instead of embracing and glorying in the new literature, the New York Irish either ignored it, or if they were re-
spectable enough, turned on the Irish authors, accusing
them of using bad language!

The Ancient Order of Hibernians raged and
rioted when the Abbey Theatre brought the new play-
wrights to America. John Quinn, a New York lawyer, and
an important patron of the Irish writers, showed an early
copy of the Playboy to John Devoy, the Fenian journalist
so dedicated to a dynamite-and-blood solution of the land
question. Quinn later wrote Cohalan that for weeks and
weeks in his paper "Devoy railed at the language of the
Playboy as foul, un-Irish, indecent, blasphemous, and so on.
. . ." 67 The Irish-Americans' reaction to the new literature
was, of course, not very different from that of many or most
of the native Irish.

Reilly and the 400 was fun, but it was not
Riders to the Sea. When it emerged that the American Irish
did not see this, their opportunity to attain a degree of cul-
tural ascendancy quite vanished. After that began a steady
emigration from the Irish "community" of many of the
strongest and best of the young. This migration was as
devaluating in America as it was to the Irish nation overseas.

The image changed. At the turn of the cen-
tury Ireland stood for brave things. The painter John Sloan
was Scot by descent, but preferred to think otherwise: "I'm
an Irishman," he would say. "Therefore I'm against the
government. . . ." But as time passed, the rebel receded, the
policeman loomed larger. "We wuz once the world's dreamers
af freedom," says the drunk old woman in Anthony West's
The Native Moment, "—what are we now?"

There are, of course, no statistics or mea-
ures of this kind of movement, but the impression is over-
whelming. Excepting those with a strong religious vocation,
the sensitive, perceptive children of the American Irish born
early in the twentieth century found little to commend itself
in the culture to which they were born.

Of all the New York Irish to live with this
and write about it, foremost was Eugene O'Neill. Only
toward the end of his life was he able to do so. Long Day's
Journey Into Night recounts the agony of his family, "the
four haunted Tyrones," headed by the actor father. (The
O'Neills were the Earls of Tyrone.) Throughout one feels
the rending insufficiency for the sons of the "gas and brag
and bosh" of their father's Irishness.

EDMUND
Sits down opposite his Father—contemptu-
ously

Yes, facts don't mean a thing, do they? What you want to
believe, that's the only truth!

DERISIVELY
Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic, for example.

TYRONE
Stubbornly

So he was. The proof is in his plays.

EDMUND
Well he wasn't, and there's no proof of it in his plays, except
to you!

JEERINGLY
The Duke of Wellington, there was another good Irish
Catholic!

TYRONE
I never said he was a good one. He was a renegade but a
Catholic just the same.

EDMUND
Well, he wasn't. You just want to believe no one but an
Irish Catholic general could beat Napoleon. 68

One of O'Neill's last plays, A Touch of the
Poet, recounts the final defeat of Major Cornelius Melody,
an Irish officer, late of Wellington's army. Descended to
running a tavern near Boston, he is scorned by the Yankees
and mocked by the Irish, neither of whom accept him as
a gentleman. Melody returns from his crisis broken, a bog-
trotter once more. He has killed his horse and dropped his
English accent.

. . . Me brins, if I have any, is clear as a bell. And I'm not
puttin' on brogue to torment you, me darlint. Nor play-
actin', Sara. That was the Major's game. It's quare, surely,
for the two av ye to object when I talk in me natural tongue,
and yours, and don't put on airs loike the late lamented
auld liar and lunatic, Major Cornelius Melody, av His
Majesty's Seventh Dragoons, used to do. So let you be aisy,
darlint. He'll nivr again hurt you with his sneers, and
his pretendin' he's a gentleman, blatherin' about pride and
honor, and his showin' off before the Yankees, and thin
laughin' at him, prancing around drunk on his beautiful thoroughbred mare—for she's dead, too, poor baste. 

Melody rises and makes for the bar to drink with the Irish laborers he had scorned. From within he shouts a toast: "Here's to our next President, Andy Jackson! Hurroo for Auld Hickory, God bless him!" Melody was now, like the rest, an Irish Catholic Democrat—at peace with a world that would have it no other way.

"THERE ARE SOME OF US LEFT"
ON THE SURFACE, THE "IRISH" IN IRISH-AMERICAN IS FAST fading. "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" has become simply one of the old songs about the old-fashioned American girl. If any recognize the wild notes of "Garryowen," it is most likely as the charging call of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry, and the association is more with the battle of the Little Big Horn River than with the gay times of old on the banks of the Shannon.

Unquestionably, however, an Irish identity persists. It would seem that it now identifies someone as plain as against fancy American. In an urban culture, Irishness has come to represent some of the qualities the honest yeoman stood for in an earlier age, notably in the undertone of toughness and practicality. "Be more Irish than Harvard," Robert Frost told the young President in 1961.

Ethnic identity being mostly a matter of where one came from, it loses much of its content in the Middle and Far West where most persons came from the Eastern Seaboard in the character of Yankees, or Southerners, or whatever. New York being the first stop in America, however, most white New Yorkers continue to identify themselves as originating somewhere in Europe. Asked, "What are you?" a New Yorker replies, "Italian," or "Greek," or "Jewish." Most Irish still answer, "Irish." For one thing, it is probably an advantage to do so. The more amiable qualities of the stage Irishman have persisted in tradition. The Irish are commonly thought to be a friendly, witty, generous people, physically courageous and fond of drink. There is a distinct tendency among many to try to live up to this image.

The problem with perpetuating this Irish type is that it is essentially proletarian and does not jibe with middle-class reality. Like Southern hospitality, the Irish temperament has become a tradition—valid enough, perhaps, but requiring constant reinforcement. Hence names acquire importance. The Maguires and O'Toolees and O'Shanes are continually reminded by others that they are Irish and are therefore less likely to forget (it normally being a pleasant thing to tell a man he is Irish). But the vast numbers of Irish Blacks and Whites, Longs and Shorts, Smiths and Joneses, not to mention the Comisekeys, Nagles, and Costellos, seem to lose their Irish identity more easily. In addition, there is a fairly strict rule of patrimonial descent: to be an Irish-American writer, an Irish last name is required. A kind of cultural rule also obtains: Henry James was pure New York Celt, but is hardly regarded as an Irish-American author.

The three additional factors working toward a decline of Irish identity in America are the decline of immigration, the fading of Irish nationalism, and the relative absence of Irish cultural influence from abroad on the majority of American Irish.

The native Irish continue to emigrate (the population today is not half the pre-famine level), but most of the immigrants settle in England. A trickle of Irishmen arrives in New York, but it is barely sufficient to keep the County associations alive and to provide talent for and interest in the sporting events that are centered at Gaelic Park in the Bronx. A handful of declining Irish papers continues to be published, and the Ancient Order of Hibernians manages to keep an organization together, if only to arrange the St. Patrick's Day parade. But the first-generation immigrants are a declining, rather isolated group. A fair indication is the disparate course of development between the Jewish and Irish summer resorts in the Catskills. As the Jews have become more prosperous, their recreation centers in Sullivan County have developed into fabulous pleasure domes. By contrast, the Irish colonies in Greene County to the north seem to be dying out.

In truth, most of the recent immigrants are rather a disappointment to the American Irish, just as is
Ireland itself to many Americans who go back. Neither the people nor the land fits the stereotype. Few sights are more revealing than that of a second- or third-generation Irish-American tourist sitting down to his first meal, boiled in one iron pot over the open peat fire, in his grandparents' cottage. Embarrassment hangs just as heavy over the Fifth Avenue reviewing stand of the St. Patrick's Day Parade. The sleek, porcine judges and contractors, all uneasy bravado, simply don't know what to make of the smallish, dour Irish officials and emissaries gathered for the occasion. Neither do the guests from Eire seem to know quite what to make of the "O'Donnell Abu," Fighting 69th, "Top O'the Mornin" goings-on. In Dublin, March 17th is a holy day, the parade is like as not devoted to the theme of industrial progress; and until recently the bars were closed.

Modern-day Ireland has little to commend itself to the average Irish-American. Where the American granddaughters of Calabrian peasants are blossoming forth in Roman chic, there is no contemporary Irish manner to emulate. Even the most visible Irish contribution to the New York scene, the Irish saloon, is vanishing, decimated by prohibition and now unable to compete with the attractions of television and the fact that Italians can cook. A very considerable body of Irish traits and speech habits has become so thoroughly absorbed in New York culture as no longer to be regarded as Irish. No one, for example, any longer thinks of Halloween as another of those curious days on which all the Irish in town get drunk. The result is fewer and fewer opportunities for Irish-Americans to associate themselves with their past.

Fewer and fewer need to do so in order to sustain their own identity. This is nowhere more evident than in the plight of the American Irish Historical Society. This group was founded in New York in 1897 "to make better known the Irish chapter in American history." There was certainly a case to be made that the Irish had been slighted, and the Society set out to right this imbalance with some vigor. But little came of it. The membership was basically not interested in history; it was the imbalance of the present, not the past, that concerned them. When this was righted, the purpose of the Society vanished. Its Journal, which had inclined to articles by aspiring judges beginning "While we know that an Irishman was in Columbus' crew on his first voyage to the New World . . . ," has long ceased publication. The Society continues to occupy a great tomb of a mansion on Fifth Avenue, with a fine library that few seem interested in using, and splendid meeting rooms where no one evidently wants to meet.

The establishment of the Irish Free State and later the Republic of Eire, despite the Ulster issue, has substantially put an end to the agitation for Irish independence which contributed so much to the maintenance of Irish identity in America. As Whitehead said of Protestantism, so of Irish-American nationalism; "Its dogmas no longer dominate; its divisions no longer interest; its institutions no longer direct the patterns of life." On the contrary, the more militantly Irish circles in America have become alarmed about the unorthodox behavior of the Irish government on issues such as admission of Red China to the United Nations. The American Mercury has published an article on the imminent possibility of a Communist takeover in Ireland. The Brooklyn Tablet carries long pleas from Irish-Americans for ideological aid to "an Ireland subject to the seductive siren call of the Left and the domination of an alien and atheistic ideology."

Ironically, it is precisely those persons who were most attached to the Irish cause and the Irish culture of the nineteenth century who are having the most difficulty maintaining such attachments in the present time. Ireland has not ceased to influence America. Contemporary American literature can hardly be understood save in the context of Shaw, Wilde, Yeats, O'Casey, Joyce, and the like. Contemporary Irish authors appear almost weekly in The New Yorker. But those who would most value their Irishness seem least able to respond to such achievements. Irish writers have been Irish indeed. Protestants, agnostics, atheists, socialists, communists, homosexuals, drunkards, and mockers, they have had but few traits that commend themselves to the Catholic middle class. "A common drunk," Honorable James A. Comerford of the Court of Special Sessions ex-
claimed in announcing that the playwright Brendan Behan would not be marching in the 1961 St. Patrick’s Day parade in New York.

In the coming generation it is likely that those persons who have the fewest conventional Irish attachments will become the most conscious of their Irish heritage. This is already evident in writers such as Mary McCarthy and John O’Hara: things Irish are to be found throughout their work. It would seem that any heightened self-consciousness tends to raise the question of racial origin and to stir some form of racial pride. Irish authors abound in the bookstores around Fordham. In Greenwich Village there is a distinct Irish strain, compounded of the literary and political traditions. Songs of the Irish Revolution have taken their place in the repertoire of the balladeers and are listened to rapturously by emancipated young Irish-Americans.

Irish consciousness would seem to be holding its own in the upper reaches of the business as well as the intellectual sphere. The Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick can hardly ever have been more prosperous than today, as it approaches the third century of its existence. The annual dinners, strictly adhering to a format that seems to have been fixed about the time Victor Herbert was president, are splendid affairs, moving in ponderous array from the Bonded Diamondback Terrapin à la Travers with Bobadilla Amontillado, through the Chicken Forestière and Heidsieck Brut, to the demitasse, H. Upman Belvederes, and brandy. They leave no doubt that even if the Protestants have rather disappeared, the Society remains, as it began, an organization of well-fed merchants. Perhaps the principal innovation of the past century is a middle course of boiled bacon, Irish potatoes, and kale, a wistful reminder of those far-off cabins in Roscommon. No one touches it.

Indications are that the Irish are now about the most evenly distributed group in New York in terms of economic and social position. (See Table 8.) They are perhaps a bit heavy on the extremes: rather more than their share of the men on the Bowery and on Wall Street, but generally about the right proportions. In this respect they are unique among the major ethnic groups in New York.

"THERE ARE SOME OF US LEFT"

Their distribution within class strata is not nearly so even. O’Faolain has reminded us that the ancient Irish had a powerful distaste for commerce; through history the Irish were by preference lawyers and soldiers and priests, and the pattern rather persists in the New World. The Irish are well represented in Wall Street law firms. In one of the largest the Irish partners were recently considering whether a quota should be imposed. But they have shown relatively little talent as merchants, and most of those that did so have been quite overwhelmed by Jewish competition.

The principal Irish businesses in the city still tend to be family affairs, founded by working men and involving the organization of manual labor in forms that may begin small and grow larger. Thus in 1850, Michael Moran, just off the boat, began as a mule driver on the Erie Canal at 50¢ a day. Ten years later he put down $2,700 for half-interest in a towboat hauling barges from New York to Albany. Today his descendants operate the largest tugboat fleet in the world, with only two competitors left in New York Harbor. The Sheila, and Moira, and Kevin, and Kathleen Moran’s greet one and all as the great ships move in and out of the harbor.

The Irish, in a sense, have never strayed far from the docks, where they established a singularly disspiriting regime of political, business, and trade-union corruption. They quickly enough got into the businesses of digging ditches and hauling freight, and Irish contractors have eviscerated, built up, knocked down, and again built up a good deal of New York City. Whether their firms will survive the rationalization process that appears to be going on in this industry remains to be seen. Considerable Irish fortunes were made in real estate speculation—a peasant attachment for land which O’Neill describes in his portrait of the elder Tyrone—but these seem not to have produced much in the way of continuing enterprise.

The Irish have done well in businesses such as banking, where there is stress on personal qualities and the accommodation of conflicting interests, and not a little involvement in politics. In 1850, at Bishop Hughes’ suggestion, the directors of the Irish Emigrant Society, founded
THE IRISH

in 1841, established the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank. As time passed, the bank became more active, and the charitable society less so until, in 1936, the Society went out of existence. But the bank remains, on its original site behind City Hall, the fourth-largest savings bank in the nation and still very much an Irish affair. The Irish have also done well on Wall Street. James V. Forrestal, the son of an immigrant, was president of Dillon, Read & Co. before he entered the Roosevelt Administration.

The Irish talent for political bureaucracy seems to have carried over into the world of business organization. The Irish have been content to get in the long lines of the giant corporations and for some time have been popping up in the front ranks as their turn came. In the long run, their patience may prove as important a commercial asset as Jewish daring or Yankee rigor.

For the moment, however, the relevant question is not how the Irish have succeeded, but why they have not succeeded more. The English and Dutch who preceded them in New York are now almost entirely middle- and upper-class. The Germans who accompanied them are predominantly middle-class. The Jews who followed them are already predominantly middle-class and soon will be exclusively so. If the majority of the Irish have climbed out of the working class, it has been only to settle on the next rung. Oscar Handlin has put it candidly that, just as the movement of Jews out of the ranks of unskilled labor was exceptionally rapid, that of the Irish was "exceptionally slow." 73

A clue might be found in a cover story of Life magazine in 1947 on the "Peoples of New York." The Irish were not included among the major groups in the city but were relegated to a small block between the Rumanians and the Arabs. The picture was that of a cop, and the caption read "Once the victims of a violent prejudice, New York's many Irish are now thoroughly assimilated. Many of them become politicians or members of the city's police force." 74 Instead of profiting by their success in the all-but-despised roles of ward heeler and policeman, the Irish seem to have been trapped by it. As with the elder Tyrone, they seem almost to have ruined their talent by playing one role over and over until they could do little else.

For Tyrone, as for his sons, so also for the race: drink has been their curse. It is the principal fact of Irishness that they have not been able to shake. A good deal of competent enquiry has still not produced much understanding of the Irish tendency to alcohol addiction. It would seem, in the words of Charles R. Snyder, that

Irish country culture appears to be an "ideal type" case of a deeply embedded tradition of utilitarian drinking. There is also a tradition of convivial social drinking in which drunkenness is common, but there is an extensive body of tradition which tends to orient individuals toward drinking for the effect of alcohol as a generalized means of individual adjustment. 75

It seems to be agreed (but with less persuasiveness) that the Irish culture was "such as to create and maintain an immense amount of suppressed aggression and sexuality." 76 The question may still be asked why drinking becomes addictive, and why the pattern persists in the New World. Aspects of the culture, particularly the suppressed sexuality, survive, of course. It may also be, as Roger J. Williams suggests, that the problem is at least in part hereditary. 77

Whatever the explanation, the fact itself is indisputable. In a study of a group on the Bowery, Straus and McCarthy found 44 per cent of the whites to be Irish. 78 A dominant social fact of the Irish community is the number of good men who are destroyed by drink. In ways it is worse now than in the past: a stevedore could drink and do his work; a lawyer, a doctor, a legislator cannot.

In New York the Irish are competing with groups whose alcoholism rates are as phenomenally low as theirs is high. Studies almost invariably find the Irish at one end of the spectrum and the Jews at the very opposite. Meyer found "alcoholism is 74 times as important a cause of psychoses among men of Irish descent as it is among those of Jewish descent." 79 The Italians are well down on the scale. In 1947 Donald D. Glad reported the following incidence of inebriety in New York State based on first
admission for alcohol psychoses per 100,000 population of each ethnic group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavian</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident enough that Irish drunkenness has given competitors a margin in business and the professions—it may even have tended to keep the Irish out of some of the professions. It is probably also true that it partially accounts for the disappearance of the Irish from organized crime. Gambling and related activities are among the largest business activities in New York and certainly among the most profitable. With their political power, even if declining, the Irish ought to have a share of control in them, but the Southern Italians, with Jewish connections, have completely taken over. Bookmaking, policy, and drugs are complex, serious, exacting trades. They are not jobs for heavy drinkers.

The relative failure of the Irish to rise socially seems on the surface to be part of a general Catholic failure. This hypothesis, with regard to Catholics, was put by a Notre Dame sociologist, John J. Kane:

There may be some kind of lower middle or lower class orientation among them to education and occupation which tends to anchor Catholics in the lower socio-economic groups and which limits those who do achieve higher education to certain fields which appear to offer more security albeit less prestige and income. It may also be that leadership, even outside the purely religious field, is still considered a clerical prerogative, and the same seems equally true of scholarship. It seems that Catholics creep forward rather than stride forward in American society and the position of American Catholics in the mid-twentieth century is better, but not so much better than it was a century ago. Neither is it as high as one might expect from such a sizable minority with a large educational system and reputed equality of opportunity in a democracy.81

Such evidence as is available supports this hypothesis. In Detroit Gerhard Lenski found white Catholics to have the least positive attitude toward work of any of the major groups (Jews, white Protestants, Negro Protestants and Catholics). Where Catholic attitudes were positive, it was, in contrast with Protestants, toward the less demanding, and hence less rewarding, positions. Positive attitudes toward work came close to being nonexistent (6 per cent of the sample) among middle-class Catholics with Catholic education. In striking contrast, 28 per cent of the middle-class Catholic males with a public education had a positive attitude.82 The evidence also underlines the concentration of Catholics in certain activities. Kane found that in a sample of American Catholics in Who’s Who in America 48.6 per cent were lawyers or priests. Bosco D. Costello found in a sample of Catholic businessmen in the same directory that 25 per cent were in finance, two-thirds more than the national proportion, while only 7.7 per cent, barely a quarter the national average, were in trade.83

The curious distribution of even successful Catholics—getting ahead as bankers before making much progress as merchants—raises the question whether the relative poor showing of Catholics in the business world is not primarily a poor Irish showing. The Italians and Poles and Puerto Ricans have not really been settled long enough to make it clear what their performance in normal circumstances will be. In time they may produce a Catholic business class that is quite up to average. But clearly, the Irish have not done so.

In New York this failure may well be related to the Irish success in politics. It is perilous to speculate in such matters, but a case can be made that contrary to the general impression politics is not a lucrative calling. This case is more confirmed than contradicted by the periodic scandals that reveal the large amounts of graft and benefactions passed between politicians and various legitimate and illegitimate businessmen: the politicians are often as not on their way to jail. The secret of the long tenure of many of the better known Irish politicians is that they were honest men by any standards, and certainly by the American standards of their time.
The equally relevant fact in a city like New York, with constantly changing neighborhoods, is the extreme difficulty of passing on political power from one generation to the next and in that way establishing prosperous family dynasties. The problem of Tammany leaders is not much different in this respect from that of champion prize fighters. A few Irish district leaders today are sons of old leaders, but they are rarely of the old breed. The New York Times recently ran a striking photograph of “The Clan Finn,” the rulers of Greenwich Village from the 1870's to 1943. On the wall of the Huron Club, a three-story brick and stone edifice (“Pitched it up in an afternoon himself, he did.”) hung a portrait of old “Battery Dan” Finn. Back stiff as a North River pile, and a head that must have been fashioned of cast iron. His eyes look straight ahead. Standing before the portrait is his son, “Sheriff Dan.” Homburg and high collar, with the vast jowls of a prosperous official in an age when Luchow's and Tammany Hall shared Union Square. His eyes are glazed rather. Next to him is his son, “Bashful Dan.” Gray flannels, hair and chin receding. Eyes downcast. “Bashful Dan” inherited his post in 1935. Eight years later Carmine G. DeSapio took it away from him.

The small potatoes of political success have become even less nourishing over the years. Swarms of Irish descended on the city government after the Civil War and began successions of low-grade civil servants. Here, as with the top-ranking politicians, there was little cumulative improvement from one generation to the next. The economic rewards in America over the past century have gone to entrepreneurs, not to fonctionnaires, and hence, in that measure, not to the Irish of New York.

Even were the Irish rising faster socially and economically than seems to be the case, the first impression would be one of decline. People disappear into the lower-middle class, to emerge, if ever, only years or generations later, in the upper reaches of achievement. In the interval, they are outdistanced in the areas of popular achievement, which are particularly visible in an age of mass media. This has been painfully obvious for the Irish in New York, which is the center of the nation’s entertainment industry and thereby the center of most of the popular arts. The past thirty years have been a time of steady decline for the Irish. The Irish fighters and ballplayers have gone down before Negroes and Italians. The Irish crooners have been driven out by Italians. Most of the popular comedians are Jewish. The best of the musicians are Negro.

A similar, if more complex, process is at work in the trade-union movement. The most important of the working-class leaders of the city, from Gompers to Dubinsky, have emerged from the Jewish Socialist tradition (Peter McGuire and George Meany excepted). This tradition, however, has about played out; the Jews have left the working class, and Jewish liberals have largely turned their interests elsewhere. During all this time the bulk of the trade-union leadership, notably in the craft unions, has been Irish. This leadership continues with a diminished, but by no means vanished ethnic base. Of late the leadership has even been revived by the influence of Catholic ideological movements, symbolized in New York by the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and the various church-related labor schools. It is likely that Irish influence in this area will continue for some time.

In their classic stronghold, the police force, the Irish have been forced to set up a society to protect their interests. For some time ethnic groups in the New York police, as in many of the city bureaucracies—as in the life of the city generally—have maintained fraternal organizations. The Italians were first to organize on an ethnic basis within the Police Department. In the 1930's they were followed by Jews, the white Protestants, the black Protestants, the Puerto Ricans, and the Poles. For a long while, the Irish were so dominant that it would have seemed ludicrous for them to organize. But by 1952 it was obvious that those days were passing; the Irish still had a majority of the force, but no longer a majority of the police academy, and so they set up the Emerald Society and took their place among the other minorities.

Turning lower-middle class is a painful process for a group such as the Irish who, as stevedores and truck drivers, made such a grand thing of Saturday night. Most prize fighters and a good many saloon fighters die in the gutter—but they have moments of glory unknown to
accountants. Most Irish laborers died penniless, but they had been rich one night a week much of their lives, whereas their white-collar children never know a moment of financial peace, much less affluence. A good deal of color goes out of life when a group begins to rise. A good deal of resentment enters.

The cumulative effect of this process has been to produce among a great many Irish a powerful sense of displacement. It is summed up in a phrase they will use on hearing an Irish name or being introduced to another Irishman. "There are some of us left," they say. One could be in Connought in the seventeenth century.

THE PARTY OF THE PEOPLE

THE SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT IS NOWHERE MORE ACUTE THAN IN POLITICS.

The basic cause of the decline of the political power of the Irish has been their decline as a proportion of the population. Where they accounted for a third of the population of the city in 1890, they are probably no more than one-tenth today. In 1960 there were 312,000 first- or second-generation Irish in the city, and a considerably larger number of older stock. But like their English and Scotch predecessors, much of the old Irish stock has moved to the suburbs. Some, of course, have dispersed throughout the country. Many of the Irish who remain in the city have become Republicans, thus splitting the Irish vote, and of those who remain Democrats, a great many have been at odds with the prevailing ideology within their party. The result, inevitably, has been the rapid waning of Irish political power.

At first glance the Irish appear to be doing well enough, but only because they are passing out of political power. They have most of the very top jobs. But they have fewer and fewer of the bottom ones, a fact which means that in time they will lose the top ones. Seven of the last nine mayors of New York have been Irish, if one counts the latest, Robert F. Wagner, who is half Irish. Recently an Irish-Catholic Democrat from Brooklyn was chief judge of the Court of Appeals, the highest judicial post of the state. (He was succeeded by an Irish-Catholic Democrat from Buffalo.) A Manhattan Irish Democrat retired recently as Chancellor of the State Board of Regents. A third of the New York delegation to the 1960 Democratic convention was Irish. In the city itself, as of 1961, the chief justice of the City Court and the Chief City Magistrate were Irish, but Italians and Jews predominated in the city courts. In 1959, of sixty-three State Supreme Court judges from New York, less than a quarter were Irish. During the Harriman administration in Albany, 1955-1958, New York City Jews received two jobs for every one given to the Irish.

Nine of the nineteen Congressmen elected from New York City in 1962 were Irish, but only a fifth of the sixty-five Assemblymen were. Al Smith was the last Irish officeholder who could command a large vote in New York politics. Since he left office in 1928, only one Irish Catholic, James M. Mead of Buffalo, has been elected Senator or Governor. A series of Irish candidates were put up against Dewey with no success. It was not until 1954, when for the first time in memory the Democrats nominated a state ticket with no Irishman on it, that they won back the governorship. In 1962 James B. Donovan, the Democratic candidate for Senator, managed even to lose his home borough of Brooklyn to the Republican Jacob K. Javits.

Within the Democratic party the death of Edward J. Flynn of the Bronx in 1953 marked the end of Irish political leadership. Although the Irish continued with a majority of the county leaders, the initiative and leadership of the party passed almost entirely to the Italian leader Carmine DeSapio. In the great primary contest of 1958 over the mayoralty nomination, DeSapio was beaten, and with him most of the Irish that had survived. By 1963 the county leader in Manhattan was Armenian, Brooklyn and Queens had Jewish leaders, with only the Bronx and Staten Island lingering in Irish hands.

As stated, the principal cause of the decline of Irish political power in New York City is the decline of Irish population. In the suburbs, to which many Irish have moved, they retain a good deal of power. Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk all had Irish Democratic county leaders as of 1969. In the city, where the Irish established a system of popular rule, they no longer rule now that they account
for only some 10 or 12 per cent of the populace. But this is not the whole story. The ideological displacement of the Irish in the Democratic party has also been a major cause of their decline in New York.

The emergence of Irish political conservatism in recent years may seem to call for more explanation than is needed. The main thrust of Irish political activity has always been moderate or conservative in New York, but until recently it has not been articulated so. There is a well-known story about the Tammany Fourth of July fête at which a reporter asked why “Mister” Murphy had not joined in singing “The Star-Spangled Banner.” “Maybe,” came the reply, “he didn’t want to commit himself.” The functioning urban politician does not commit himself; he negotiates with the commitments of others. This came naturally to the Irish, who were the least encumbered with abstract notions about municipal ownership and trade-union rights.

Tammany conservatism has been greatly reinforced by the political developments which from the beginning of the Irish era to the present have kept the New York Democratic party isolated from that party in the rest of the country. Tammany stood for sin in a party wedded to virtue. This was never better expressed than by the Midwesterner speaking for Grover Cleveland at the Democratic convention in 1884. “They love Cleveland for his character,” said the speaker, turning to the New York City delegation, “but they love him also for the enemies he has made.” Tammany did not support the original nomination of a single successful Democratic Presidential candidate between the Civil War and the Second World War. The ideas behind the programs of Cleveland and Wilson and Roosevelt largely passed them by.

Indifference began to turn to opposition about the time of the First World War. A great many New York Irish were bitter about Wilson’s refusal to give American support to Irish independence, and the election returns showed it. Wilson’s league became for them a symbol of American toadyism to British imperialism. Cohalan organized five hours of testimony by the Friends of Irish Freedom before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the hear-

ings on the Treaty of Versailles. The League was denounced as “an abomination,” “a perversion of American ideals.” Many New York Irish Democrats entered the 1920’s alienated from their party on what was then the fundamental issue of foreign policy.

The rejection of Al Smith, first by his country and then by his party, was the breaking point for many. The New York Irish gave their hearts to Smith, who was an Irish figure whatever his ancestry. He was in no sense a product of the slum, but rather a representative of a distinct New York urban culture that to this day asserts its own manner of speech and dress in a society otherwise overwhelmed by Brooks Brothers. Smith had not the slightest qualms about the adequacy of his education: it was hyperbole, and perhaps a sense of mockery, that led him to tell the New York State Assembly that he was a graduate, not of Yale, but of the Fulton Fish Market. He was the greatest state governor of his generation, perhaps of the century, but he was such without the pomposity of Good Government. He talked out of the side of his mouth, and mispronounced words. When he declared, “No matter how you slice it, it’s still baloney,” he seemed to strip the establishment of all the pretense and posture designed to keep the Irish and such in their places.

The bitter anti-Catholicism and the crushing defeat of the 1938 campaign came as a blow. The New York Irish had been running their city for a long time, or so it seemed. They did not think of themselves as immigrants and interlopers with an alien religion; it was a shock to find that so much of the country did. Worse yet, in 1938, when the chance came to redress this wrong, the Democrats, instead of renominating Smith, turned instead to a Hudson Valley aristocrat with a Harvard accent who had established his reputation by blocking Murphy’s nomination of “Blue-eyed Billy” Sheehan for the U.S. Senate, and was soon to enhance it by getting rid of Jimmy Walker.

The main effect of the New Deal in the upper reaches of the Irish community in New York was to reveal to its members that while they had been rising socially and economically, the Democratic party as a whole remained an organization of the masses. It rarely occurred
to the Irish to stop being Democrats because they had become bankers, or whatever. The party was an ethnic and religious alliance, as much as an economic one. (In DeSapio’s day, for example, the chairman of the board of the New York Stock exchange, a distinguished broker, son of an Irish policeman, regularly attended the Tammany Dinner.) Irish businessmen hated Roosevelt much as did other businessmen but with the special twist that they felt it was their own political party, overcome by alien influences, that was causing the trouble.

A distinctive quality of the anti-New Deal Irish during the 1930’s is that they tended to identify the subversive influences in the nation with the old Protestant establishment. The well-to-do Irish felt it was Harvard, as much or more than Union Square, that was out to socialize America. The lower ranks of the New York Irish were powerfully attracted by Father Coughlin and his notions about social justice, Jews, and Wall Street bankers.

Al Smith openly endorsed the Republican candidate for the Presidency in 1936. In a major address to an enthusiastic New York City audience he accused Roosevelt of preparing the way for a Communist-controlled America. The feeling of displacement is painfully evident. He told a Chicago audience that Jeffersonian Democrats were “out on a limb today, holding the bag, driven out of the party, because some new bunch that nobody ever heard of in their life before came in and took charge of things and started planning everything.”

When Jim Farley broke with Roosevelt in 1940, the Irish conservatives became even more united in opposition. Farley had hoped to succeed Roosevelt, only in the end to be pushed aside. For the Irish conservatives the Third Term became a racial insult as well as a constitutional affront. Farley’s account of those years is bitter:

What few people realize is that the relationship between Roosevelt and me had been basically political and seldom social. Strange as it may seem, the President never took me into the bosom of the family, although everyone agreed I was more responsible than any other single man for his being in the White House. Never was I invited to spend the night in the historic mansion. Only twice did I ever make a cruise on the presidential yacht. Both cruises were political. Never was I invited to join informal White House gatherings. My appearances there were for official social functions or for informal dinners followed by exploration of political and patronage problems. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Franklin finds it hard to relax with people who aren’t his social equals.” I took this remark to explain my being out of the infiel.

Apart from his great talent, Farley was, after all, a man of honor and decorum in private life as in politics. He broke with Roosevelt on what he regarded as an issue of principle—only to find it interpreted as the inevitable incompatibility of landlord and tenant. He later wrote:

What particularly irked me were the background articles emphasizing my quite humble unquote beginnings. I am an American of Irish descent. I have known many people of Irish descent. Fat, thin, tall—loquacious, taciturn, ebullient, and morose—but never in my life have I met a “humble” one. It just doesn’t run in the strain. The fact is that I have met few men of Irish descent who were not their own figurative secretaries of state. Whatever else they may lack, it isn’t opinions or the willingness to fight for them. As to authenticity as Americans, while the Mayflower passenger list will be combed in vain for their names, sixteen Kelleys, seventeen Murphys, and hundreds of others of old sod ancestry have won the Congressional Medal of Honor—enough to assure even the unfairedminded that the credentials of Americans of Irish descent are in order.

The record would certainly support Farley’s contention, but, if so, why bring it up? It was one thing to make a fuss over Irish performance in the Mexican War, when they were still new to the country and the nation for the first time faced a Catholic enemy. But a century later to carry on in the same way about, for example, the flyer Colin Kelly betrayed a curious defensiveness on the part of the Irish themselves.

Mixed with this defensiveness was a measure of aggression on the subject of Communism. The Irish revolutionary tradition contributed its portion of recruits to American radicalism. William Z. Foster, who organized the
Catholics that they were right for the wrong reasons. Two decades ago it was not even clear they were right.

The fact seems to be that non-Catholics did not pay very much attention to speeches of the kind in which Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, in 1941, denounced "the colossal wastage of taxes to pay professors who would destroy America by teaching Russian Bolshevism," and went on to tell the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick:

It is not to the point to say, as some newspapers do, that only 3 per cent of the professors, and 20 per cent of the students are disloyal to their country. Why is it you will not find a single Communist teaching in Manhattan College? Why none in Fordham? Why none in St. Patrick's Parochial School?

This climaxd with the announcement that "The professors in certain universities and colleges in New York City are the most learned professors in the world—because they are the 'best red.'" 90

This kind of anti-Communism for a long period suffered from a characteristic Irish-Catholic failing. It was felt to be enough to know and to say that Communism was morally wrong. But nothing much was offered by way of specific advice to those who struggled in the world of day-to-day events.

The crisis came in the years immediately after the Second World War when evidence began to accumulate about the true nature of the Communist conspiracy—only to have the evidence, seemingly, ignored. Alger Hiss and William Remington and the Rosenbergs seemed proof enough for anybody—but not for a good number of persons in the Protestant-Jewish intellectual elite. To many Irish Catholics these innocents seemed to grow more arrogant as their failings proved more serious. The country seemed filled with persons who, in Irving Kristol's description, "prefer to regard Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley as pathological liars, and who believe that to plead the privilege of the Fifth Amendment is the first refuge of a scholar and a gentleman...." 91 This is the context in which the New York Irish turned overwhelmingly to the support of Senator McCarthy.
A clue to the nature of McCarthy's influence on the New York Irish is that he did not bring out the worst in them. New York Communism was primarily a Jewish affair, but Irish anti-Communism in the postwar period never became anti-Semitism. Even when it looked like anti-Semitism, and Jewish groups became disturbed—42 of the 47 employees suspended or refused clearance at Fort Monmouth after the McCarthy hearings, were Jewish—this was not the Irish-Catholic reaction. At best, the Irish position at this time rested on profoundly responsible religious convictions. At its worst, Irish anti-Communism was not directed at Communism at all. From start to finish, McCarthy got his largest response from the New York Irish when he attacked the institutions of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment. It was Harvard University and the State Department and the United States Army that seemed to be subverting the country. The faculty of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's college was riddled with Reds. Dean Gooderham Acheson would not turn his back on spies in the Foreign Service. George Catlett Marshall was a front man for traitors. Eventually McCarthy's aides began proposing that the biggest threat of Communism to the nation came from the Protestant clergy, and the Senator himself intervened to put an end to the "real threat" to American security, the British blood trade with Red China. The Irish Catholics, and they had many supporters, could not believe the men running the country could be blind to the Communist threat that seemed so clear to them. There had to be a more sinister explanation. No action was too drastic to uncover it.

The Catholic hierarchy in New York left little doubt that it supported McCarthy. In 1954, despite the opposition of the Democratic city administration, the Senator was invited to address the annual communion breakfast of the Police Department Holy Name Society of the New York Diocese. He received a tumultuous reception as he explained that an educator under Communist discipline with a "captive audience" was "ten times as dangerous" as even a traitor in an atomic plant. Among some liberals there was a reaction almost of terror: the Fascists had won over the police! Preparations were actually discussed for an underground opposition in the event of a coup d'état.

McCarthy let the Irish down. He ended up a stumblebum lurching about the corridors of the Senate where it had been decided he was no gentleman. This left the Irish to defend a reputation that had become, in practical terms, indefensible. Yet the Irish achieved a strong temporary advantage from the McCarthy period that may or may not prove of permanent value. In the era of security clearances, to be an Irish Catholic became prima facie evidence of loyalty. Harvard men were to be checked; Fordham men would do the checking. The disadvantage of this is that it put the Irish back on the force. It encouraged their tendency to be regular rather than creative.

The agitation against Communists in government produced valuable results. But once the issue of Communist subversion at home was settled, the problem remained of what to do about Communist aggression abroad. Here the Irish had little to contribute. They had so committed themselves to the issue of internal conspiracy that they seemed to have no resources left for positive thinking. They remained with the FBI while Harvard men continued to run foreign policy—with an increasingly evident assist from the sons of Lower East Side radicals. When the "twenty years of treason" came to an end and Eisenhower installed his cabinet of "nine millionaires and a plumber," the plumber (appointed Secretary of Labor) was the Irish Catholic. Apart from a few persons such as Thomas B. Murray of the Atomic Energy Commission, the principal area of foreign affairs in which Irish Catholics have so far played a creative anti-Communist role has been in the international labor movement under the leadership of an Irish plumber from the Bronx, George Meany of the AFL-CIO, and even here the influence of the State Department and Jewish intellectuals has been much in evidence.

During the New Deal and, later, the McCarthy period, a great many New York Irish began voting Republican. Certainly a majority voted for Eisenhower. They were easily convinced that Stevenson was soft on Communism. It was Farley who said that "to send Governor
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Stevenson to negotiate with Mr. Khrushchev is to send the cabbage patch to the goat.”

The crisis for the conservative Irish came in 1960, when, for the second time, an Irish Catholic ran for President. It turned out that for many the estrangement from the Democratic party had gone too deep to be overcome by more primitive appeals. Alfred E. Smith, Jr., announced he was voting for Nixon. In fashionable Greenwich, Connecticut, the grandson of John H. McCooey of Brooklyn turned up ringing doorbells for the straight Republican ticket. Kennedy probably got little more than a bare majority of the Irish vote in New York City. The students at Fordham gave him as much, but it appears it was the Jewish students in the College of Pharmacy who saved that ancient Jesuit institution from going on record as opposed to the election of the first Catholic President of the United States.

For some time a considerable number of New York Irish have been enrolling as well as voting Republican, but they have not made much progress in the Republican party organization. Reversing earlier roles, the Jews and Italians are keeping the Irish out of things. Barely an eighth of the New York delegation to the 1960 Republican convention was Irish.

Contrary to appearances, within the New York Democratic party, Irish fortunes probably took a turn for the better during the cataclysmic events of the 1961 mayoralty primary and election campaigns. The estrangement between the Irish organization leaders and the growing Jewish and Protestant liberal middle class, which intensified during the McCarthy period, became open warfare after Stevenson’s defeat in 1952, which turned the attention of the latter group to local politics. Manhattan erupted in a series of Democratic primary fights in which the liberals set out to unseat the old guard Irish incumbents.

One by one the Irish district leaders were defeated. When this process had about run its course, the reformers turned on the leader of Tammany itself, Carmine DeSapio, accusing him of being a boss, which was of course his proper function in the traditional system. The Tammany leader’s position was, as always, ideologically inde-

fensible. Unfortunately for DeSapio, it was also ecologically untenable: middle-class voters were pouring into his district and had begun to operate within the regular party system. Forced to choose between increasingly hostile forces, Mayor Robert F. Wagner came down on the side of the reformers, whereupon DeSapio in the classic manner set out to deny him renomination. As agreed by all involved, the essential power of the Democratic party organization was not to elect its candidates, but to choose them. Historically, no one could get the Democratic nomination without the support of the organization. The issue was of such central importance that the Irish county leaders of Brooklyn and the Bronx, along with the lesser figures in Queens and Richmond, joined DeSapio in a solid organization front.

Except for the Negro areas of the city, the primary contest that followed was bitter and pitiless in contrasting the appeals of the traditional, neighborhood-oriented party organization with the modern, mass-media-oriented, liberal establishment. “If Wagner wins,” said one party leader, “you can close down every clubhouse in the city.” Wagner won overwhelmingly.

It may be that the Wagner victory put an end to the Irish political system itself in New York, just as La Guardia in the 1930s had broken the hold of the Irish on the system. Wagner’s victory was a triumph of middle- and upper-class political initiative, organization, and leadership over the traditional, conservative, working-class party. It was uniquely a victory of public opinion experts, communication specialists, and theoreticians allied with a haute bourgeoisie whose liberalism and genuine concern for the poor of the city were nonetheless combined with something very like old-fashioned Tory will-to-power. Tammany disciplined the masses and enabled them to rule. With that discipline broken, it is likely New York will revert to the normal municipal condition of rule by the centers of economic power in alliance with the communications media. Organized crime is likely to persist as one such center and may even grow more important. There are indications that the powerful political machines of the Tammany variety were the one social force capable of controlling organized crime—certainly the decline of Tammany was accompanied by the
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rise of Costello and the like—and it may well be that the future will see the liberal middle class and the criminal syndicates sharing power in a pattern that was already to be perceived during La Guardia’s ascendency.

If this should happen, the Irish have a role to play, for they have in significant numbers joined the middle and upper classes. A number of new Irish faces appeared in the ranks of the reformers, indistinguishable in most respects from their Jewish and Protestant counterparts, and helped perhaps by a tradition of being “politicians.” Sharing the honors of primary day with Robert F. Wagner of Yale was James S. Lanigan of Harvard, who defeated DeSapio for district leader in Greenwich Village. The Irish liberals lack, for the moment at least, an ethnic constituency, but they are not less sensitive to the changed style of politics. “The old-line political club,” said one reformer, “is concerned with individuals, getting a job for this one or doing a favor for that one. In our modern society, politicians have to deal with the problems of whole groups of people, and we reformers are concerned more with groups than with individuals.” This was said by Peter P. Meagher, running for district leader on the West Side of Manhattan against the son of The McManus.

CITY OF GOD AND MAN

THE FUTURE OF THE IRISH IN NEW YORK POLITICS WILL BE profoundly affected by events within the Catholic Church, which is, and for a generation at the very least, will remain, essentially an Irish Catholic Church. If New York, like Washington or Paris, had no great cathedral on a main thoroughfare, it is not likely that 120,000 marchers and more would turn out on St. Patrick’s Day. The great parade is no longer an Irish affair; it is even questionable whether a majority of the marchers are, in fact, Irish. The parade is rather an annual display of the size of the New York Catholic Church, whose priests and hierarchy on the whole are quite conscious of their Irish origins. The center of interest on the line of march is not the reviewing stand at 66th Street so much as the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, where Cardinal Spellman accepts the homage of his flock. This Catholic Church is now entering a new phase both for the clerics and the laity. Two items will evoke the period that is passing:

Some time prior to the 1948 campaign the Atlantic Monthly published a statement by an Episcopalian layman directed to Al Smith which, citing papal encyclicals and canon law, challenged the compatibility of Smith’s religion with his loyalty to the United States Constitution. It was clear to Smith’s advisers, who gathered to discuss it, that the Governor would have to answer this challenge, but Smith himself was most reluctant. Hurt and dismayed, he said to Judge Joseph M. Proskauer (as reported by his daughter):

Joe, . . . to tell you the truth . . . I don’t know what the words mean. I’ve been a Catholic all my life—a devout Catholic, I believe—and I never heard of these encyclicals and papal bulls and books that he writes about. They have nothing to do with being a Catholic, and I just don’t know how to answer such a thing.84

According to Reinhold Niebuhr’s version of the meeting, which may be more accurate in spirit, Smith simply entered the room and asked all present, “Will someone tell me what the hell a Papal Encyclical is?” 85

On the clerical side, a Catholic sociologist recently looked into Cardinal Cushing’s remarks about the social origins of the parents of American Catholic hierarchy. He found the Cardinal was substantially correct about the absence of college graduates, but not so much in his impression that the American Bishops are the sons of working men and working men’s wives. Only 5 per cent of the fathers of some 133 prelates studied in 1957 had graduated from college, and 65 per cent had not even gone to high school. But only 17 per cent of these men remained unskilled laborers. The largest single group, 27 per cent, became the owners of small businesses. Over half were either small businessmen, clerks, salesmen, foremen, or minor executives.86

All this is passing. It is hard to conceive an American Catholic of the future becoming a candidate for President of the United States without having acquired a fairly sophisticated understanding of Catholic dogma on the
subject of relations of church to state. Nor is it likely that henceforth the prelates of the American Church will be drawn so preponderantly from the lower-middle class. But the one social characteristic of the present New York Church which does not seem likely to change during the next generation is its Irishness. Of the eighteen bishops in the New York area, in 1961, one was Chinese, one was Italian, and the rest were Irish. And in contrast to the police academy and the legislature, in the seminaries the Irish are holding their own.

The Catholic Church in New York during the remainder of this century will be characterized by an increasingly articulate and inquiring laity, ministered to by a steadily more sophisticated, predominantly Irish clergy. But the role of the Church in the life of the city is as yet uncertain. It will be determined by two sets of events: first, the course of Catholic education and intellectual life; second, the attitude of the Church toward social change.

There is nothing in the history of organized religion comparable with the effort of the American Catholic Church to maintain a complete, comprehensive educational system ranging from the most elementary tutelage to the most advanced disciplines. The effort absorbs so much of the energies and resources of the faithful as to prompt the remark of a New York Jesuit that a Catholic diocese is a school system here and there associated with a church. Lately, however, the strain on resources has become all but intolerable while serious misgivings have arisen as to the value of the end product.

Encouraged by the growing proportion of educated Catholics and much stimulated by the renaissance of Catholic thought in Europe, American Catholic intellectual life is going through, in the words of one nun, "an orgy of self-criticism." (Fortunately, as Reverend Gustav Weigel, S.J., writes, "non-Catholics have politely and wisely kept out of the debate.") The most widely discussed statement of the issue appeared in 1955 in the Fordham quarterly Thought. It was written by Monsignor John Tracy Ellis. Msgr. Ellis began with Denis Brogan's statement that "In no Western society is the intellectual prestige of Catholicism lower than in the country where, in such respects as wealth, numbers, and strength of organization, it is so powerful." "No well informed Catholic," said Monsignor Ellis, "will attempt to challenge that statement." He listed as causes: First, the deep anti-Catholic bias inherited from seventeenth-century England, which has discouraged Catholic intellectuals and fostered "an overeagerness in Catholic circles for apologetics rather than pure scholarship." Second, the fierce problem of settling the immigrants which has preoccupied the Church until this generation. Third, the native American anti-intellectualism: "In that —as in so many other ways—the Catholics are, and have been thoroughly American. . ." With no encouragement at home, and no well-established intellectual tradition to draw on from Ireland and Germany abroad, the American seminaries became unintellectual, and so also their products. Even the revival of scholastic philosophy was the work of non-Catholic institutions such as the University of Chicago.

Monsignor Ellis was particularly concerned with the studies that showed the abysmal performance of Catholics and Catholic institutions in scientific work. Two years earlier, Reverend Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, S.J., of Fordham, in the presidential address of the American Catholic Sociological Society, had said, on the same subject, "If this is true for the physical sciences, I would not hesitate to assert that it is more true of the social sciences." He suggested this was more than simply a matter of pedagogy; it had to do with the Catholic mind in a much wider sense:

. . . there is one state of mind, fairly common, that is confident in the possession of the ultimate answers to life's mysteries and does not see the need of seeking anxiously for the proximate answers also. There is another state of mind, also common enough, which is convinced that God saved the world without science; therefore prayer, sacrament and sacrifice are the things to be concerned about.

Father Weigel has put the matter even more succinctly. In a paper presented to the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, the group that has stimulated much of this discussion, he declared: "The postulate of all scholarly investigation is the nagging existence of mystery. The training of not a few young Catholics makes them be-
lieve that there is no mystery.” While at Fordham, Thomas F. O’Dea spoke out severely on the matter of the Catholic preoccupation with apologetics:

The great Protestant and secular thinkers of America are not just men who made mistakes, like the “adversaries” of the scholastic manual. They have positive things to say to those American Catholics who have neglected the search itself. The partial segregation of Catholic life from that of the general community adds difficulties in that respect, but further defensiveness concealed under lethargic self-satisfaction is hardly an adequate response to the situation. We repeat: to be an intellectual means to be engaged in a quest, and if to be a Christian has come to mean to have the whole truth that matters—albeit in capsule form—in advance (to know, for example, that “Plato had an erroneous theory of human nature,” that “Comte held God knows what, which is absurd”) without ever having been introduced to a genuine philosophical experience, then we are hopelessly lost.

To be sure, not every professor at Fordham holds this view, but the proposition fits the observed facts. Apart from a spate of half-apologetic articles on “Great Catholic Intellectuals” there has been surprisingly little dissent. On the other hand, this is an argument that disproves itself: the act of asserting the lack of Catholic intellectual standards is the first step of establishing them. The Catholic world is in fact astray with intellectual aspirations that carries with it the possibility of great achievement.

It is possible, even likely, that such a development will come quickly. Over the past half century there has been no lack of artists and intellectuals born and raised in Catholic, especially Irish-Catholic, environments, but the greater part of them have rejected this environment as one hostile to their aspirations to scholarly or aesthetic excellence. If this atmosphere were to change, as it is now changing, it is possible to envision an almost sudden emergence of a Catholic intellectual class, encouraged by the Church and sustained by the increasing relevance of religious doctrine to the intellectual concerns of the present age.

Whether this happens will depend largely on the quality of the education Catholics receive in the coming generation. The criticism of Catholic intellectual standards inevitably involved the quality of Catholic elementary and secondary schools as well as the colleges and universities. Despite evidence that parochial schools get a good quality student, the end results have simply not been good enough. Moreover, evidence exists that some of the better Catholic students have been avoiding competition in the tougher non-Catholic schools, with a resulting isolation that feeds on itself. In a study of New York City high school students who applied for state scholarships, it was found that while 34 per cent of the Jews and 28 per cent of the Protestants in the group were seeking admission to Ivy League schools, only 8 per cent of the Catholics had submitted similar applications. Without question, Catholic education came to a moment of crisis by the early 1960’s.

There are three elements to this crisis. First, the Catholics have a large and rapidly growing population. Second, it is the teaching of the Church and the wish of most of the laity that Catholic children should be educated in Catholic schools. Third, if this education is to meet their rising intellectual and social requirements, the already crushing cost will grow much greater; this leads to an increasingly adamant demand that in one form or another there be an end to the double taxation of the Catholic population for the cost of education.

The best available estimate of religious backgrounds in New York City identifies 49.6 per cent of the total population in 1952 as Roman Catholic. Only 27.1 per cent of the population was actually affiliated with a Catholic Church—but this figure, according to Leland Garrett, the author of the study, would account for more than half the persons with religious affiliation in the city (some 50 per cent having no affiliation). It is unquestionably a growing group. Dr. Ronald A. Barrett, a Catholic sociologist, has recently shown that in the 1950–1959 decade American Catholic population increased twice as fast as the general population, accounting for 41.1 per cent of the total United States population growth during that period.

The cost of the Catholic school system in New York City is by any standards staggering. In 1960 in the dioceses of Brooklyn and New York (excluding those
parts outside the city) there were some 360,000 students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools. This was 37 per cent of the enrollment of the public schools: a proportion hardly changed from the days of Bishop Hughes. On top of this the dioceses maintain eighteen colleges and universities, with some 30,000 students. The operating expenses of the city public schools came to $650,000,000 in 1960, on top of which was the cost of the city colleges. The Catholic population of the city, barely a median income group, pay their share of the taxes that support the public schools in addition to the full cost of the Catholic education system.

The Catholics manage this by sacrifice and by what appears to be a high level of managerial efficiency. (The cost per pupil of Catholic elementary schools in New York is not one-third that of the public schools.) But there is a limit to such possibilities, and when that limit is reached, as it almost surely has been in some respects, the disparity in costs creates a difference in quality as well. In a period of rising intellectual expectations, this fact has led inevitably to active dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement under which Catholic schools are denied all but marginal public assistance.

Ironically, the crisis was precipitated by the election of President John F. Kennedy, which created a serious possibility that a program of federal aid to education would be enacted. For the President there was no apparent constitutional or political way to include aid to Catholic elementary or secondary schools in his program. But the New York Catholic Church, having been left out at the beginning of the era of state aid in the 1840's, was determined not to be excluded from the era of federal aid which seemed about to begin. Cardinal Spellman did not even wait for the new President to be inaugurated before denouncing in the strongest terms a proposal for federal aid prepared by advisers to the President-Elect, and later adopted by him. "... It is unthinkable," said His Eminence, "that any American child be denied the federal funds allotted to other children which are necessary for his mental development because his parents choose for him God-centered education." Months later the vote of Democratic Congressman James J. Delaney of Queens killed the administration proposal in the House Rules Committee. Thereafter a stalemate ensued, with the Cardinal becoming if anything more adamant. In 1962, at the 18th annual Archdiocesan Teachers Institute, he declared that it would be a "terrible crime" to exclude parents, children, and supporters of Catholic schools from the benefits of help from the national government. To do so, he said, would mean the "eventual end" of parochial schools: "we cannot compete with the federal government support and subsidy of the public schools alone."

In the early 1960's elements of the New York Catholic Church seemed to be entering electoral politics for the second time in its history—but on the same issue. A series of Democratic congressional primary contests occurred in which the school aid issue was raised by militant Catholic groups. The New York State Federation of Citizens for Educational Freedom, a nonsectarian group but overwhelmingly Catholic, began endorsing candidates for office. In the 1962 elections this organization came out strongly for the Republican candidate for Governor and the Democratic candidate for United States Senator.

The prospects for the Church are at best doubtful. The basic problem is that Catholics have failed to persuade any significant number of non-Catholic opinion leaders of the justice of their case. The history of the 1840's has vanished for Catholic and non-Catholic alike. In New York Catholic spokesmen have not yet been able to couch the issue in terms that have appeal, even perhaps meaning, for many Jewish or Protestant leaders, nor have they succeeded in providing Catholics in public and party office with any very coherent understanding of the problem. This is itself a measure of Catholic isolation from the liberal, secular tradition of the city that is epitomized by the New York Times, but this isolation is breaking down. At the same time Catholics appear to be making some progress with their case among the public generally, and increasingly opinion leaders such as Walter Lippmann have been concluding that the national deadlock over federal aid to education can be broken only by including Catholic schools.

If an accommodation is reached on the school issue, there is likely to be some diminishement of
Catholic defensiveness of the kind that led Heywood Broun to call the New York Irish "the cry babies of the Western world." This defensiveness takes the most painful and destructive forms, as in the continuing controversy over discrimination against Catholic scholars at Queens College.

Catholic defensiveness can be particularly destructive on the issue of Communist subversion and American loyalty. New York Catholics have been prone to think they have learned something when the leader of Tammany Hall informs a communion breakfast of the Sanitation Department Holy Name Society that "there is no Mother's Day behind the Iron Curtain." 

When a number of the leading universities of the nation announced their opposition to the loyalty oath provisions of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 all over the country, as one disgusted Catholic scientist put it, "Catholic newspapers... proudly displayed front-page stories in which they told how Catholic students in Catholic colleges virtually demanded loyalty oaths..." "This is at best a curious posture for members of a church whose principal effort in American society is to limit the role of the state in education.

The announcement in 1961 by the head of the John Birch Society that half his membership was Catholic—whether true or not—caused a stir in Catholic circles, as did in general the rise of the radical right in the post-Eisenhower period. Elements within the Church appeared to realize how uncritical and remote from reality large sections of lay opinion had become. There followed a series of lucid and eloquent statements denouncing extremist organizations and expounding the bases of effective anti-Communism, but whether the minds of those concerned had been conditioned beyond the reach of appeals to reason remained to be seen.

The excesses of Catholic militancy are producing a reaction among the laity as well. There is a suggestion of anticlericalism in the New York air. A student writer for *The Fordham Ram* recently devoted his column to ridiculing the Brooklyn *Tablet*, the official weekly of the Brooklyn Diocese, with this description of a typical issue: "Well then you come to the editorial page and look at the cartoon. Usually you got some guy in a dark suit with 'Out-consider' written on him. Then there's a mountain with a building on it, and there's light coming out from behind it. This is generally a church or Truth or something. Then you got a rowboat between the man and the building, and it's marked 'Penance' or 'Hard Work' or something and the oars have 'Guidance' written on them. Well all this is too deep for me. I like straight from the shoulder talk. None of this symbolism."

I look at the letters section and see that people who write in are all against something. Generally it's Queens College. Once in a while a college kid complains about the 'Tablet's' editorials or point of view. And they pull him apart like a broken accordion. Usually the poor sap says, 'How can an adult newspaper be so stupid?' Well they never answer his question, but they knock him because he spelled a word wrong or mentioned Shakespeare or somebody."

Although New York has for long been a center of clerical conservatism in the Catholic Church, it is also a center of Catholic intellectual activity that tends to "liberal" views in about the same proportion and along the same lines as intellectual opinion generally. The isolation of the Catholic community is rapidly breaking down as the great issues of the 1930's and 1940's recede. The passing of the Franco regime in Spain, already an object of strong criticism by the Spanish Catholic Church, will remove a time-honored source of misunderstanding, bitterness, and *bona fide* hostility. The expulsion of Communism from the power centers of American life has been acknowledged in most Catholic circles, while the appearance of Communism in Latin America must give Catholics pause in their assumptions about the process of Marxist subversion: no Protestant country has yet gone Communist. Increasingly, the prospect is that the various elements of Catholic opinion—liberal, conservative, radical—will merge with corresponding elements in non-Catholic groups, at once and the same time expanding the area of Catholic influence while diminishing the influence of the Catholic bloc.

The strong likelihood, therefore, is that the future will see Catholic opinion become increasingly variegated, reflecting the widely divergent views of a community...
that spans a broad social and ethnic spectrum. The development of Catholic social policy will almost certainly strengthen and hasten this process.

In 1965, some seven years after his widely read assessment of Catholic intellectual life, Monsignor John Tracy Ellis turned his attention to a potentially more dangerous situation: that the emergence of an intellectually trained and vigorous Catholic laity would bring with it "the curse of anti-clericalism." Already there was to be encountered "severe criticism of bishops and priests among the intellectuals and professional people."

This represented, of course, an almost entirely new situation for the American Catholic Church, reflecting the increased numbers of highly educated Catholics, but also the increasing intellectual stature of the Church itself. Whereas in the past a disgruntled Catholic intellectual, in Protestant-secular America, at a certain point would simply leave the Church, there now emerged the possibility of remaining Catholic but becoming an anticlerical!

Monsignor Ellis spoke with great feeling of the only solution he could envisage:

... the laymen must be freed to speak and to act without hindrance on the vital problems that press for solution outside the realm of doctrine. If they are not given such freedom the superior training and education of which they are the recipients in rapidly mounting numbers will have been—insofar as the Church is concerned—largely wasted, and the Church itself will be exposed to the very real threat of having the laymen's repressed zeal and frustrated ambitions for the Mystical Body turned into a disillusionment and embitterment that will breed in our land the kind of spirit that has poisoned the relations of clergy and laity in so much of western Europe and in Latin America.134

The prospects for dissension within the Catholic community are strongest in the area of social policy, although here the structure most likely will be that of liberal clergy and laity alike combining in opposition to their conservative counterparts. Since the time of Rerum Novarum (1891) Catholic social doctrine has been opposed to many of the most cherished economic doctrines of American conservatism. However, this fact has, as it were, only gradually emerged. (It may be speculated that semantics is in part to blame: Catholic spokesmen have used the term "liberal" to refer to laissez-faire economics of the Manchester school, and have generously denounced same. However, Catholic and non-Catholic audiences alike would seem generally to have understood the term in its contemporary American reference to essentially non-laissez-faire views.)

With the promulgation of the papal encyclical Quadragesimo Anno (1931), and more drastically, with Mater et Magistra, the American Catholic Church found itself committed to a systematic social doctrine that was almost certainly far to the left of the social thinking of most American Catholics, clergy and laity alike.

Mater et Magistra came as a distinct surprise to many. Reinhold Niebuhr, in a perhaps patronizing but authentic tone, noted in an editorial in Christianity and Crisis that the reaction of non-Catholics, secular and Protestant, had "been generally one of amazement that a church which they considered 'reactionary' should come out so clearly for such modern 'liberal' policies as social insurance, the whole philosophy of the 'welfare state' and aid to underdeveloped countries." The reaction of some conservative Catholics was disbelief bordering perilously (for a Catholic) on irreverence, as in the celebrated gibe "Mater si, Magistano" which appeared in the conservative National Review. The first reaction to the later encyclical of John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, was even more unusual. The Commonweal described the general attitude as follows: "Of all of the responses that Pope John's encyclical, Pacem in Terris, could have been expected to arouse, perhaps none has been more startling than the general paralysis which has gripped American Catholics in the face of its implicit 'opening to the left.' For once it seems impossible to find any significant support for an important part of a major encyclical."

It is almost inevitable that American Catholicism will face a crisis of commitment as a result of the social doctrine set forth by Pope John XXIII. American Catholics, notably in areas such as New York, have not much thought of their religious obligations in terms of social action. A 1959 study of a Bronx parish, for example, found parishioners regarded the roles of Civic Leader, Social
Leader, Recreational Leader, and Reformer to be the least important functions of a priest. The role of Administrator, for one, ranked well ahead. More seriously, even were the Catholic community to commit itself fully to the social objectives of Catholic doctrine, the question remains as to how successful would be the outcome.

The function of Catholic education has been primarily pastoral (or has been widely regarded as such). Educators such as Professor John J. O'Brien have presented the thesis “that the present social result of past American Catholic decisions in the field of education has been to establish a system of schools which have, . . . tended to encourage the development in their students of certain qualities which render them more or less ineffective in any effort to reconstruct American society along lines consonant with Catholic principles.” He described these qualities as “negativism, a faulty operational perception of the order of virtues, provincialism, and a certain moral-intellectual arrogance.” Strong meat, but hardly to be avoided in a conservative communion suddenly confronted with a radical and not particularly congenial mission. What is here reflected, of course, is not simply the difficulties which Catholics must face, but also the sense of urgency and purpose which such a mission can arouse. Clearly, such conflict can produce much good as well as much anguish.

Although the bulk of Catholic intellectuals will almost certainly associate themselves with the main body of American liberal opinion, Catholics are likely to have their most significant impact on conservative thought. American conservatism has for a century been notably inarticulate. Whatever Catholic doctrine might be, the generation of Irish Catholics now being educated has been steeped in conservative social feeling both at home and in their formal education. This sets them apart from any large group in America outside the South, save possibly the less numerous German Catholics. If the education of these Catholics is good enough, they will have the opportunity to create a sustained and comprehensive body of conservative opinion in the United States based on the Catholic doctrine of the rights and responsibilities of the individual, the limitations on the power of the state, and the transcendent purpose of the social order, combined with a scholastic respect for intellect.

Had John Fitzgerald Kennedy lived out his time he might profoundly have altered the course of the Irish-American world. Among his incomparable powers was an ability to bring together the sacred and profane streams of American public life that have somehow, for example, made foreign affairs genteel but domestic politics coarse. Out of such a consummation might have emerged a new American style, combining as did he himself the tribal vigor of ward politics with the deft perceptions of the chancelleries.

But he is gone, and there is none like him. Although he may yet emerge as the first of a new breed, all that is certain is that he was the last of an old one. The era of the Irish politician culminated in Kennedy. He was born to the work and was at every stage in his life a “pro.” He rose on the willing backs of three generations of district leaders and county chairmen who, like the Good Thief, may in the end have been saved for their one moment of recognition that something special had appeared among them. That moment was in 1960 when the Irish party chieftains of the great Eastern and Midwestern cities, for reasons they could probably even now not fully explain, came together to nominate for President the grandson of Honey Fitz.

It was the last hurrah. He, the youngest and newest, served in a final moment of ascendancy. On the day he died, the President of the United States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, the Chairman of the National Committee were all Irish, all Catholic, all Democrats. It will not come again.