

YOUNG IRELAND & THOMAS DAVIS

Address to Ógra Shinn Féin, Trinity College Dublin, 23.11.21

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh

BACKGROUND TO TALK

In a sense, this talk originated in the cemetery at Mount Jerome. A few months ago, the present Cathaoirlreach of the Robert Emmet Cumann, Ciarán Ó Meachair, showed me the grave of Thomas Davis there, which I did not realise before was so located. It was in quite a bad condition, particularly as regards the headstone, which was so ingrained with dirt that it was virtually illegible. As a result, a clean-up expedition was organised by Ciarán, involving himself and Liam Kiernan, under the supervision of my good self.

As a result, it is now quite legible and generally looks in good condition. You may have seen photographs of it on the Cumann Facebook page. There has also since been a small commemoration at the graveside, a practice which will be followed in years to come.

And all this, of course, is quite appropriate, given the very significant role which Thomas Davis played in Irish history during his brief lifetime. Subsequent to these events, Ógra asked me to give a talk on Thomas Davis and so here I am this evening.



YOUNG IRELAND

After getting this request, I reflected on it and very quickly came to the conclusion that simply to talk about the life of Davis himself would not bring out the full import of his contribution to the national cause. It was, I believed, necessary to place him in the overall context of the Young Ireland movement. Indeed, on further reflection, I realised that I had to go beyond even that

in order to grasp fully the impact of Davis and Young Ireland on our history. In fact, I came to appreciate that I would have to go as far back as the first arrival of the English in Ireland in order to fulfil my obligation. However,

you may be assured that, as for reference to the period stretching from the late 12th century up to the middle of the 19th, I will be zooming quite quickly across that vista in order to concentrate most of what I have to say on the episode of the Young Ireland movement.

ENGLISH AGGRESSION

It was often said by nationalists, who looked back from the beginning of the independence struggle in the last century, that Ireland suffered under the yoke of the English for over 700 years. If you take the

perspective up to the present and include the endurance of partition, it has been observed that we have actually not got rid of English interference for just over 800 years. In reality, however, there was much toing and froing of English power in Ireland between 1167, when the first Norman knights landed, and 1603, when the Irish Earls finally lost out completely to the English, following the Nine Years' War.

Prior to implementation of the 1921 Treaty, therefore, it might be said that the history of Irish interaction with the English could be divided into two broad periods, namely pre-Tudor, lasting up to the beginning of the 17th century, and then post-Tudor, insofar as the conquest of the island was only fully accomplished by the time the dubiously named Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, died. In other words, let us not credit the English with having been in total domination of this island for more than a little over 300 years prior to 1919 when the War of Independence started.

One should also remember that, at the start of intrusion, those concerned might have been more accurately described as Anglo-Norman, reflected not least in the fact that the chief military officers tended to speak a variety of French rather than Old English, and were little more than a generation away from the Norman invasion of England in 1066.

AN IRISH PARLIAMENT

It was during the first, pre-Tudor period,

that the rudiments of an Irish Parliament came into being in 1264. In time, that was to involve, not only carefully chosen representatives of the Crown, but also the aristocracy generally, the church and leading administrators, along with some big merchant interests. The geographical scope of the Parliament, which had very little power to begin with, was mainly confined to what was called the Pale, i.e. along a stretch of the East coast and not penetrating very far inland, although Anglo-Normans did have grants of lands beyond that.

By the 14th century, while a certain sense of colonial identity had begun to develop among the intruders' descendants, which started to jar with the dominance of England, there was also the fear of the Gaelicisation that was taking place among some of them, particularly those surrounded by Gaels. As a consequence, the notorious Statute of Kilkenny was passed in 1366, which was an all-round injunction against adopting the Gaelic culture, customs and language, as well as engaging in intermarriage, and so on.

In 1460, the colonists had developed to the point of making a parliamentary Declaration announcing that Ireland should be bound only by those laws which were passed by the Dublin legislature. In practice, this did not have a great impact on Crown rule. And, by 1494, the English pressed the Irish Parliament to pass what was known as Poyning's Law. Effectively,

this meant that the Irish Parliament could not act in any way contrary to the wishes of the Crown and negated any legal residue of the Declaration of 1460.

A PROTESTANT PARLIAMENT

Following the Reformation, and the redesignation of Henry VIII from Lord of Ireland to King of Ireland in 1541, those increasingly excluded from the Irish Parliament were not only the Gaels, but all Catholics, even if Anglo-Irish, as we may classify them by then. The Parliament was to become a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people. And Protestant was to mean Anglican rather than Puritan or Presbyterian.

CONFEDERATION OF KILKENNY

By the time Thomas Wentworth (Earl of Strafford) convened the Parliament of 1640, the Plantations, as well as the Reformation, were well underway. This led to the rebellion of 1641 and the formation of the Confederation of Kilkenny the following year.

The main institutions of the Confederation were a General Assembly (in effect, a parliament) and a Supreme Council (in effect a rival administration to that of the Crown). The Confederation represented an amalgam of the Gaels and those Anglo-Irish still adherent to Catholicism. Its class base consisted of the landed aristocracies (Gaelic and Anglo-Irish) and, to a certain extent, town burgesses, while being quite democratic and representative within those

parameters.

Even given those limitations, it was the first manifestation of what was largely an Irish national assembly and exercised real authority throughout most of the island, while its diplomatic representatives were to be found in other countries on the continent. Meanwhile, Strafford's Parliament continued to exist in Dublin in name only.

Both the latter and the Confederation came to an end in 1649 following the reconquest of Ireland by Cromwell.

While the Confederation lasted, there was also an ongoing war against the Crown administration. The setup might be seen as an early prefiguration of the combined parliamentary and insurrectionary resistance that was to be manifest in the juxtaposition of the revolutionary Dála and the Irish Republican Army.

CROMWELL & AFTER

During the period of the Cromwellian Commonwealth, there was no Irish Parliament of any sort. Instead, between 1653 and '59, there was a limited Irish representation at Westminster. Then, in 1660, there was a brief quasi-parliamentary gathering in Ireland described as a Convention, which welcomed the restoration of the Stuarts in the person of Charles II. Next, in 1661, the old Irish Parliament was re-established.

In 1689, what came to be known as the

Patriot Parliament (being the title of the book written about it by Thomas Davis) was established in support of King James II, as part of his reaction to the assault by William of Orange on his throne. However, unlike the Confederation of Kilkenny, it was mainly representative of the Anglo-Irish Catholics and not the Gaels.

It has always puzzled me as to why Davis, while acknowledging the importance of Kilkenny, concentrated on the ephemeral Patriot Parliament in a book, rather than the much longer lasting Confederation, as being something of an inspiration for Irish national democracy. While Davis was a Protestant, he was by no means sectarian and one would have thought that even a Catholic-based Confederation was more in line with his Celtically inclined nationalist thinking than the 1689 Parliament. And the latter was also predominantly Catholic, while having little to do with the Gaels. So religion could not have come into play regarding Davis's choice in either case.

RESTORATION IRELAND

While the Parliaments convened subsequent to the Treaty of Limerick were a definite return to a Protestant colonialist system, and characterised by the Penal Laws against Catholics, the members began to display a renewed sense of colonialist nationalism. In 1698, William Molyneux published *The Case of Ireland Stated* protesting at the Irish Parliament being bound by Acts of Parliament

emanating from England.

In the light of growing discontent in Ireland about discriminatory laws in respect of Irish commerce under the Navigation Acts, Westminster passed the Declaratory Act of 1720 claiming a quite unambiguous right of what was by now the *British* Parliament (i.e. subsequent to the union with Scotland) to pass laws for Ireland. Nonetheless, colonialist discontent continued and was manifest, for example, in the Woods' Ha'pence controversy of 1722 which led Swift to publish one of his famous pamphlets entitled *A Drapier's Letters*.

The distemper lingered on in the succeeding decades and, by the 1750s, a group of so-called Patriots had formed around Henry Flood, continuing the tradition of Molyneux and Swift. In due course, at a time when Britain had been severely weakened by the American War of Independence, the discriminations against Irish commerce were lessened.

GRATTAN'S PARLIAMENT & UNION

However, the full eruption of disaffection occurred in what came to be known as Grattan's Parliament in the period 1782 to 1800. This arose when the American debacle had been added to by threats from revolutionary France.

The two drawbacks of Grattan's Parliament were first of all, principally, the fact that the legislative independence it secured was not accompanied by equivalent autonomy for executive authority and, secondly, that

the great mass of the Irish people, namely Catholics, were still excluded from membership of Parliament, while being only begrudgingly awarded the vote in 1793.

The end of the colonial Parliament nonetheless came in 1800 with the Acts of Union and following the Great Rebellion of 1798. Fear of Napoleon featured largely in this episode.

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION & REPEAL CAMPAIGNS

But Catholics were already organising themselves and when they were denied parliamentary participation in the new Union, they martialled themselves to rectify this in the early years of the 19th century.

The associated campaign eventuated in so-called 'emancipation' in 1829, but it was a pyrrhic victory insofar as the franchise was at the same time greatly diminished. The Liberator thus secured the reduction of the Irish electorate from 200,000 to 60,000. Effectively, he sold out what were known as the 40-shilling freeholders that had been the backbone of his campaign. Therefore, his victory was for the co-religionists of his own class.

He was nonetheless promoted as the hero of the day and next set himself the aim of securing repeal of the Acts of Union. But there was the question of what specifically repeal would mean. Following Catholic emancipation in particular, it could hardly lead simply to a return to something like

Grattan's Parliament, which had persisted in disallowing Catholic membership of the legislature. Moreover, there was the deficiency in that Parliament which has already been noted of not being accompanied by an Irish Executive responsible to a Dublin legislature.

While repeal thus seemed to imply a parliament restored, reformed and democratised, it was not to be until the time of Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell that the demand began to be fleshed out. But, by then, it was reduced to a type of local autonomy within the United Kingdom that would be well short of even the legislative independence of 1782.

What it was to signify in legal detail was only spelled out in the two abortive home rule bills of Gladstone. These were largely recast in the Government of Ireland Act 1914 and its successor of the same name in 1920. Therefore, the Acts of Union were left unrepealed while only limited devolution was allowed for. One might recall here the equivocating O'Connell who once said that he was seeking "an independent legislature", but would be prepared to settle for "a subordinate Parliament". The Stormont regime from 1921 to '72 later became the residual embodiment of home rule.

In the 1830s and '40s, the cry nonetheless was just stated as repeal as declaimed by O'Connell who was to be enthusiastically joined in this by Young Ireland in its first phase.

INSURRECTIONARY & PARLIAMENTARY PATHS

By this juncture, a differentiated pattern of Irish resistance or recalcitrance to English rule had clearly emerged in modern Irish history. It was both insurrectionary and parliamentary. Up to 1800, the parliamentary manifestation, we have seen, came from local colonialists. The two interruptions of this pattern had been the alternative parliamentary phenomena of the Kilkenny Confederation and the fleeting Catholic Patriot Parliament, with these also being accompanied by violence. The period from 1689 to '91, however, was complicated in that, while it involved armed resistance to the Dutchman William III, it was also in support of the English King James II.

There had been national insurrections from 1592 to 1603, from 1641 to '49 (alongside the Confederation), in 1798 and lastly 1803 with Robert Emmet's rising. The first two insurrections were essentially Catholic-based, while the second two attempted to appeal to a cross-religion base, even if largely led by Protestant republicans such as Tone.

REFORM & YOUNG IRELAND

In the decade after emancipation, O'Connell allied with the Whigs at Westminster to secure reforms. There were half-hearted moves on tithes, local government and poor relief, but no action on the land question. By 1840, O'Connell, partially responding to discontent about

this, launched the Repeal Association.

Young Ireland, for its part, is usually seen to have been foreshadowed in an address to the College Historical Society, associated with Trinity College Dublin, by Thomas Davis as its outgoing president, in 1840. "Gentlemen, you have a country. ... Reason points out our native land as the field of our exertions – the country of our birth, our education, our recollections, ancestral, personal, national; the country of our loves, our friendships, our hopes; our country; ... Patriotism is human philanthropy." He also stressed the importance of the Irish language.

The emergence of Young Ireland may be taken to have begun in substance in 1842 with the foundation of a new patriotic newspaper. In particular, there was the famous stroll and discussion in Phoenix Park by Charles Gavan Duffy, John Blake Dillon and Thomas Davis in the Spring of that year. As a result, a decision was taken to launch a periodical entitled, as Davis suggested, *The Nation*, which first appeared in October.

It was around *The Nation* that a certain group of writers formed and a distinctive collection of ideas developed. The name 'Young Ireland' was given to them the following year by a journalist friend of Davis, namely Daniel Owen Madden in his book *Ireland and Its Rulers Since 1829*. In fact, Madden was drawn to do this by his awareness of a group of nationalistic

English Tories called Young England. What inspired him to think of 'Young Ireland,' we can only imagine. Perhaps it was the common factors of youth and domestic nationalism that he saw in the two gatherings. Although it would tend to strike one that, whatever about youth, the nationalism of Young England was of quite a different character indeed to that of Young Ireland.

In fact, 'Young' was generally in vogue in the Europe of the time; Mazzini had founded Young Italy and later Young Europe. Initially, the group around *The Nation* was not inclined to endorse this description, and it was never enshrined in any document, but they came to accept it in time, not least because that was what others came to call them. Indeed, O'Connell ended up at one point by referring to himself and his confreres as "Old Ireland".

THOMAS OSBORNE DAVIS

Before we go on to consider Young Ireland in its **first phase** from 1842 to 1847 (the latter year being when its **second phase** was entered into with the formation of the Irish Confederation), it is only appropriate to pause and consider the life and person of Thomas Osborne Davis.

Davis was born in Mallow, Co Cork, on 24 October 1814, a month after his father, who had been an inspector of military hospitals in the British Army, died in England. The father's family was of Celtic Welsh origin

and, he had married Mary Atkins from Mallow.

In 1818, with her two sons and three daughters, she moved to Dublin. Mary Atkins was descended from a Cromwellian settler family and there had later been intermarriage with the Gaelic family of O'Sullivan Beare.

Davis attended school in Dublin which was religiously mixed. He was brought up as an Anglican, but does not seem to have been overly religious, while not actually disavowing the church. Although, he is believed to have been attracted in a measure to liberal Protestantism in the shape of Unitarianism. He also tended to look askance at superstitious teachings of some Christians in both Protestant and Catholic denominations in Ireland.

EDUCATION & INTELLECTION

He entered Trinity College Dublin at age 17. There, he studied law and also earned a reputation as a prodigious reader. It is known that he associated with some other students, both of a Protestant and a Catholic background, who were nationally minded. We may safely assume that this circle was familiar with the inchoate colonial nationalism of the preceding centuries as well as the republicanism of Tone and Emmet and the recent historical events of the American and French revolutions.

Indeed, Davis was later to start a book on Tone, the draft of which unfortunately has

been lost. (It would have been interesting to read it along with his published work on the Patriot Parliament of 1689.)

There were contemporary influences abroad as well: Chartism in England, and those of German and French political romanticism whose works Davis could read in the original languages. The anti-clericalism of Michelet and Thierry would also have been available to him. And he would have been conscious of the emerging post-napoleonic nationalism of Germany and its early material expression in the Zollverein.¹

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM

After graduation, in 1836, he was required to spend a year further studying law in London. In 1837, he published a pamphlet entitled *The Reform of the Lords*. The following year, he is recorded as being a member of the Dublin Historical Society and giving an address to it on the subject of Irish history.

In 1839, Davis helped to reorganise the College Historical Society, which was still not formally recognised by the TCD authorities. In debates, he took the negative side on the question of whether British rule was beneficial to India, the affirmative on mixed education, and the negative on the question of the beneficence of the Norman conquest for England. In a memoir found after his death,

Davis had recorded that his ideas of national independence had gelled in the context of his involvement with the historical societies.

From those who knew him, we have gathered that Davis was rather introspective as well as slightly melancholic, but he consciously countered the latter trait by throwing himself into activity, which happily resulted in a very productive writer and activist.

He was described by friends as concerned with the ethical, but repelled by religious zealotry. With regard to the socio-economic dimension, he was to write: "the social order in Ireland is essentially bad, and must be changed from top to bottom." He also said: "The recollections, blood, and habits of the Irish landlords are utterly alien; they despise the people; the people hate them." He continued: "What are the evils under which the peasantry labour? Poverty. Give them land of their own to work on, they will then have motives to labour, and will soon cease to be poor."

IDEOLOGY & NATIONALITY

However, we should be careful not to try and extrapolate from this attitude an indication of some kind of incipient socialism. That Davis was generally concerned socially is without doubt. But, understandably, he focused on the predominant question of the day in Ireland,

¹ Customs Union

namely that of land. Otherwise, he was wary of materialistic philosophies as was evident in his lukewarm reaction to the influential Benthamite utilitarianism of the time. Thus, while he was sensitive to the condition of the poor, he was also wary of all doctrines which undervalued the cultural and the idealistic. He was repelled by the early manifestations of industrial capitalism in England and its “dark satanic mills”.

His political romanticism, to a degree redolent of that emerging in Germany, was at the same time not of such an extreme kind as to be accepting of some medieval bucolic idyll. There have been attempts to compare Davis’s cultural nationalism to the Volk und Vaterland² and the Blut und Boden³ tendencies in Germany, and even to accuse him of proto-fascism, but these are just nonsensical slanders by anti-national elements.

On the international front, he was decidedly anti-imperialist and wrote articles deprecating British policy and actions in relation to India and Afghanistan. And, as one would expect of an anti-imperialist, he had a sense of universality when he wrote: “We are battling for Ireland; if we conquer, it will be for mankind.”

PERSONAL LIFE

As for his family, there was no rift because of his politics, but these were more tolerated than shared.

In his personal life, he fell in love with Annie Hutton, the daughter of a wealthy coach builder, when she was 18 and he 29. Her family, decidedly unionist in politics, did not initially approve of a relationship between them, perhaps because of his ideology. However, eventually they relented somewhat and the situation could have been heading towards marriage, but Davis’s premature death at the early age of 31, due to scarlet fever, intervened in September 1845. Annie herself did not have a long life. She was somewhat sickly and died in 1853 in her 28th year.

EDUCATION & CULTURE POLICY

Young Ireland gave full support to the Repeal Association and was very much involved in it. But, as *The Nation* got underway, the distinctive contributions that it was to make to the national struggle quickly became evident. There was an emphasis not only on radical land reform and political rights, but also on education and culture. The people needed to be educated and to be made fully aware of their great history and rich traditions of custom and language.

In the latter respect, Young Ireland was fully supportive of Gaelic and Davis made efforts to learn it himself. He was not able to write or give speeches in Gaelic, but one does not know whether or not he would in time have become a gaeilgeoir, simply because his life was cut so short. In any

² People and Fatherland

³ Blood and Soil

event, he wrote: “to lose your native tongue and to learn that of an alien is the worst badge of conquest – it is the chain on the soul.” At one point, he ridiculed English as “the mongrel tongue of a hundred breeds”. O’Connell, though a fluent Irish speaker, had little time for the language. But not all Young Irelanders were as enthusiastic about the language. Mitchell and some others did not warm to it.

The importance of *The Nation’s* work was underlined by the fact that the curriculum for the national school system introduced by the British in 1831 excluded mention of Irish history. Young Ireland was advanced in its thinking in that it understood that one needed not only to have the right politics, but to have persuasive means of conveying them. “Educate that you may be free” is a slogan that is attributed to Davis. Thus, Young Ireland encouraged not only the writing of articles but also of poems and songs. In 1843, it published an anthology of these entitled *The Spirit of the Nation*. The ire of the London *Times* was aroused when it complained about “the fervour of rebellion which breathes in every page of these verses ...”

RELIGION & YOUNG IRELAND

It was in 1843, that O’Connell’s monster meetings demanding repeal were halted by the Government and he was arrested and imprisoned for a while. This persuaded the Protestant landlord, William Smith O’Brien MP, to join the Repeal Association and he

was to become a key figure in Young Ireland.

Davis was intensely anti-sectarian, but he was circumspect about Catholic supremacism, originating in the Papacy. He was anxious that Protestants should be sympathetically won over to the national cause. In 1842–43, he wrote a series of articles entitled *Letters of a Protestant on Repeal*. About Protestants, he urged that “you must address their reason, their interest, their hopes, and their pride. I, for one, a Protestant – intimately knowing them – think it possible to effect this object.” *The Nation’s* perspective was that of an all-embracing nationalism, while many O’Connellites spoke of “two nations on one soil”, namely consisting of Irishness and Catholicism. Their main organ of expression was a publication entitled *The Pilot*. Its sectarian ‘faith and fatherland’ attitude was stoutly rejected by the inclusive patriotism of Young Ireland.

CONSTITUTIONAL OPTIONS

On the constitutional issue, an idea which was occasionally raised was that of federalism. What this meant to those advocating it at the time was something along the lines of what later became known as ‘home rule’. As we have already noted, O’Connell appeared at one point to be willing to settle for that. Davis is on record as perhaps considering it as an option, but only as a step towards full freedom. Echoes perhaps here of the later Treaty debate.

Another idea floated at the time was that of a “Hiberno-British Empire” in a pamphlet by a well-known northern Protestant, which was referred to favourably by O’Connell. Shades of Griffith’s dual monarchy? *The Nation* firmly rejected this describing the idea as that of a “wicked partnership”. But D’Arcy McGee later speculated about an Anglo-Irish Dual Monarchy.

THE COLLEGES CONTROVERSY

Tensions soon developed between Young Ireland and ‘Old Ireland’. Catholic nationalists were suspicious of *The Nation* from the beginning, taking account of its partially Protestant leadership and what was called its indifferent attitude to religion. However, Robert Peel’s Colleges Bill to provide for universities in Ireland brought this to a head in 1845.

As there was to be no provision for religious teaching in the colleges, the O’Connellites denounced them as “godless”. On the general principle of mixed education, Young Ireland and Catholic nationalists were in completely opposing camps, as apparent in the pages of *The Nation* and *The Pilot* respectively.

The year was not out before the Catholic nationalists launched a new periodical entitled *Old Ireland* directed against mixed education in general. At meetings of the Repeal Association, Davis and O’Connell

clashed on the issue. However, in 1845, Peel got an Act passed to establish what were called Queen’s Colleges in Cork, Galway and Belfast, which opened in 1850. The compromise ultimately was that they were non-denominational, but theology could be taught by private endowment.

REFORMISM & MILITANCY

Young Ireland was also concerned about renewed O’Connellite overtures to the Whigs at Westminster which were with a



view to securing some more reforms with the implication of not immediately pressing for repeal. Furthermore, *The Nation* also inveighed against attempts to buy off Irish nationalists by offering them offices under the Crown.

During the first phase of Young Ireland, two new arrivals were John Mitchell

and Thomas Francis Meagher, who proved to be firebrands in the group. They were instrumental in bringing to the forefront the question of using force when need be for the advancement of Irish freedom. As a result of a famous speech, the second became known as a “Meagher of the sword”. Mitchell, in time, proved to be equally militant. Incidentally, it was Meagher who brought back to Ireland the green, white and orange tricolour after a visit to France and clearly inspired by the French *tricolore*.

By early 1847, the accumulation of differences between Old and Young Ireland led to the latter forming a separate Irish Confederation, which marked its second phase of development. Probably the chief reason for the break was the adoption of contrasting positions on the possibility of armed resistance. The Daniel O’Connell who had participated in militia efforts to suppress the ’98 Rebellion was not willing to contemplate another uprising. Additionally, a position of the Confederation was for non-attendance of Irish MPs at Westminster. Meanwhile, it was attacked by O’Connellites for allegedly being (horror of horrors) like the Chartists in England.



James Fintan Lalor

At the same juncture, a new recruit to the Confederation was the radical James Fintan Lalor who said he was indeed for repeal - that is, he declared, “repeal of the conquest”. Mitchell effectively linked up with him in denouncing the landlord class. Short of revolt, they advocated a policy of non-payment of rents and rates, although insurrection was still on their agenda.

On the other hand, in the Confederation, William Smith O’Brien, himself a landlord, but a progressive one who accepted the need for land reform as well as repeal, adhered with others to an earlier romantic hope, which had indeed been shared by Davis, of building a cross-class alliance of

patriots and continuing to use constitutional methods.

LEFT & RIGHT

There were now two identifiable wings in the Confederation, which might be termed Left and Right or, perhaps, more in tune with the times, militant and reformist. For all

his national and social militancy, Mitchell nonetheless took time to refer favourably in his writings to Black slavery, such as obtained in the southern United States. And, in later years, he was to become involved with the American Confederacy. Therefore, he was quite capable of being thoroughly progressive on

some issues and utterly reactionary on others.

Mitchell was impelled, because of his excessive militancy, to eventually leave the ruling Council of the Confederation and found a new periodical entitled the *United Irishman*. His hope was that, especially given the onset of the Great Famine, a spontaneous peasant uprising would take place. He and Lalor referred to Tone’s dictum of ultimately having to rely on the “men of no property”. As ever, the Continent was an inspiration for Irish resistance and the uprisings there in 1848 strengthened the resolve of the militants.

But the Government moved swiftly and

several Confederation leaders were arrested and put on trial. There were acquittals by some juries, but, in Mitchell's case, the jury was packed and he was transported to Australia. The *United Irishman* was suppressed, but another, short-lived publication sprang up in its place called *The Irish Felon*, with Lalor as a major contributor.

REBELLION

On 25 July 1848, the Government suspended habeus corpus and issued arrest warrants for Smith O'Brien, Meagher and others. *The Nation* was of course suppressed. They immediately formed a War Council along with Dillon. The militants had been joined with previous reformists, chiefly Smith O'Brien, who all became convinced that an uprising was now definitely necessary.

The War Council travelled the country trying to encourage backing for revolt, However, the Catholic clergy preached vigorously against it and this had its effect in dampening support.

It was while the Council were in a village called The Commons that a police force advanced to arrest them. A manned barricade was erected to halt them and the police then retreated and occupied a farmhouse at Ballingarry where they were surrounded.

A shoot-out commenced and lasted several hours with some fatalities, but then police reinforcements were known to be coming

from Cashel and the rebels were compelled to retreat and disperse. Yet pockets of resistance in the country continued, using guerrilla tactics, some of them organised by a John O'Mahony who, ten years later, went on to help found the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Otherwise, there were outbreaks, which lasted into September, in Carrick-on-Suir, Carrickbeg, Lowry Bridge, Curraghmore Wood, Kilmacthomas, and Glenbower. The following year, Lalor led an abortive attack on Cappoquin police barracks. That proved to be the last gasp of the insurrection.

By then, all the leaders of Young Ireland had been captured and most were transported. It was the end. But the pike remained in the thatch and was to come out again within twenty years in the shape of IRB Fenianism.

LEGACY OF YOUNG IRELAND

So, how do we sum up Young Ireland, leaving aside the break with Old Ireland?

There were quite different personalities and emphases of policy and tactics in Young Ireland. And, indeed, there were variations under these headings over time. A post-modernist deconstructionist would have a field day in addressing all of the subtleties. However, it is possible to make some useful generalisations and draw some overall conclusions about Young Ireland.

Neither Catholic, Protestant Nor Dissenter

Young Ireland was marked by a pluralist as

distinct from Catholic or colonialist nationalism. As a result, it was both aware of the Catholic majority and sensitive to the Protestant minority that had to be accommodated in a new Ireland. This led to stands on particular issues such as mixed rather than denominational education, which particularly emerged in connection with the Colleges Bill intended to provide for universities in the country. Davis was rightly apprehensive about the Catholic bishops' ultramontane role in affairs generally.

Socio-Economic Questions

On socio-economic questions, Young Ireland was for at least radical reform concerning land ownership and use. Davis was drawn towards a system known as udalism (as distinct from feudalism) that was derived from Norse tradition. In a nutshell, it meant that the land was owned by communities, while the crop tilled by a specific farmer was the property of him/her.

Lalor and Mitchell asserted more generally that the land belonged to the people as a whole and that it was to be decided by them after independence as to how it would be divided up, possibly on the basis of some sort of equitable landlord-tenant dual ownership. In the short term, Young Ireland was supportive of reform that would address fixity of tenure, recognition for improvements, and fair rents.

In the matter of industrialisation, Davis could not be accurately depicted as being

totally opposed to this. Rather did it seem that he preferred less disruptive and dislocatory small-scale domestic industry, with protective tariffs if need be, as was being advocated in Germany by Friedrich List who became a favourite reference for Arthur Griffith. Indeed, Davis advocated industrial education taking example from what was being done in Prussia.

Young Ireland also promoted the idea of what would later be called simply 'buy Irish'. Texts from Dean Swift and George Berkeley were quoted in this and other connections with regard to economic policy, including self-reliance.

An expression that gained some currency variously with both Old and Young Ireland, in the matter of economic production in the country and foreign imports, as well as rejection of a Whig alliance and any need for foreign support for resistance, was "Ourselves Alone".

This was then translated into Irish by somebody, inaccurately, as "Sinn Féin" - 'Sinn Féin' being in fact 'we ourselves' (or simply 'ourselves' in Hiberno-English), while 'alone' added to it gives 'sinn féin amháin'. Griffith, as we know, later adopted the description 'Sinn Féin' in his talk of 1905, building up to an organisation so designated, and the second expression ('Sinn Féin Amháin') was then enunciated on occasion as a slogan.

Anti-Imperialism

On foreign policy, Young Ireland evinced an advanced form of anti-imperialism, thus being not only sympathetic to the likes of Poles and Italians, but also what were considered by most Europeans as lesser races, such as in India and Afghanistan. Writing about rape and pillage in the latter country, Davis stated: "Certainly a more bloody and rapacious power than England never existed." He has nonetheless been accused of preferring the resistance of only so-called 'Aryan' nations, but that is contradicted by his support for the New Zealand Maoris and Australian Aborigines against the English settlers. More generally, he rejected the idea of Britain's mission to civilise 'barbarous' peoples.

The Nation constantly opposed Irish recruitment in the British army and the taking of the "Saxon shilling", which so often was the prelude to imperial service. The views of Mitchell and some lesser figures of similar mind as regards Black people and slavery were completely out of kilter with this perspective and, therefore, by no means characteristic of Young Ireland. Davis denounced Black slavery and, untypically for the day, not only that, he defended the rights of North American Indians.

Constitutional Issue

On the constitutional issue, Young Ireland was decidedly for sovereign independence, but some of its members, including Davis,

were willing on occasion to contemplate that there might be necessary interim steps along the way, such as through a form of federalism within the UK. They thus supported repeal of the Acts of Union, which had abolished Grattan's Parliament and envisaged the subsequent, even if only eventual, creation of a genuinely independent executive and legislature, although detail was left to be spelt out.

Lalor was more explicit about what he saw as the utter insubstantiality of Grattan's Parliament in rejecting any romantic nostalgia about it, a position which was to be reflected later in the writings of James Connolly. Mitchell broadly took up this position as well.

Resistance

As for the methods by which Ireland was to be made a nation once again, of course it was sensible to exploit parliamentary means to that end. But Young Ireland did not discard the insurrectionary tradition when it became clear, to use Mitchell's words, that England knew nothing save the edge of the sword. In other words, Young Ireland may be seen in both the parliamentary and insurrectionary traditions according to what was deemed necessary. And that is the sensible revolutionary position, as modern Sinn Féin understands.

Cultural Imperialism

While Young Ireland did not succeed in bringing about a sovereign independent

State, it made a huge contribution to understanding the importance of combating cultural imperialism, whereby it was essential to counter historical distortion, suppression of language and customs, and the sewing of psychological inferiority.

The following statement was found in Davis's papers after his death: "Nationality means ... self-respect, self-rule, and self-reliance. A dependent mind is a false, an insecure, and a low mind ...". Young Ireland still echoes throughout the land every time the anthem of *A Nation Once Again* is sung and the irrepressibility of Irish nationality is articulated in the verses of *The West's Awake*.

The Task today

But, Young Ireland has a particularly important message to offer us at this point in Irish history in the necessity to reject both what is left of Catholic nationalism, in all its arrogance and supremacism, and orange bigotry, in all its sectarianism and hatred. We have to build a national and socially just republic which is secular in the public sphere and characterised by pluralist tolerance and inclusiveness, while fostering the rich heritages that in the main derive both from our ancient Gaelic past and other culturally positive aspects from Norman, Anglo-Saxon, Scots and Welsh sources.

Our task is to write the epitaph of Emmet and to fulfil the vision of Davis. ♦

<p>Arna Fóilsiú ag <i>An Náisiún Éireannaic</i> Aibreán 2022 www.inc.ie</p>	<p>Published by <i>The Irish Nation</i> April 2022 www.inc.ie</p>
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