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Brahmins and Bullyboys: William Henry Cardinal O'Connell and Massachusetts Politics*

Robert O'Leary

William Cardinal O'Connell, former Archbishop of Boston, has been resting inconspicuously in his tomb at St. John's Seminary since 1944 but his legend as the "eminence grise" of Massachusetts politics is still very much alive. Although the details of his career have faded, he occasionally surfaces in contemporary accounts as the archetype Machiavellian among American prelates. It is not an unfair label, nor one that he would necessarily be uncomfortable with. During his tenure as archbishop, from 1907 to 1944, it was popularly alleged that O'Connell was an autocratic power broker and that the invisible hand of the archdiocese was an active force in local politics.¹ His opposition to the child labor amendment, public lotteries, and the public dissemination of birth control information, as well as the famous 1937 election of Maurice Tobin over James Michael Curley are among the more well-known examples frequently cited as evidence. In 1929 Heywood Broun testified to O'Connell's alleged influence when asked, "What's the matter with Boston?" and answered: "I think the answer is miscegenation, the fusion of puritanical Catholicism with Protestant neo-Puritanism."² More recently, John Kenneth Galbraith remarked, while reminiscing about his early days as a liberal at Harvard University, that he and his associates were convinced that "the Cardinal and the Catholic Church were always secretly and often successfully working behind the scenes to undermine our efforts."³

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that this popular image is simplistic and fails adequately to reflect the contradictions of O'Connell's career. He was a complex man, beset by conflicting emotions and ambitions which, in many ways, were representative of some of those second and third generation Irish who were seeking to redefine their position in Massachusetts. Early in his tenure as archbishop, he achieved some political

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successes but for the bulk of his episcopal career he was never truly able to define or direct Catholic assimilation, despite his driving ambition to do so. In sum, both his historical and popular images need revision and clarification.

Any analysis of O'Connell must begin with the understanding that he was in many ways a man of splendid contrasts who defies simple explanations. He had the face of a Boston bull-dog and the build of a longshoreman, yet successfully affected the manners of a European aristocrat. He was born in the mill town of Lowell, the last of eleven children, son of a factory worker; yet by the age of fifty-one he had become one of only three American cardinals, an achievement he unabashedly declared made him "greater than a king."⁴ He had an enormous ego and a seemingly limitless reservoir of self-confidence that bordered on arrogance; yet he was privately plagued with deep feelings of insecurity in his relationship with the Yankee community. He was an untiring and brilliant administrator who involved himself in the smallest detail of archdiocesan affairs; yet for four winter months of every year he fled to the warmth and relaxation of a private estate on Nassau, earning the derisive nickname "Gangplank Bill." He admonished his pastors to avoid the monumentalism of the past and insisted they build churches that "will not be a burden to the people," yet he personally had constructed a multi-million dollar archdiocesan complex, including a palatial cardinal's residence, all of which he proudly called "my little Rome."⁵ He could be autocratic and pretentious, a leader who was "admired but not loved," yet among his personal associates he inspired great loyalty and an enduring personal affection.⁶ In a classic incident which beautifully captures the contradictions of Boston's only "Prince," Joseph Brennan, a Boston College alumnus, wrote how Mr. Duff, a Catholic contractor, and his friends were mounting the steps of an expensive North Shore restaurant when "suddenly their entrance was blocked by the egress of His Eminence. . . massive, ruddy and benign." O'Connell surveyed those members of his flock with the air of a man who had dined well. Duff ventured to express the hope that "His Eminence" had enjoyed his dinner. Delicately wiping his lips with a handkerchief of fine linen woven especially for him by an order of Irish nuns, O'Connell smiled benevolently. "My tastes are very simple," he said. "Just a crust of bread and a glass of water."⁷

O'Connell's propensity for contradiction, which was grist for his enemies and a source of constant delight for his friends, also manifested itself in the great public issues of his day. He was, for example, an unabashed flag waver who often flaunted his patriotism. Yet, at substantial costs, he publicly opposed America's involvement in three successive wars.⁸ He repeatedly insisted on the need to separate church and state, yet he led the opposition to a state constitutional amendment designed to achieve that goal. He proclaimed that both he and the archdiocese were above politics, and then through public statements, by indirection and studied indifference, sought unsuccessfully to manipulate a generation of Massachusetts politicians. He was a lifelong advocate of the established order, yet his most enduring legacies were that he modernized and reformed the archdiocese and sought to disrupt the status quo by asserting Catholic equality.



"Cardinal O'Connell"

Any analysis of O'Connell's career must deal cautiously with the available written documents. The Cardinal was a prolific writer and speaker who never waited for or trusted historians to accurately record what he once described as "the miracle of success of my very remarkable career."⁹ In a vain attempt to define his place in history he compiled two autobiographical works, edited and published his major speeches in eleven volumes, and commissioned two historians to write a three-volume study of the archdiocese which, not surprisingly, ended in a glowing testimonial to the Cardinal's achievements. There is also a strong oral tradition that he forged many of his early letters for publication and when threatened with public disclosure that he and "another were seen in the basement throwing the copies into the furnace."¹⁰ It is a matter of written record that he especially disliked comparisons between himself and his predecessor, Archbishop Williams, especially comparisons which he thought were not adequately enthusiastic about his administration. In the 1960s when the Right Rev. Francis Sexton wrote to the Carmelite Monastery in Santa Barbara, California, seeking an unpublished copy of the *Life of Archbishop Williams* which had been written by their foundress, Mother Augustine, he received an answer stating that a copy had been sent earlier to O'Connell and explaining that:

There is only one thing Monsignor — it was the Cardinal who asked Mother to write. . . When she sent the completed life, we understand that the Cardinal was not pleased since she felt in her research and knowledge that she had to tell the truth. . . It was to have been published and she heard no more. We have a secret fear that it may have been destroyed — but hope that it is not the case.¹¹

Despite the problems of historical evidence, the outline of O'Connell's early career is fairly straightforward. He was born in the second half of the nineteenth century into an environment in which Catholics were considered second class citizens and when relations with the Protestant establishment were a confusing mixture of optimism and hostility. The church through which he moved as a young man was poorly organized, inadequately developed, and uncertain about its future. It was led by an aging Archbishop Williams, a man of saint-like simplicity whose vision was firmly fixed in the past. Despite the fact that Catholics were beginning to win political control of Boston, they were still heavily discriminated against. Archbishop Williams urged a policy of passive accommodation. He complained that his greatest problem with the clergy was not the "need to urge them on, but to prevent them at times from going too fast."¹² He suffered what one author described as a "kind of intellectual paralysis at the massiveness of the (Catholic) immigration and its accompanying problems" and apparently believed that by disguising Catholic growth he could preserve what he optimistically understood to be Catholic-Protestant cooperation.¹³

Although O'Connell began his clerical career under Williams' supervision, he did not share the older prelate's backward-looking perspective. As a bright young student with promise, he escaped the provincial poverty of Boston



“Archbishop Williams”

Catholicism when in 1881 he was sent to Rome to study at the prestigious North American College. Rome made an enormous and enduring impact on O’Connell’s personality. The child of Irish-American immigrants, he had grown up in a state permeated with patronizing nativism and in a company town where “everything Catholic was despised” and where Catholicism and poverty were considered related afflictions.¹⁴ In Italy, he discovered that Catholics had an elaborate and glorious history and a tradition of wealth and power with which nothing in Massachusetts could compare. For the impressionable and culturally pretentious O’Connell, it was a heady and reassuring experience, and after several years he returned to the Commonwealth enraptured with what he would later call “Romanita,” the Roman way, and with a more ambitious outlook for both himself and his fellow Catholics.

In 1895, against the background of the Americanist Controversy, an ideological struggle between liberal and conservative factions within the American hierarchy, Dennis O'Connell (no relation to William) was forced to resign as rector of the North American College. The school's American suffragans scrambled to select an acceptable successor, and the relatively obscure William O'Connell, after some aggressive lobbying in his own behalf, was unexpectedly appointed rector of his alma mater and the unofficial ambassador of the American hierarchy to the Vatican. There he worked diligently to take advantage of his good fortune and over the next several years ingratiated himself with powerful individuals within the Vatican by espousing pro-Roman ideas. In time, his loyalty became well known and, with the support of Merry del Val, Secretary of State to Pius X, he was rewarded with a series of rapid promotions which began with his appointment as Bishop of Portland, Maine, and ended with his elevation to the College of Cardinals in 1911.¹⁵

O'Connell became Archbishop of Boston in 1907 with strong presuppositions concerning his authority and the future role of the archdiocese in Massachusetts. An aggressive and able administrator who was very much aware of the shortcomings of his predecessor, he immediately set about reshaping the church despite the fact that among the clergy there was widespread local opposition to his appointment.¹⁶ He began by systematizing and centralizing all administrative practices under his direct authority, making the infrastructure of the institution virtually an extension of his personality. He dramatically increased the extent to which the priests were supervised, particularly the pastors who had grown quite independent of episcopal authority under Williams. He tightened diocesan regulations and then demanded that they be absolutely enforced. He encouraged the development of lay organizations, but insisted that they subject themselves to his authority. At the same time he set about enlarging the institutional structure of the church so that it would accurately reflect the newly-acquired size and power of the Catholic community, something his predecessor had sought to avoid. He expanded Catholic social services, encouraged the establishment of Catholic colleges and universities, and made some advances in the development of a parochial school system. He also brought the expanded seminary under his immediate control and acquired *The Pilot* and reshaped it into the archdiocese's official organ, insuring that Boston Catholics spoke with a single voice, that of its cardinal. During his tenure, the Boston Catholic church achieved what in retrospect was probably an historic level of development.

O'Connell's elevation to the See of Boston coincided with the arrival of a new generation of Irish Catholic political leaders. Among the first and most colorful were John Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley, both of whom represented a sharp and irrevocable break with the past. The posture of compromise and accommodation which had characterized the administrations of their Irish predecessors, John Collins and Hugh O'Brien, was breached by Fitzgerald and contemptuously dismissed by Curley. Believing that hidden beneath the veneer of fair play was a political and economic system rooted in

religious and class discrimination, they both, but particularly Curley, rejected old standards and sought to re-shape the political process to benefit their constituency. In place of the Yankee notion that government should be orderly and bureaucratic, they substituted the conviction that it was more important for it to tend to the needs of their constituents. In place of the morality of the Protestant minister, they offered the ethics of the ward heeler.¹⁷

On the surface, O'Connell first appeared to be the religious counterpart of these new Irish politicians. Like them, he was first generation American born, the son of immigrants who had struggled to advance with only limited success. Emotionally, he was both proud and defensive about being Irish Catholic yet optimistic about the ability of his generation to break down traditional barriers and to achieve equality. He was also bitter about the state's history of discrimination and resentful of the climate of Anglo-superiority that pervaded the community. In addition, he was convinced that the Catholic church was the victim of a public double standard which was inadequately justified on the basis of non-sectarianism.

Within the archdiocese, O'Connell also represented a sharp break with the past. Unlike his predecessor, whose defensiveness had encouraged pastors to build their churches on side streets so as to avoid calling attention to them, O'Connell believed in high Catholic visibility.¹⁸ Bursting with ambition, he asserted that the church had important public as well as religious functions, and that as archbishop he should play a leading role. Determined to enlarge Catholic influence, he encouraged the development of lay societies such as the Knights of Columbus and most especially the Federation of Catholic Societies. In addition, unlike Williams, who avoided formal occasions, O'Connell clearly relished every public opportunity. Columbus Day parades in Boston became annual opportunities for him to review the archdiocese's army of Catholic citizens and to demonstrate their power and numbers to the Protestant community. Unlike Williams, he also immersed himself in the political process, particularly when issues impacted on the church. The extent of his political activity was evidenced by the fact that the Massachusetts Legislature privately nicknamed him "Number 1."¹⁹

But despite the superficial similarities between the Cardinal and his Irish political contemporaries, O'Connell made few allies and spent most of his tenure as archbishop struggling unsuccessfully with them for influence over the Catholic community. From the outset, he quarrelled with "Honey Fitz" and in 1907 quietly let it be known that he was opposed to his reelection.²⁰ Fitzgerald lost, but then quickly recovered in 1910 and continued to be a major political figure in the state into the 1920s. O'Connell then moved on to Martin Lomasney, the famed "Irish Mahatma" of the West End. In 1916, the Cardinal became outraged with Lomasney's role in the passage of the Sectarian Amendment which outlawed continued state funding of private organizations. O'Connell was convinced that the amendment was directed against the church and passionately opposed it, a passion he felt all Catholics should share. Lomasney did not agree and thereafter the two were lifelong

political enemies. But, as was the case with Fitzgerald, O'Connell's enmity seemed to have little effect upon the "Mahatma's" political fortunes, for he remained a popular and powerful figure in the West End until his death in 1933.²¹



"James Michael Curley"

One Catholic politician who was not as fortunate was Joseph Finnegan, one of only a handful of Democrats in the Massachusetts Senate during the 1930s. Finnegan had both the audacity and foresight to support a bill calling for public access to birth control information, which prompted the Cardinal to call for an end to Finnegan's political career. In the 1934 election, "volunteers" from various Catholic lay organizations suddenly descended on the Dorchester district, unexpectedly causing Finnegan to lose reelection. Although he tried several times, he was never again able to win public office in Massachusetts.²²

But Fitzgerald, Lomasney and Finnegan were never the focal points of O'Connell's political antagonism; that unsought distinction belonged to James Michael Curley. They seldom spoke and appeared publicly together only once when the Cardinal was unwillingly maneuvered into performing the marriage ceremony for Curley's daughter. Likewise, a journalist described how on one occasion both accidentally found themselves fellow passengers on a ship bound for Nassau. During the "Bon Voyage" party at the pier, Curley was interviewed by reporters and was quoted as saying that the cardinal and he were old friends and that it was "an honor" to travel on the same vessel. Hoping for some controversy, the reporters rushed to O'Connell's stateroom seeking a news-worthy reaction and found him quietly reading and sipping port. When Curley's name was mentioned, the cardinal paused, and then coolly responded: "I seem to have heard of him" and went back to reading his book.²³

O'Connell's dislike for Curley was deep-rooted and central to understanding his vision of the future role of the Irish. Although Curley was more a practical opportunist than an ideologue, he had an intuitive and historical sympathy for the underdog and an emotional dislike for the Yankee establishment. Curley dominated city, and later state politics, for more than a quarter century, becoming a symbol of both Irish ambitions and frustrations. The self-proclaimed mayor of the poor, he greatly enlarged public services and implemented the politics of favoritism at the city and state level. When asked by a reporter if it was true that he would "take the false teeth out of the mouth of his followers" if they crossed him up, he replied, "Why not? I put them there, didn't I?"²⁴ In addition, Curley was the unequal master of the eloquent insult. The most famous graduate of the now defunct Staley School of the Spoken Word, of Dorchester, he once described the Brahmin community as a "perishing people who seek by dollars and denunciation to evade the inexorable and inevitable law of the survival of the fittest."²⁵ He dismissed all Yankee reformers as "Goo Goos" and characterized the phrase "Codfish Aristocracy" as "a reflection on the fish."²⁶

Philosophically, Curley's episcopal counterpart was entrenched at the other end of the political spectrum. A lifelong conservative Republican and an ardent subscriber to the "Gospel of Wealth," O'Connell was an unapologetic elitist. He argued that "the complete abolishment of poverty in this life was a futile dream. . . for. . . there will always be rich and poor."²⁷ He was also an advocate of the principle of laissez faire and was appalled by the growing power of government, which he believed was dangerously encroaching upon individual rights and even more drastically upon the independence of his beloved Catholic church. In effect, the Cardinal believed that America was thoughtlessly slipping down the path towards socialism. Society was becoming more secularized and less religious. Moral and spiritual concerns were increasingly and disturbingly replaced by civic and scientific points of view. The church was in a struggle with big government; the battle was joined and the enemies were men like Curley who advocated the extension of government as a provider of services.

According to Cardinal O'Connell, what society needed was "less reform" and more "discipline."²⁸ At various times during his tenure in Boston, he, or *The Pilot* which he editorially controlled, spoke out against women's rights, penal reform, judicial review, initiative and referendum legislation, health and hygiene legislation, and progressive education. In addition, he was suspicious of organized labor, a suspicion which was powerfully reinforced by the activities of the IWW during the famous Lawrence Strike of 1922.²⁹ He was also a lifelong and passionate opponent of socialism and communism, supporting among other things a teacher's loyalty oath in Massachusetts and the work of the Dies Committee on the federal level. In the 1930s, together with Henry Shattuck and various other Brahmins, he became a member of the National Economy League, an organization designed to "combat the federal government's alleged spending orgy."³⁰ With the exception of anti-communism, it was a political record which won few allies among O'Connell's Irish-Catholic political contemporaries.

But the mutual antagonism between Curley and O'Connell went beyond political philosophies; it was also a matter of style. Both came from similar backgrounds and each, through talent and ambition, had risen to prominence in the two careers most available to the Boston Irish, politics and religion. Each had chosen a different path and one suspects that each saw in the other a part of themselves that they had at some point in the past consciously rejected. To Curley, O'Connell must have appeared to be an arrogant fraud who had assumed the aristocratic mannerisms of the Yankee establishment. To the cardinal, Curley was a "bush-league politician" who exploited past injustices and reinforced the bigotry and the ethnic clichés which had interfered with Catholic social and economic ambitions.³¹ Curley's son, Francis, once said of the relationship, "I personally in later years have thought of the two as a modern counterpart of Henry VIII and Wolsey. They had to clash when each reached the top."³² Ultimately, it was a question of self-identification, for both men had fundamentally different ideas of whom they were and what it meant to be Irish Catholic.

From the outset, O'Connell's ambition was to redefine the relationship between the city's Brahmin elite and the Catholics and in the process to reshape the Catholic self-image. In 1908 he delivered a major address entitled "In the Beginning." He spoke at great length on the history of relations between Catholic and Puritans and argued that the conflicts in the past were largely due to misunderstandings rather than malice, and the moment had come now to leave that behind. The "Puritan has passed; the Catholic remains," he proclaimed, and now it was time for compromise and understanding. He called upon those present to "harmonize" into a common sympathy and patient forbearance and ended his address with a buoyant view of Boston in which the various ethnic groups would coexist in peaceful equality.³³ Later at a Federation meeting he admonished the Catholic audience to abandon hostility towards the Yankees as unwarranted and counterproductive, declaring, "There is not in this world a finer type of manhood or a fairer-minded people than the Yankee of Boston and New England. I know them; I have lived

among them all my life."³⁴ In those early years, he also argued that the bulk of the Brahmin community would accept them on a separate but equal basis and would offer equality without insisting on full assimilation, an arrangement which was central to the Cardinal's vision of the future. "You need not be ashamed of your faith," he declared. "The Yankee admires the man of no compromise. It is the cheap Catholic that he despises."³⁵

Hoping to negotiate a new partnership, he personally began moving through Yankee society as a kind of self-appointed ambassador of Catholic social aspirations. Linking his own status with that of Catholics in general, he enthusiastically adopted the style of upper class Boston and embarked upon a career-long quest for acceptance. In comparison to his episcopal predecessors, he dressed expensively and lived elaborately. Frequently sporting a black derby or top hat and carrying a gold tipped cane, he traveled around Boston in a chauffeured black Pierce Arrow, appropriately upholstered in cardinal red. He joined several exclusive clubs, became a frequent dinner guest in homes in the Back Bay and on Beacon Hill, and took up the newly-fashionable game of golf. One of his first acts as archbishop was to shift his residence from the declining South End to more desirable Back Bay, later to an elaborate residence in Brighton, a pattern of outward migration that was common among upper class Bostonians at the turn of the century.³⁶ But nothing more clearly reflected O'Connell's patrician tastes than his weakness for expensive summer homes, the symbol of elite affluence. He purchased his first in 1911, shortly after being elevated to the College of Cardinals. Located in Marblehead and christened "Bay View," it had coincidentally been built by another successful Lowellian, Benjamin Butler. Although Bay View was later abandoned in favor of a "cottage in the more fashionable Devereus section of Marblehead," O'Connell ultimately set his sights beyond the provincial North Shore.³⁷ Later he acquired a home in Hyannisport and then in 1930 purchased a place in Nassau.

O'Connell's emulation of elite life styles, his frequent calls for cooperation and his propensity for self-criticism, especially in terms of Irish Catholic politicians, were at first warmly received by the Yankee community. The *Boston Herald* wrote that "It is due Archbishop O'Connell to observe that his liking for the Yankees is cordially reciprocated. In fact, it invites admiration."³⁸ Robert J. Bottomly, secretary of the Good Government Association, announced that "We regard him as one of the great progressive leaders of thought in our city."³⁹ Symbolically, in 1911, when he was elevated to the cardinalate, a group of twenty-five of the state's leading non-Catholics presented him with a gold casket containing \$25,000 as tangible evidence of their admiration for what they believed to be their new ally. To the Yankee establishment which was increasingly outnumbered and threatened with the belligerency of a Curley, O'Connell appeared to be the personification of moderation and worthy of encouragement.

But the new archbishop's admiration for Boston's native elite was a fragile entity beset by personal confusion and insecurity. Like a rejected suitor who

loves and hates with equal passion, he harbored contradictory feelings towards the Yankee society with whom he and the rest of the Catholic community were condemned to compete and with whom he unsuccessfully sought to build an alliance. For O'Connell, as for many of his contemporaries, the native elite became the "mysterious factor in life. . . whom they both admired and despised at different levels simultaneously."⁴⁰ His admiration he made public, but his hostility, which was more covert, only bubbled uncontrollably to the surface in moments of intense frustration.

This insecurity and ambivalence clearly manifested itself in his relationship with Harvard University. At first the university pointedly ignored the episcopal upstart and then in 1919 thoughtlessly humiliated him when it awarded the Belgian Cardinal Desire Mercier a coveted honorary degree. This was done without having granted O'Connell a similar honor and only inviting him at the last moment to the ceremony. Outraged, he made his displeasure known by arranging the Belgian's itinerary so as to preclude the possibility of a visit to Cambridge. He relented only after Mercier personally wrote, insisting upon time to receive his degree.⁴¹ Despite such irritations, Harvard continued to occupy a special place in O'Connell's ambitions for both himself and for the faithful. Throughout his career, he carefully supervised the types of priests that were associated with the institution, insisting that the church represent itself in the most favorable way. He also advocated the construction of St. Paul's virtually in the midst of the university, and unlike other churches and counter to his own avowed policy, encouraged the pastor to build an elaborate and impressive monument to Roman Catholicism. Interestingly, the interior of the church was decorated with an enormous mural of the cardinal in all his episcopal glory, the only one in the entire archdiocese, and a less than subtle hint to the university that he was an historical figure to be reckoned with.

One single incident most clearly reflects the cardinal's need to feel comfortable with Harvard and all it represented in his mind and his inability to ever satisfy that need. In 1933, a reception was given at Mrs. Jack Gardner's palace for the new president of Harvard, James Bryant Conant. At that time O'Connell, who was seventy-four, only occasionally accepted social invitations and almost never went out in the evening. But for Harvard he characteristically made an exception. According to his biographer, Dorothy Wayman, the cardinal "stole the show." Dressed in "imposing Roman purple," he majestically ascended the colonnaded stairs of Gardner's palace and briefly stopped to admire Rubens' huge painting, "Rape of Europa." There he was quickly surrounded by the other guests who quite spontaneously queued up to shake hands. After an hour, he finally broke free of his well-wishers to seek out the announced guest of honor, President Conant, only to discover him waiting patiently at the end of the impromptu reception line.⁴² Since that time, this story had been told and retold by the cardinal's surviving associates, generally with the amusing hint that by 1933, he had become more of an important public figure than Harvard's new president. Although the anecdote is passed along in a lighthearted manner, its popularity with the Irish Catholic clergy of Boston

and, one suspects, with O'Connell when he was alive, is revealing and reflects their continuing need to reassure themselves that the gap between them and the Yankee community was closing.

O'Connell's insecurity and ambivalence was also reinforced by the wider social and economic environment in which he moved. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Boston was still a community characterized by what one historian has described as "virtual apartheid."⁴³ It was a city in which most of the important and respected institutions or activities seemed to Catholics to be dominated by a sometimes hostile, nearly always patronizing, non-Catholic elite. The banks, the professions, and the major businesses were largely preserves of the Protestant minority. The Chamber of Commerce in 1908, for example, with over a thousand members, had fewer than twenty Catholics enrolled, and as late as 1929 had not a single Irishman in an important office.⁴⁴ Catholics were generally massed in lower economic occupations and were only just beginning, with great difficulty, to develop their own elite. Upward social and economic mobility was slow, and as late as World War I it was not unknown for positions in banks and retail establishments advertised in newspapers to stipulate that "Protestants are preferred": blatant evidence of what was probably a much wider pattern of covert discrimination.⁴⁵

Despite this, O'Connell continued to be optimistic, a perception reinforced by the repeated reassurances of his Brahmin allies. But then in the years immediately surrounding World War I, this optimism suffered a series of painful setbacks, leaving the prelate with lower expectations for religious and racial harmony. The process of disillusionment was gradual, rooted in the growing movement for local reform, much of it led by the very Yankees whom the Cardinal had been so assiduously courting. He viewed their efforts as simple ruses to restrict the power of the Catholic church and thereafter became quite cynical about the true feelings of the Yankee establishment. But no issue had a more dramatic impact on this transformation than the Sectarian Amendment. Originally voted out by a legislative committee in 1914, it called for an amendment to the state constitution which would make unconstitutional further state support of sectarian institutions. O'Connell viewed it as essentially anti-Catholic, designed to deny to them rights which had been given to Protestant organizations in the past and was initially relieved when the bill was easily defeated on the House floor.

In 1915, however, the hitherto disreputable anti-Catholic hostility of the previous year metamorphosed into a more credible and more popular attack on what the cardinal believed to be the interests of the church. The Sectarian Amendment was again resurrected, but this time with the support of a host of respectable individuals and groups, most notably Bishop William Lawrence, head of the state's Episcopal church, and his cousin, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University. After several public hearings which were witnessed by thousands of supporters and opponents, the amendment now labeled the Batchiller was again favorably reported out by the committee, and

quite suddenly the church found itself doing battle not with religious zealots whose bigotry could easily be dismissed, but with some prominent groups in the Brahmin establishment. Within a year, it was law and the cardinal who had originally dismissed its proponents as a “vicious group of bigots,” suddenly believed that he had underestimated the depth of prejudice among non-Catholics and the shallowness of his Brahmin allies.⁴⁶

He reacted by becoming more of the “Boston Bullyboy,” revealing that he had more in common with the James Michael Curleys of the world than he would probably have liked to admit. In April of 1916, for example, he wrote in *The Pilot* an anonymous review of the recently published autobiography of Charles Francis Adams. In it, much of the frustration of recent years and the hidden hostility of a lifetime exploded into a bitter attack on Adams in particular, and on Yankees in general:

The autobiography of Charles F. Adams is a dreary story of utter failure. . . the mystery is why he took the pains to write a book about it at all. That can only be explained by the same curious puritan conceit about himself, self-centered and self-conscious which seems to be the outstanding trait of all typical Bostonians of puritan spokesmen like Eliot. . . the conceit is pathetic, it is also insane.

But in one sense the book is worth reading. It reveals from within what we have clearly seen from without. Family pride blown onto a balloon filled with cold air — that is the chief tradition exhibited by this typical example of the Boston pedigree. . . He says his home life as a child was a dreary, bleak and barren one. . . In a word it was puritanical and no function could be sociable.

The wonder is psychological and physiological that there were any children at all in puritan homes.⁴⁷

Although this personal attack on Adams was anonymous, O’Connell was not afraid to make his bitterness public. In an address before the annual Diocesan Federation Meeting in reference to the Sectarian Amendment, he sought to prod the membership into a belligerent public posture:

We shall stand just where we are for what belongs to us. Not a hair breadths less shall we take, and we demand not a shade more. All the insults, threats and billingsgate to which these people resort will only serve to show that as is not unusual, we are welcome to fight and work for this country, but we are not supposed to ask for our legitimate rights. . . But I repeat, all this talk is merely a cloak. They are covering up the real point; that they want everything, including what is yours, for themselves alone. According to their view, you may work in their sewers or mills but must never hope that your children will take their honorable share of civic life.⁴⁸

In conclusion, by the end of the decade, it was apparent that the cardinal had abandoned much of his early enthusiasm. He had begun his career as

archbishop with a deep personal commitment to help define a new and equal partnership between an emerging Catholic majority and the Protestant establishment. This goal had two major variables which would ultimately frustrate his ambition. First of all, he needed the cooperation of the Catholic community, particularly influential Irish political leaders. For although O'Connell saw himself as an ambassador of the state's Catholic community, he was also dedicated to the principle of separation of church and state and unwilling and unable to act directly. So he tried to lead, through example and by persuasion, cautiously venturing into the political process only when he was convinced that the interests of the church were under attack. Unfortunately for him, his vision of a conservative partnership between Catholic and Protestant elite had little appeal to the faithful, who after years of discrimination, were more interested in real or symbolic revenge and flocked to leaders like Curley.

Secondly, O'Connell's vision of a partnership failed because it assumed that Massachusetts' native elite was ready to welcome the Catholic, an assumption which during his first decade and a half as archbishop was steadily eroded both on a personal and public level. For the balance of his life, there is no evidence that he abandoned his ambition. However, out of frustration or sheer disgust with both parties, it became less of a pressing issue with him. As a public figure, he continued to set what he believed to be a compelling personal example of restrained respectability, but by 1920 he had few illusions about who was following him.

NOTES

1. Jack Alexander, "The Cardinal and Cold Roast Boston," *Saturday Evening Post*, 4 October 1941, and Kate Sargent, "Catholicism in Massachusetts," *The Forum*, 75 (May, 1925).
2. Heywood Broun, "It Seems to Heywood Broun," *Nation*, 2 October 1929, p. 345.
3. Conversation with John Kenneth Galbraith, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Buzzards Bay, Ma., fall of 1977.
4. Cardinal William O'Connell, *Sermons and Addresses*, 11 vols. (Boston 1915-1938), 4:27.
5. *Boston Journal*, 1 December 1909.
6. *Congregationalists*, 7 April 1906.
7. Joseph Gerard Brennan, *The Education of a Prejudiced Man* (New York, 1977), pp. 38-42.
8. Dorothy G. Wayman, *Cardinal O'Connell of Boston* (New York, 1955), p. 109 and undated and unsigned editorial, *Pilot File*, Boston Chancery Archives, Brighton, Ma.

9. O'Connell to his publisher regarding publication of his early correspondence, Uncatalogued Letters, Boston Chancery Archives.
10. Letter from James Gaffey, author of "Changing of the Guard," *Catholic Historical Review*, 12 June 1977 to the author.
11. Marie Fidelis of Jesus O. C. D. Prioress to Right Reverend Francis Sexton, Williams File, Boston Chancery Archives.
12. Archbishop Williams, "Golden Jubilee Speech," 1895, quoted in Mother Superior Augustine, "Archbishop Williams," Williams File, Boston Chancery Archives.
13. Donna Merwick, *Boston Priests, 1848-1910* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 69.
14. Cardinal William Henry O'Connell, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Boston, 1934), p. 38.
15. O'Connell, *Sermons and Addresses*, 3:430-432.
16. Gaffey, "Changing of the Guard," *Catholic Historical Review*, 59:225.
17. William V. Shannon, "Shamrocks and Shillelaghs; The Phenomenon of the Ethnic Mayors in Boston Politics," lecture at John F. Kennedy Library, Columbia Point, Boston, 16 September 1980.
18. According to John Deedy, "William Henry O'Connell: The Prince of Yesterday's Prototypes," *The Critic* 35 (1977): 54-61, this is why St. Paul's in Worcester "today a cathedral church in a separate diocese — sits on a side street." There was an available site on a major thoroughfare but Williams did not wish to arouse anti-Catholic passions. "Even so," states Deedy, "construction of St. Paul's created a real estate panic among nearby Worcester Yankees in 1866."
19. Joseph F. Dineen, *The Purple Shamrock* (New York, 1949).
20. *Boston Transcript*, 31 October 1908 and *Cambridge Tribune*, 15 August 1908.
21. Alexander, "Cardinal and Cold Roast Boston," *Saturday Evening Post*, 4 October 1941.
22. Conversation with Joseph Finnegan, Fall of 1981.
23. Alexander, "Cardinal and Cold Roast Boston," *Saturday Evening Post*, 4 October 1941.
24. *Boston Globe*, 9 November 1980.
25. The Staley School of the Spoken Word was an unaccredited institution which gave instruction in public speaking. Curley was its most famous graduate. *Boston Journal*, 21 January 1914.
26. Shannon, "Shamrocks and Shillelaghs," Kennedy Library, 16 September 1980.
27. *Boston Globe*, 15 December 1930 and Charles J. V. Murphy, "Pope of New England: A Portrait of a Cardinal," *Outlook and Independent*, 23 October 1929, p. 319.
28. *Boston Pilot*, 21 February 1918.
29. Reverend P. J. Waters to Dr. Richard J. Haberlin, 7 April 1919. St. John's Seminary File, Boston Chancery Archives.
30. Trout, *The Great Depression and the New Deal*, p. 260.
31. Conversation with Monsignor Joseph Lally, S. J., Washington, D. C., summer of 1977.

32. Deedy quotes a letter from Francis X. Curley, 13 February 1975. Deedy; "Prince of Yesterday," *Critic*, p. 95.
33. O'Connell, *Sermons and Addresses*, 3:121-139.
34. *Boston Transcript*, 12 August 1908.
35. Ibid.
36. Joseph E. Garland, *Boston's North Shore* (Boston, 1978).
37. Ibid., p. 335.
38. *Boston Herald*, 16 August 1908.
39. *Boston Post*, 15 March 1910.
40. Merwick, *Boston Priests*, p. 100.
41. Wayman, *Cardinal O'Connell of Boston*, pp. 243-245.
42. Ibid., p. 249.
43. Trout, *The Great Depression and the New Deal*, p. 16.
44. Ibid.
45. *Boston Globe*, 30 January 1916.
46. Ibid., 9 November 1980.
47. The review was written in the Cardinal's script and then appeared in a *Pilot* editorial dated 1 April 1916. O'Connell's Personal File, Boston Chancery Archives.
48. O'Connell, *Sermons and Addresses*, 5:26-27.