

John Boyle O'Reilly 1844-1890

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Poet, novelist, and editor, born at Douth Castle, Drogheda, Ireland, 24 June, 1844; died at Hull, Massachusetts, 10 August, 1890; second son of William David O'Reilly and Eliza Boyle. He attended the National School, conducted by his father, and was employed successively as printer on the "Drogheda Argus", and on the staff of "The Guardian", Preston, England; he afterwards became a trooper in the Tenth Hussars. Entering actively in the Fenian movement, believing in his inexperience that Ireland's grievances could be redressed only by physical force, he was betrayed to the authorities and duly court-martialled. On account of his extreme youth, his life sentence was commuted to twenty years' penal servitude in Australia. Later study of his country's cause made him before long an earnest advocate of constitutional agitation as the only way to Irish Home Rule. In 1869, O'Reilly escaped from Australia, with the assistance of the captain of a whaling barque from New Bedford, Massachusetts. In 1870, he became editor of "The Pilot", Boston, and from 1876 until his death in 1890 he was also part proprietor, being associated with Archbishop Williams of Boston. His books include four volumes of poems: "Songs of the Southern Seas", "Songs, Legends, and Ballads", "The Statues in the Block", and "In Bohemia"; a novel, "Moondyne", based on his Australian experiences; his collaboration in another novel, "The King's Men", and "Athletics and Manly Sport". A sincere Catholic, his great influence, used lavishly in forwarding the interests of younger Catholics destined to special careers, and in lifting up the lowly without regard to any claim but their need, was for twenty years a valuable factor in Catholic progress in America. He was married in 1872 to Mary Murphy, in Boston, who died in 1897. Their four daughters survive them.

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The Massachusetts State Board of the Ancient Order of Hibernians conducts a memorial exercise on the third Saturday in June each year at his gravesite in Holyhood Cemetery in Brookline, MA near Chestnut Hill.