



Frederick Douglass in Ireland: The Black O'Connell'

Laurence Fenton

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‘When we strove to blot out the stain of slavery and advance the rights of man,’ President Obama declared in Dublin in 2011, ‘we found common cause with your struggle against oppression. Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave and our great abolitionist, forged an unlikely friendship right here in Dublin with your great liberator, Daniel O’Connell.’ Frederick Douglass arrived in Ireland in the summer of 1845, the start of a two-year lecture tour of Britain and Ireland to champion freedom from slavery. He had been advised to leave America after the publication of his incendiary attack on slavery, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Douglass spent four transformative months in Ireland, filling halls with eloquent denunciations of slavery and causing controversy with graphic descriptions of slaves being tortured. He also shared a stage with Daniel O’Connell and took the pledge from the ‘apostle of temperance’ Fr Mathew. Douglass delighted in the openness with which he was received, but was shocked at the poverty he encountered. This compelling account of the celebrated escaped slave’s tour of Ireland combines a unique insight into the formative years of one of the great figures of nineteenth-century America with a vivid portrait of a country on the brink of famine.

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