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## The Courtship of John Rooney and Katharine Cusack, 1887–93: Obligations and Marriage Ideals in Irish-American New England

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, clergy and representatives of the Boston archdiocese repeatedly expressed their dismay with what they perceived as an overwhelming number of unmarried Irish-American Catholic adults. In 1901, Rev. Fr. Thomas Scully of St. Mary's Church in Cambridge proposed a "Bachelor Tax" of twenty-five dollars a year on all unmarried men between ages twenty-five and thirty-five, in addition to a fifty-dollar one-time fee for single men over thirty-five. "After that age," the *Boston Globe* reported, "they will be exempt from the tax, as the priest claims no woman would care to marry them then."<sup>1</sup>

The *Boston Pilot*, the archdiocesan newspaper, went further, focusing on parent-child relations and marriage. According to the fictitious middle-class female moralists of the *Pilot's* "In the Family Sitting Room" column, the devotion of adult Irish-American children to their parents and a concern with property accumulation wrongly kept them at home with mother long after they should have married. They described one hypothetical and typical family thus:

But when the mother's ambitions of community competence had been achieved they had all apparently been wedded to the routine. It is hardly in nature that the man should not break away some day; but the daughters, with wills weakened for want of exercise and personal responsibility; children in all things but their occupations—what remains for them? Does the property by which they will live, by and by, when they all past [*sic*] labor[,] represent the best investment? Is a life that has missed the common womanly joys, even if it has also escaped the common sorrows, the happiest in retrospect?<sup>2</sup>

Such complaints indicate that, although church representatives believed that marriage satisfied natural male and female desires to marry and establish house-

1. *Boston Globe*, 19 April 1901.
2. *Boston Pilot*, 30 January 1904.

holds, many young Irish-American men and women of Boston apparently did not view marriage as a necessity. Indeed, they ranked it behind acquiring property and homes for their parents. Boston clergy understood these attitudes as little more than keeping up with the neighbors. The strength of adult childrens' tolerance for or acceptance of prolonged adolescence prompted the clergy and their allies in print to shame younger Irish Americans into accepting the virtues of wedded bliss and domesticity.

The *Pilot's* attitudes toward Irish-American households reflected the archdiocese's larger effort to encourage marriage as a means to changing gender roles and raising class aspirations.<sup>3</sup> As Colleen McDonnell's study of American Catholic manhood reveals, local clergy—as a means to ensure the continued stability of the institutional church—deliberately inculcated in Irish-American men an association between manhood and notions of male household leadership, frugality, and increased religiosity. This undertaking involved changing the mindsets of both Irish Catholic men and women, transforming them into “true Catholic” men and women. “True Catholic” men would leave behind the world of the working-class saloon, with its resemblance to sex-segregated Irish culture, and see the ostensibly middle-class home as a place of refuge and responsibility. As Irish culture did not proscribe women's labor, the local church representatives faced a real challenge in its dealings with both men and women.<sup>4</sup>

American Catholic authorities, like native-born white American Protestants, feared bachelors and spinsters as harbingers of instability in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Yet unlike other Americans' negative reactions to the perceived dip in the marriage rate that accompanied the movement of young people from the countryside to the cities, such Catholic periodicals as the *Pilot* directed their fears specifically to an audience of Irish descent. In fact, whether Irish factors played the primary role in Irish-American marriage patterns is unclear. Historical literature on the American Irish treats their late age-at-marriage or avoidance of the institution as a uniquely Irish phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> Yet the Irish

3. Paula Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 56, 79–81.

4. See: Colleen McDannell, “‘True Men as We Need Them’: Catholicism and the Irish-American Male,” *American Studies*, 27 (Fall 1986), 21. See also: Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 63; Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 66, 69, 96–98.

5. Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 3–4.

6. Two key works devoted to Irish women immigrants in the United States pay particular attention to what role Irish family forms and customs played in Irish-American marriage patterns. See Diner, pp. 1–29, 44–49, and Janet Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885–1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), pp. 9–42.

in urban America delayed their weddings in similar fashion to other immigrant groups or native-born whites living in cities.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that their marriage patterns are perhaps not explained by Irish culture alone, particularly in reference to the stem-family forms that arose after the Famine and which encouraged wedded unions for only one son and one daughter in a given family.<sup>8</sup> For that matter, more recent scholarship has challenged the prevalence of the stem family among the nineteenth-century Irish and, implicitly, its undergirding Irish cultural interpretations of Irish-American marriage practices.<sup>9</sup>

What may be exceptionally Irish about Irish-American marriage mores might arise less from a culture of postfamine Irish stem-families than from American Catholic responses to urban Irish Americans' delayed nuptials and Irish-American men and women's corresponding reactions to church pressures. Irish influences shaped the church in America. Prior to the Famine, the Irish were nominally Catholic, but during the postfamine Devotional Revolution their

7. Timothy Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy of Ireland, 1850–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 224–25. On Italians and delayed marriage, see Nancy S. Lansdale and Stewart E. Tolnay, "Generation, Ethnicity, and Marriage: Historical Patterns in the Northern United States," *Demography*, 30 (February 1993), 113, 118.

8. Diner and Nolan based their analyses of Irish-American and Irish reluctance to marry on seminal works establishing the importance of the stem-family model in Ireland, including Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940); K. H. Connell, "Peasant Marriage in Ireland: Its Structure and Development since the Famine," *Economic History Review*, 14, 3 (1962), 502–23; and K. H. Connell, *Irish Peasant Society: Four Historical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Nolan's work is also indebted to Robert E. Kennedy, Jr., *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage, and Fertility* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). According to K. H. Connell, stem families arose after the Famine, when parents became reluctant to subdivide and distribute land to multiple children, as commonly done before the blight. In stem families, the eldest son inherited land and, thus, achieved the means to marry. His wife's dowry allowed one of his sisters to wed. The married son, his wife, and their children lived in the household and took care of any living parents or grandparents, and thus stem-family households looked like multi-generation couple-households. Other siblings of the married son received neither land nor dowry, and, unable to marry, often emigrated.

9. Later works discuss the preponderance of alternatives to stem families and patrilineal inheritance practices. See: Donna Birdwell-Pheasant, "The Early Twentieth-Century Irish Stem Family: A Case From County Kerry" in *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies*, ed. Marilyn Silverman and P. H. Gulliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 208–09; Donna Birdwell-Pheasant, "Irish Households in the Early Twentieth Century: Culture, Class, and Historical Contingency," *Journal of Family History*, 18 (1993), 32; David Fitzpatrick, "Irish Farming Families Before the First World War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (April, 1983): 339–74; Anne O'Dowd, "Women in Rural Ireland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries—How the Daughters, Wives, and Sisters of Small Farmers and Landless Labourers Fared," *Rural History*, 5 (1994), 175–78; Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish*, pp. 17, 85, 146, 164–165; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Irish Economic History, 1880–1925* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 165.

religiosity markedly increased. Irish emigrants exported their brand of Catholicism to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, changing even the lives of those who had left Ireland before or during the Famine.<sup>10</sup> The transformed Catholic church played a central and daily role in the lives of Irish Americans, including young Irish Americans courting and contemplating matrimony. Scholars' focuses on delayed nuptials have ignored whether real people actually wrestled with the prospect of marriage. Did adult children of Irish immigrants perceive their peers', or their own, reluctances to walk down the aisle as a problem? If so, was it an "Irish problem" born of changes in family forms after the Famine, or did they react to more immediate forces? Most important, if Irish Americans were so opposed to marrying, how do we explain how any of them actually decided to wed? It is impossible to answer the question of what prompted Irish Americans to postpone marriage definitively. It does seem clear, however, that local Catholic representatives' views on marriage tempered a reluctance to tie the knot.

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The extensive courtship letters of John A. Rooney and Katharine Cusack—some 190 letters in a correspondence of a type that has rarely survived, now held by the Schlesinger Library at Harvard—make possible an intimate look into the factors that shaped the courtship and eventual marriage of two adult children of Irish immigrants in the streetcar suburbs of Boston. Although many American-born offspring of immigrants might have delayed marriage in order to care for parents, the Rooney-Cusack letters offer insight into how a second-generation couple balanced a mother's insistence that the couple first save six thousand dollars with John Rooney's disdain for "money grubbing," and also with local Catholic authorities' encouragements that adult Irish Americans marry and embrace middle-class life.

The letters bring into relief how a man and woman living in an Irish-American Catholic community responded to the local church's pressures to marry, notwithstanding the problems posed to their relationship by parental needs. As the letters show, the Boston Irish couple courted and married, despite Katharine Cusack's extreme sense of responsibility to her widowed, Irish-born mother, and John Rooney's radical politics. By marrying, the couple moved closer to the archdiocese's prescription for complying with American middle-class family and gender roles. Cusack turned the bonds of parent-child obligation, so problematic to the *Pilot*, into a channel to upward mobility through marriage by instilling in Rooney a sense that her caring for her mother constituted a form of social re-

10. Emmet Larkin, *The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism* (1976; Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1997), pp. 83–85.

sponsibility. Katharine Cusack mobilized her “duty” to her mother as the means to creating a marriage that not only embodied the church’s calls for respectability and “true Catholic” manhood and womanhood, but also guaranteed her mother’s financial security. She justified supporting her mother’s household at the expense of immediate marriage by adhering to a clearly articulated sense of “duty.” The successful fulfillment of Katharine Cusack’s familial obligation made her mother, Hannah Cusack, very resistant to John Rooney’s intentions. Katharine Cusack complied with her mother’s insistence on her devotion until she came to see the virtue in the *Pilot’s* view of marriage and gender. A lesson in love from the *Pilot’s* Katherine Conway convinced Cusack that if she did not relent to romantic love and marriage she would render herself unwomanly. In order to balance the competing demands of her mother with her desire to become a proper Catholic woman, Katharine Cusack convinced John Rooney to help her fit social respectability, economic security, and recommended Catholic gender roles to Hannah Cusack’s unbending claim that she constituted her daughter’s primary concern. The couple accommodated Hannah Cusack’s insistence of her daughter’s “duty”—and in doing so, modified it in order to assume new Catholic class, gender, and family identities realized through marriage.

As many Boston Irish—or other upwardly mobile Catholics, for that matter—understood, fulfilling the local church’s prescription for appropriate family, marriage, and gender norms required that a man and woman have the means to a home in which to create a nuclear-family household. That apparently demanded the wages of more than two persons. The ups and downs of the late-nineteenth-century United States economy regulated aspirations to home ownership. By 1890 in Boston, only 10 percent of Irish immigrants held white-collar positions compared to 40 percent of the second-generation Irish.<sup>11</sup> Adult Irish-American children, therefore, should have had the means to marry.

Yet the depressions of the late nineteenth century, which David N. Doyle cites as factors inhibiting Irish-American’s greater economic mobility, likely diminished the marriage prospects of both skilled and unskilled urbanites. Between 1880 and 1920, the Irish gained “economic parity” with native-born whites, but the frequent depressions rendered such gains fitful.<sup>12</sup> In Boston, the depressions of 1873, the mid-1880s, and of 1893 slowed the booming housing market, which may have encouraged adult children of any ethnicity to postpone marriage and support their parents’ households. Living with parents, as the *Pilot* admitted,

11. Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 496.

12. David Noel Doyle, *Irish Americans: Native Rights and National Empires: The Structure, Divisions, and Attitudes of the Catholic Minority in the Decade of Expansion, 1891–1901* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), pp. 46–48.

served as a strategy for acquiring and maintaining property. Its disapproval was in keeping with what Paula Kane describes as the Boston clergy's efforts to promote both upward mobility and constrained materialism as Irish-Americans made social and economic strides. Adult Irish-American children's loyalties to parents and their strategies for property accumulation, or a toehold on the middle-class, thwarted the local church's scheme.<sup>13</sup>

Personal and financial losses in this period rendered Katharine Cusack's economic support of her mother essential. When the letters commenced in June 1887, Katharine Cusack, age twenty, worked in Boston as a stenographer for the advertising executive Lorin F. Deland. Despite being fortunate enough to have this skilled position, events outside of Cusack's control likely forced it upon her.<sup>14</sup> Until her father's death in 1884, Katharine Cusack and her family lived a relatively stable existence in Roxbury, one of Boston's streetcar suburbs. Her father, a slater named Matthew, was born in Ireland and settled in Boston around 1869 with his wife Hannah (née Hearn) and a four-year-old daughter named Susan. They likely arrived from the industrial city of Lawrence, the site of what Cusack called the family "homestead." From 1869 until 1883, Matthew Cusack's fortunes neither waxed nor waned substantially enough to warrant frequent moves. During all of those years the Cusacks lived at 30 King Street in Dorchester, relocating once in 1884. This move likely reflected unexpected changes. As of 1880, Hannah and Matthew Cusack lived with five of the seven children Hannah Cusack bore.<sup>15</sup> Soon after the letters between Katharine Cusack and John Rooney began, however, Cusack lost her sister Mary. John Cusack, a brother, died at age eight in May 1882. Matthew Cusack—like his wife, a survivor of the Famine—died on December 17, 1884. By 1888, the diminished Cusack household consisted of Katharine and her mother Hannah, in addition to fourteen-year-old Andrew Cusack. Susan, a married sister, passed away in 1890. By the time Cusack and Rooney began their courtship, she had already made the transition from schoolgirl, to bereaved daughter and sister, to her family's sole financial support.<sup>16</sup>

13. Kane, pp. 56–57, 81, 85–89, 104–05.

14. Katharine Cusack's approximate age is derived from the Manuscript Population Schedules, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Records of the Bureau of the Census (National Archives, Washington, DC). The first letter in the collection is dated 14 June 1887; see Katharine Cusack (hereafter KC) to John A. Rooney (hereafter JR), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Katharine (Cusack) and John A. Rooney Papers, 1887–1893, file 1.

15. Twelfth Census; "Return of Death" (Hannah Cusack, Boston), filed 17 July 1905, FamilySearch.org; KC to JR, 14 June 1887, file 1; *Boston City Directory* (1869–1884); Manuscript Population Schedules, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; and, KC to JR, 5 October 1891, file 6.

16. Manuscript Population Schedules, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; KC to JR, 11 November 1892, file 7; Twelfth Census; KC to JR, 23 September 1890, file 5;

Cusack's future husband, John Rooney, age twenty-two in 1887, came from a more stable family in Hyde Park. Rooney was the fourth of five children and the second son of parents born in Ireland. His family had the means to send him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but John Rooney left his studies in 1889 to pursue a career as an independent contractor. Census schedules indicate that Rooney's father, Patrick, was a laborer and a milkman, but contextual evidence from the letters suggest that he also had experience in construction.<sup>17</sup> Like Katharine Cusack's parents, Catherine and Patrick Rooney were born in Ireland; Patrick Rooney fled postfamine Ireland in 1853.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Cusack's family, however, Rooney's grew in the 1880s. Siblings Mame and Patrick had children by 1889. When not boarding in Cambridge, John Rooney lived in Hyde Park with his parents; sisters Maggie, Katie, and Mame; and a brother-in-law named Jim. Good health contributed to the family's prosperity.<sup>19</sup>

Ostensibly of similar class status until Matthew Cusack's death, Katharine Cusack and John Rooney possessed a common interest in ideas and learning. Although Cusack could not go to college, she envisioned sending her daughters to Wellesley or Radcliffe.<sup>20</sup> The letters show that the couple kept abreast of important books and speakers visiting the Boston area. Cusack belonged to a "Shakespeare Girls" club and to a young women's Catholic reading circle. Both successfully published small essays and poems in local periodicals.<sup>21</sup>

John Rooney's portion of the correspondence indicates his strong commitment to reform politics and progressive thinkers and writers, and he tried to instill this passion in Katharine Cusack. Taken with the Social Gospel and humanitarianism, the couple read Edward Bellamy, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and George Eliot.<sup>22</sup> Rooney belonged to the Tolstoi Club in Boston

*Boston Death Index* (1881, 1884, 1887), Boston Public Library; KC to JR, 5 October, 1890, 14 October 1890, file 5.

17. Twelfth Census; KC to JR, 29 March 1889, file 4; Tenth Census; JR to KC, n.d., file 10; JR to KC, 5 October 1890, file 5.

18. Manuscript Population Schedules, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910.

19. Thirteenth Census; KC to JR, 15 March 1889, file 3; JR to KC, 25 July 1889, file 4; KC to JR, 25 June 1888, file 2; JR to KC, 18 June 1889, file 3; KC to JR, 5 October 1888, file 2; "Little Kittie" to "Uncle Johnnie," 25 January 1892, file 7; JR to KC, 13 August 1889, file 4.

20. KC to JR, 3 November 1889, file 4.

21. JR to KC, 23 January 1889, KC to JR, 2 May 1889, file 3; KC to JR, 11 January 1890, KC to JR, 4 February 1890, file 5; KC to JR, 10 June 1891, file 6; KC to JR, 25 January 1892, file 7. Reference to publications appears in KC to JR, 25 January 1889, file 3.

22. KC to JR, 11 April 1889, KC to JR, 7 June 1889, file 3; KC to JR, 23 July 1889, JR to KC, 25 July 1889, KC to JR, 31 July 1889, KC to JR, 3 December 1889, file 4; KC to JR, 7 July 1890, JR to KC, 5 October 1890, file 5; JR to KC, 19 February 1892, file 7; KC to JR, n.d., file 9; JR to KC, 1 December [?], JR to KC, 10 April [?], JR to KC, n.d., file 10.

and considered the Russian writer “the most wonderful man” and felt that “his character and writings will effect the conditions of mankind.”<sup>23</sup> The poverty in the streets of Boston haunted Rooney and drove him to seek the causes of so much misery. The depths of his disdain for mere charity led to his leaving the Tolstoi Club, which he claimed sought only the effects and not the causes of deprivation in Boston.<sup>24</sup> What Mrs. Cusack thought of John Rooney and his enthusiasm for Tolstoy’s admonitions against materialism is not revealed. Given her demand that Rooney and her daughter obtain six thousand dollars before they marry, it is not likely that she approved of Rooney’s teaching her daughter the virtues of simple living and the evils of money, when she herself faced diminished economic prospects were her daughter to marry the idealistic John Rooney.

Other forces in Cusack’s life spoke to the benefits of bourgeois security. Cusack’s employer, Lorin F. Deland, also a Harvard football coach, along with his wife, the author Margaret Deland, incorporated Cusack into their creative endeavors. As Deland’s stenographer, Cusack, for instance, typed the manuscripts or serialized versions of Margaret Deland’s *Florida Days* (1889), *Philip and His Wife* (1894), and *Sidney* (1890). In addition to discussing with Margaret a budding controversy centered on the not-yet-published novel *John Ward, Preacher* (1888) Cusack helped Lorin look for a new house in Dedham. Both Delands possessed a strong social conscience, and in this spirit they gladly took Cusack under their wings. The Delands also undoubtedly raised Cusack’s awareness of the benefits of wealth and culture. Privately, John Rooney considered Margaret Deland’s poetry vapid—but this did not stop Cusack from making numerous trips with the Deland family to their summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine.<sup>25</sup>

Margaret Deland possibly wanted Cusack to stand up to her mother and marry John Rooney despite Hannah Cusack’s objections. The novel *Sidney*, which Cusack typed before marrying John Rooney, bears a striking resemblance to the Cusack-Rooney courtship. Through such characters as John Paul and Katherine Townsend, the novel takes on the themes of duty and self-sacrifice, particularly in terms of adult children’s loyalties to widowed parents. Cusack typed the manuscript for the serialized version of the novel published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, although she never noted that the book’s themes affected her or resembled her own experience. At the very least, Cusack’s personal story might

23. JR to KC, n.d., file 10.

24. JR to KC, 25 December 1889, file 4; JR to KC, 26 November 1890, JR to KC, 28 October 1890, file 5.

25. John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 12–14; KC to JR, 14 July 1892, file 7; KC to JR, 11 April 1889, file 3; KC to JR, 10 June 1891, file 6; KC to JR, 4 February 1892, KC to JR, [?] July 1892, file 7; JR to KC, n.d., file 10; KC to JR, 3 November 1889, file 4; KC to JR, n.d., file 9; JR to KC, 4 August [?], file 10.

possibly have inspired Deland to write the tale as a form of inspirational self-help literature for others overburdened by parental obligation.<sup>26</sup>

Just as local Catholic spokespersons' fretting over the unmarried in their midst resembled concerns expressed among middle-class Americans in general, Cusack's and Rooney's interactions with the larger non-Catholic culture of Boston reflected their tendency to see the world through Catholic lenses. A local Catholic authority swayed Cusack in favor of romantic love and marriage. Furthermore, Cusack and Rooney took many of their moral cues from Catholic culture. Although both exposed to and featured in Boston's high literary world, Cusack favored Catholic novels and stories, because "I always find a moral from them that I can apply to myself and profit by. Those are the kind of stories I like to read. I am heartily sick of the love sick sentimental trash. I have had enough of them."<sup>27</sup>

John Rooney may have committed himself to a brand of Catholic social reform disapproved of by the larger church, but he was nevertheless a devout Catholic. For instance, he lectured fellow workers on the virtues of Rev. Edward McGlynn, who lamented American greed and who was excommunicated, in part, for championing the single-tax reforms and anti-poverty initiatives of Rooney's great hero, Henry George.<sup>28</sup> Rooney's belief in the triad of character, manhood, and Christianity resembled concerns held by others devoted to the Social Gospel, but Catholic influences also informed his fixations on greed:

I truly believe that this bowing down before the almighty dollar is practiced more in this country than in any other country under the sun. We are a nation of money grubbers. In place of teaching our youth the great moral truths of Christianity, and giving them the example of Christ the teacher, we engraft early in their minds the great necessity of acquiring wealth. "Get money if you can honestly my son; if not, then get it" is the position of people today.<sup>29</sup>

Rooney's derision of both greed and manhood defined in terms of pure wealth threatened to ruin his relationship with Katharine Cusack from the very start. His intentions toward Cusack promised to destroy the nature of the mother-

26. Margaret Deland, *Sidney* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890). The characters of John Paul and Katherine Townsend echo John Rooney and Katharine Cusack, but in many ways both resemble Cusack. The relationship between widower Mortimer Lee and his daughter, Sidney, also exhibits a duty relationship between parent and child that inhibits Sidney's ability to marry. See also Diana C. Reep, *Margaret Deland* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), pp. 27, 29–31.

27. KC to JR, 9 July 1889, file 2.

28. KC to JR, 1 September 1889, file 2; JR to KC, 9 December 1890, file 5; JR to KC, n.d., file 10; JR to KC, 19 January [?], file 10. On McGlynn and George, see Fred Nicklason, "Henry George: Social Gossamer," *American Quarterly*, 22, 3 (Autumn, 1970), 649–64.

29. JR to KC, 11 October 1889, file 4.

daughter relationship that made Katharine Cusack her mother's financial support and the means by which her brother Andrew could remain in school.

In order to either discourage Rooney, or to instill in him the drive to acquire enough money to support the entire Cusack family, Hannah and Katharine Cusack insisted that Rooney fulfill nearly impossible financial criteria before he could join their family. Katharine Cusack first made ambiguous reference to the requisite six thousand dollars in May of 1888. At that time she assured Rooney that he was on his way to making the money, "Even though it is in the dim future." In September of 1888, she cheered him on more emphatically. "Hurrah for the six thousand," she wrote after learning of a successful meeting between Rooney and an employer in Syracuse, New York.<sup>30</sup> Yet even before the demand for money becomes clear in the letters, Katharine Cusack made many efforts not only actively to disdain romance but also to keep Rooney at a manageable arm's length.

Katharine Cusack used what she called her "duty" to her mother to put distance between herself and John Rooney. She thought nothing of refusing Rooney's invitations if they interfered with her mother's needs. To placate Rooney's disappointment, Cusack called his attention to the higher purpose of self-sacrifice that informed her decisions. In order to keep John Rooney interested—despite the obstacle her mother's care presented to the success of the courtship—Cusack cited her "duty" to remind Rooney that their relationship should not supersede others' needs. By heeding Cusack's calls to delayed gratification, Rooney might himself become a better man, not to mention a man worthy of supporting Katharine Cusack, her brother, and her mother. In calling attention to her "duty," Cusack struck a balance between Rooney's growing interest in becoming a married man and Hannah Cusack's fear that Rooney might take away her daughter and financial support.

While Hannah Cusack's motivations are not made explicit in the letters, her behavior was perhaps recognizable to others in Irish-American families. Her domineering relationship with her daughter and her centrality in the household, in addition to Katharine Cusack's sense of duty to her mother, echoes themes in Irish-American fiction and Catholic moral guidebooks published in the latter nineteenth through early twentieth centuries.<sup>31</sup> The real-world influence of these themes is borne out by historical studies; Patricia Kelleher finds that Irish-American mothers in Chicago engaged in an Irish or Irish-American style of parenting in which mothers expected their adult children, especially sons, to

30. KC to JR, 18 May 1888, file 2 and KC to JR, 1 September 1888, file 2.

31. See Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: Irish-American Fiction from the 1760s to the 1980s* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), pp. 158–59.

live with them and to support them financially.<sup>32</sup> Timothy J. Meagher describes Irish-Americans in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Worcester, Massachusetts, whose strict distinctions between married and unmarried women entailed single daughters' entering the labor force in order to support their family members, particularly mothers whose own identities depended upon their not toiling outside of the home.<sup>33</sup>

In early May 1889, talk of marriage without the six thousand dollars prompted Hannah Cusack to refuse Rooney admittance to her home. Although Katharine Cusack would not disobey her mother, she disagreed that Rooney must be banished. She asked Rooney to refrain from visiting, as she was not "going to make myself feel so humiliated and ashamed (as I have felt) when I have seen any one who came to see me not treated with common courtesy in my own home." Angry with her mother, she continued, "If there was anything but selfish motives at the bottom of it, or if you deserved it it would not have been so bad." She also reassured Rooney that "I am sure everything will be all right in the end, and I will try and not make the 'end' too far off." Yet she did not oppose her mother's insistence that the couple save six thousand dollars if they wished to marry.<sup>34</sup>

Immediately after the May 1889 argument with Hannah Cusack, John Rooney attempted to convince Katharine Cusack that the two of them would triumph as a couple despite not having the money. In a draft written on the back of one of Katharine Cusack's letters soon after the quarrel, Rooney reasoned that

The first of your objections is a pecuniary one; that is the first on the other side. Strange isn't it? I know Kit your ambition is not for your self; but consider your happiness, also your health—for you know you are not as strong as you used to be. Pardon me if it is insolence but you know that I am terribly interested as I said Sunday night "we" can save money [crossed out: "and if that is what you really want"] "we" are strong [between lines wrote: "have 500.00 of that \$6000"] and under present conditions will have at least \$500.00 more. What is mine is yours, anytime at all time.<sup>35</sup>

Rooney also tried to persuade Cusack that he would be in Boston for at least the next few years, which would allow her to stand by her brother and remain near her mother. This approach must have seemed futile, because another draft Rooney composed on May 3, 1889, indicates that he yielded to reality. "I have

32. Patricia Kelleher, "Maternal Strategies: Irish Women's Headship of Families in Gilded Age Chicago," *Journal of Women's History*, 13, 2 (Summer, 2001), 95–96.

33. Timothy J. Meagher, "Sweet Good Mothers and Young Women Out in the World: The Roles of Irish American Women in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Worcester, Massachusetts," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 5, 3–4 (Summer–Fall, 1986), 325, 342.

34. KC to JR, 10 April 1889, file 3; and KC to JR 2 May 1889, file 3; JR to KC, 3 May 1889, file 3.

35. JR to KC, 3 May 1889, file 4.

thought a great deal of our talk on Sunday night,” he wrote, “and while I recognize and respect your feelings in regard to your objections [beneath “objections” he crossed out “mother”] I cannot see naming a day in the near future when you will be my wife, yet I cannot see as they are altogether tenable.”<sup>36</sup>

To some, John Rooney might have seemed like a wonderful prospective son-in-law. Yet his hatred of stinginess and greed did not likely endear him to the bereaved Mrs. Hannah Cusack. Indeed, one wonders if she set the financial bar for the wedding so high precisely to sway him from his radical Catholic principles and usher him toward a greater appreciation for property accumulation and wealth. Or, perhaps she simply wanted to make the union impossible. For that matter, Rooney’s potential financial success also foretold Katharine Cusack’s probable separation from her family, her mother in particular. Katharine Cusack also rejected this outcome. She expressed concern when Rooney decided to leave the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in March 1889 in hopes of starting a contracting business with his brother. Rooney’s work bespoke greater economic promise, but it also involved travel to distant cities. John Rooney and Hannah Cusack quarreled, but Katharine Cusack’s own devotion to her mother meant that she could not always be Rooney’s champion.<sup>37</sup>

Cusack’s extended family believed that she must remain true to her mother; yet even as she supported her, Cusack herself indicates that she believed her mother’s treatment of John Rooney went too far. In a letter from September 1889, which Cusack put off mailing for days because it was so “mean,” she expressed to Rooney:

Oh, John, I wish I could say—“come and see me”—but the outlook to my eyes is very discouraging as ever. If you should come to my house, I should be completely ignored [crossed out: “for a week”] afterwards and I could not be happy without a pleasant home life at [illegible] cost to myself. Perhaps some girls, and the thought may come to you, would find happiness in the thought that they had seen you, to make up for the unpleasantness afterwards. But I have come to the conclusion that I must be a sort of stray sheep, different from most girls in a very aggravating way. My aunts are visiting us, and they are staunch champions of mine. Almost every day I hear some new story and the feeling is even stranger than I had any idea of. You will say this letter is meaner than the one on Saturday, but those are my feelings, and perhaps they look worse on paper than if told to you.<sup>38</sup>

Cusack ended this and another letter written that day “With love.” This is the first time she mentions love on paper. It is easy to speculate that she did so to keep Rooney from seeking women who might put thoughts of him over that of their

36. JR to KC, 3 May 1889, file 4.

37. KC to JR, 29 March 1889, file 4.

38. KC to JR, 25 September 1889, file 4.

own mothers. In October 1889, Cusack updated Rooney: “Everything is as usual at home, so no new developments in the ‘case.’”<sup>39</sup> Cusack made sure that John Rooney sent his letters to her at work, and she often instructed him to meet her at various rail points in the greater Boston area.<sup>40</sup> Their relationship was not a secret, but Cusack calculated every way she could to keep Rooney and his letters out of her mother’s daily notice.

Rooney did not turn to other women. Rather, he used Cusack’s devotion to her mother as fodder for his own Catholic self-actualization. In Cusack’s self-sacrifice to her mother, he saw yet another model for how to put others before one’s own needs. Cusack played an active part in this transformation. By, in Cusack’s words, “sitting on the fence” when it came to Rooney’s proposal and by attributing her postponement to her sense of duty to her family, Cusack struck two related chords in John Rooney.<sup>41</sup> In staying true to her mother, she made the moral high road so clear to him that he could not abandon the relationship. This, in turn, appealed to Rooney’s belief in the virtues of self-sacrifice and his contempt for selfish individuals who toiled solely for monetary rewards and self-aggrandizement. A month after the dispute between Hannah Cusack and John Rooney in early May 1889, for example, he admitted that Katharine Cusack’s sense of familial obligation facilitated his wish to become a better human being. This is evident when Rooney remarked on Cusack’s daughterly devotion that

I cannot help saying God bless you Kit and strengthen you always to do what you consider as your duty, no matter what people may think. You have taught me a lesson which I shall not forget, and although selfish enough at the time not to see the justice of your position—I suppose because the application of the principle was going to strike home too hard to my own breast, yet now the mist of selfishness is partly, [*sic*] cleared from my eyes and I see the nobleness of your self-sacrificing spirit which does you credit. Though the world call you foolish, then will be one at last—let him suffer what he will—who knows the facts, and is now convinced of the paramount importance of duty.<sup>42</sup>

Cusack responded,

... Now that I know you consider one’s duty higher than one’s self I am content to take what comes.

I know I have made you suffer and it hurts me so to think I have. But let us remember that there is something higher and nobler than our own happiness to look for and in doing so we will be repaid.<sup>43</sup>

39. KC to JR, 3 October 1889, file 5.

40. KC to JR, 27 March 1888, file 2; KC to JR, 5 September 1889, file 5.

41. KC to JR, 28 November 1888, file 2.

42. JR to KC, 17 June 1889, file 3.

43. KC to JR, 21 June 1889, file 3.

Rooney's willingness to accept Cusack's terms bode well for continuing the courtship. On a practical level, it kept the marriage question at bay and, therefore, temporarily assuaged Hannah Cusack's anger. But it also gave the couple the opportunity to prove just how unselfish and good they both were. "True Catholic" women served as the muses for male dreams of Catholic respectability. Rooney may not have been a "true Catholic" man, but he was on the verge of bearing a very close resemblance to one.<sup>44</sup>

Marriage as a sign of adulthood grew among white middle-class men of all religions in the nineteenth-century Northeast.<sup>45</sup> For Irish Catholic men who accepted the Catholic church's similar construction of manhood, marriage signified moderate upward mobility, and a merging of the role of household head with greater piety. In Boston, this often meant making enough money to move to the suburbs and out of the urban male subcultures favored by Irish men. According to Colleen McDannell and Paula Kane, however, Catholic definitions of manhood did not include the larger American male obsessions with wealth and conspicuous consumption. Church representatives equated too much monetary success with betrayals to the less fortunate or with diminished piousness.<sup>46</sup> Rooney's politics encompassed this view. Yet celebrations of men's fiscal constraint did not bode well for acquiring enough means to support the Cusack family, depleted in financial resources in the wake of multiple family deaths. Rooney could continue to disdain greed—but he also had to aspire to some economic advancement. Thus, as Cusack sought to maintain her mother's support and her marriage prospects, she helped Rooney transition from a man enamored of anti-poverty schemes to a middle-class male provider. By encouraging Rooney's religiosity and fiscal restraint, Cusack kept open the possibility of marriage. In turn, she tempered the association Rooney made between Christian self-sacrifice and manliness.

In insisting on the importance of duty and the value of her mother's position, Katharine Cusack used Rooney's aspirations for marriage as leverage to inspire him to work harder and earn money, and thus, to fulfill both her mother's expectations of support and her own dreams of middle-class respectability. This meant that John Rooney would have to sacrifice some of his leftist Christian principles and strive for material things. To live up to the role of upright husband and provider, John Rooney decided to enter into a partnership with his brother, Patrick, and to acquire a quarry, with a plan to build a contracting busi-

44. McDannell, "True Men," 28.

45. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 115.

46. See: McDannell, "True Men," 29–31; Kane, pp. 81, 85–89.

ness during the suburban Boston house-building boom.<sup>47</sup> He wrote Cusack to say that he intended to go into business for himself. She replied, admitting the advice might not be welcome, that “As long as you intend to do that sooner or later, I should suggest sooner, provided you see your way perfectly clear.” Yet she still admonished him to perhaps wait a year, because “you are young and your whole life is before you. That’s my motto, too, to go slowly and surely in all things.”<sup>48</sup> Rooney, tired of taking things slow, instead worked long hours in the sun in order to make the endeavor successful.

Cusack’s unwillingness to make romantic love the motivating force behind her relationship with Rooney certainly spoke to just how far she was from middle-class standards. Her reluctance to embrace love is perhaps not surprising in light of her devotion to her mother. Yet it set her apart from native-born, middle-class white Americans who had been associating love with marriage since the early nineteenth century. Following her heart down the aisle would have left her mother in despair. Nonetheless, Cusack’s acceptance of love as a pressing reason for marriage spoke to her growing acceptance of middle-class, and archdiocesan, ideas of appropriate gender roles.<sup>49</sup>

Until February of 1890, Cusack only penned the word “love” when she feared that Hannah Cusack’s anger might drive John Rooney to other women. What she said to him in person cannot be known, but in February 1890 a lecture prompted an uninhibited expression of love for Rooney. She made her declaration after hearing the prominent Catholic author Katherine Conway explain the meaning of “ideal Christian womanhood.”<sup>50</sup> Conway joined the staff of the *Pilot* in 1883, and she is believed to have been the author of the “In the Family Sitting Room” series that cajoled young Irish Catholics to strive for marriage and domestic bliss. Although a professional writer and editor of the *Pilot* after John Boyle O’Reilly’s death in 1890, Conway never wavered in her stance that Catholic women should marry and not toil for money away from the home. Rather than becoming a wife and mother, Conway used her writings and professional status to thwart materialism with maternalism. Conway also served as president of the Roxbury Reading Circle, to which Katharine Cusack belonged.<sup>51</sup> After hearing Conway’s views, Cusack wrote to Rooney on February 4, 1890, that

47. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston (1870–1900)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 43.

48. KC to JR, 12 July 1889, file 4.

49. See: Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 7–9, 20, 28, 160–161; Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 31–35, 103–07.

50. Conway’s talk is also noted in the *Pilot*, 8 February 1890.

51. Kane, pp. 221–31.

Last Tuesday night Katherine Conway, the president of our Reading Circle, read an essay of her own on “Ideal Womanhood.” It was a fine thing. She is such a clever woman! I found myself after I had got to bed (which is an excellent place to do one’s thinking, by the way) comparing myself with what she said of an “Ideal Woman.” Needless to say what the conclusion was, but yet I can’t help feeling that her little seed fell on good ground, for I awoke the next morning full of good resolutions—”

After an interruption, Cusack gave Rooney an idea of what would someday bloom:

I was talking of Katharine Conway and her “Ideal Woman,” wasn’t I? Well, of one thing I am sure, that I am a better woman for loving you, John, and I want to tell you here, if I haven’t before, what a comfort it is to me to know that you care for me as you do. But time doesn’t look half as true on paper as it is, and let time tell the rest of the story.<sup>52</sup>

In Conway’s vision, the “ideal woman” married, strove to please husband and children, and accepted the domestic ideal. In contrast, many Irish-American Catholic women just like Cusack remained single and dominated the ranks of teachers, secretaries, nurses, and other pink-collar positions—often to support their parents. In short, they subordinated their passions, romantic or otherwise, to parental needs. And thus, in the eyes of the local Catholic commentators, their helping parents to see some economic mobility kept them from marriage, middle-class domesticity, and “true” womanhood.<sup>53</sup>

Accepting these ideals was difficult for a woman in Cusack’s position. Reflecting this, in the months preceding her meeting with Conway, Cusack distanced herself from romantic love; yet from the time she wrote this letter about Katherine Conway she freely told John Rooney she loved him. Only after Conway exposed her to the relationship among love, marriage, and ideal womanhood did Cusack begin to articulate her new attention to preparing to be John Rooney’s wife. Just as Katharine Cusack’s sense of duty helped John Rooney to see how he could become a better Catholic man, Katherine Conway showed Cusack that love and marriage paved the way to ideal Catholic womanhood.

Even as their wedding day approached, practical matters still stood in the way of complete realization of the gender and status roles associated with marriage. For one, the couple still needed money and a home. Rooney toiled diligently through 1891, and in early 1892 he traveled throughout the South with his work.<sup>54</sup> Whether or not Rooney actually accumulated six thousand dollars is not

52. KC to JR, 4 February 1890, file 5.

53. McDannell, “Catholic Domesticity,” 52.

54. KC to JR, 25 January 1892, KC to JR, 30 January 1892, KC to JR, 1 February 1892, KC to JR, 4 February 1892, KC to JR, 9 February 1892, KC to JR, 12 February 1892, KC to JR, 15 February 1892, KC to JR, 16 February 1892, JR to KC, 19 February 1892, file 7.

revealed in the letters, but during this period he or Cusack (or both) acquired the means to purchase land on which to build a house. On August 27, 1892, the Mt. Vernon Land Company issued to Katharine Cusack, not to John Rooney, a receipt for her first payment toward property sold for six hundred and thirty dollars.<sup>55</sup> The prospects of a new home apparently relieved the relationship of the sour tone set by Cusack's relationship with her mother. As of 1900, Hannah and Andrew Cusack resided with the married John and Katharine Rooney.

With this arrangement, Mrs. Cusack never had to live without her daughter. John Rooney apparently made enough money to support his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, wife, servant, and three children.<sup>56</sup> The marriage was not so difficult for Hannah Cusack to accept when it kept the family together and ensured the fulfillment of her economic needs. With the assurance of a home in 1892, Katharine Cusack's attitudes toward marriage turned to glee. Her discussions of the future lacked her usual reserve: "I have some ideas, too, about our house, but since I can't draw worth a cent, I'll have to explain them *personally* to my architect! We musn't get it too large; four rooms down stairs are too many, I think; it would cost too much to furnish; three is better, I think." Katharine Cusack's wedding, and the Cusack family's stable, middle-class future—in highly respectable West Roxbury—were now almost assured.<sup>57</sup>

Cusack's cajoling of Rooney into working harder helped to bring about this outcome. As Rooney labored, Cusack spent her summers, with female Irish-American stenographers and teachers of her social set, in the mountains near Princeton, Massachusetts and on Cape Cod. Cusack's employer, Lorin F. DeLand, sometimes gave Cusack extra money—fifty dollars in 1889—to ensure that she had the best vacation possible. Rooney must have been displeased when she wrote him, signing her name "Mrs. Kitty Kiley," about dancing with working-class "village beaux" near Mt. Wachuset. Always concerned for Rooney, after telling him all about the "elegant jag" she got on her nose while boating, she begged him to please not work too hard under the sun. Such hints at her lofty aspirations spurred Rooney onward and upward.<sup>58</sup>

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Despite the preoccupation with money in Cusack's letters to John Rooney, they should not necessarily be interpreted as coldhearted. They might also be under-

55. "Contract of Sale and Purchase, Mount Vernon Land Company, Boston, Massachusetts," 27 August 1893, Katharine (Cusack) and John A. Rooney Papers, 1887–1893, file 7.

56. Twelfth Census.

57. KC to JR, 9 February 1892, file 7. On the perceived status of Boston neighborhoods, see Alexander Van Hoffman, *Local Attachments: The Making of an American Urban Neighborhood, 1850 to 1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 108–113.

58. KC to JR, 8 August 1889, file 4; KC to JR [?], July 1891, KC to JR, 21 July 1891, file 6.

stood as attempts to realize the economic advancements necessary if marriage to John Rooney would ensure her mother's support and to help Cusack achieve further markers of refined female behavior. Vacations signified young women's means to leisure and the ability to separate themselves from the masses. Holidays hinted at women's rise in status, while men's working secured those positions for life. As Cusack enjoyed the water and country in Quinapoxet in June 1891, John Rooney joined the thousands who left Boston for the day to descend upon Crescent Beach in nearby Revere, Massachusetts. Cusack haughtily pledged never to return to her once ostensibly inferior social status thus: "So you've been slumming again, you wretch! Crescent Beach is a horrid place, I think; I haven't been there for two or three years, but my last visit was quite sufficient. Those places are [illegible] I think. I *hate* crowds and that is why a quiet place like this has such a charm for me."<sup>59</sup> Cusack may have flirted with working-class men, but she did not intend to marry one. Of course, John Rooney "slummed" with those who could afford not weeks but merely a day at the beach, so he could one day support Hannah and Katharine Cusack.<sup>60</sup>

Rooney knew that Cusack's high economic standards elevated his moral worth, or so he convinced himself. He combined work with piety by imagining Cusack as the muse who made his work possible. In 1892, Rooney penned to her that

I have just read your consoling, your sweet soothing letter, and my heart goes out in gratitude to my precious for her prayers. I knew she had prayed, and her prayers had been answered by the smooth manner in which everything went along and by the thoughts of her which were with me all day, I didn't believe, dearest, you were out of my mind five successive minutes all day, especially in the prenoon when you were continually before me and the work was guided more by habit than by thought. I said to myself a number of times "I guess my sweetheart must have been praying fervently because I feel her influence and am inspired by her presence."<sup>61</sup>

With these prayers, Rooney and his crew erected a stone chimney, an apt symbol of the Cusack-inspired heights of spiritual and economic attainment. In so doing, she brought him closer to being the ideal Catholic household head that let his wife take her proper place at home. Of course, in that home Cusack's mother would reside, and, thus, the dutiful daughter would remain in the guise of a housewife.

59. KC to JR, 21 June 1891, file 7.

60. On the class implications of leisure, see Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 57, 186

61. JR to KC, postmarked 12 May 1892, file 7.

Cusack's embrace of romantic love and the knowledge of her future home stood in contrast to yet another technicality keeping her from really taking her place as queen of the household. Now that she was to marry, and John Rooney to support her mother, Cusack had to learn the household duties that defined a wife's place in a home, and which likely differentiated the mother-and-daughter roles within the Cusack household. Katharine Cusack's work as a stenographer allowed Hannah Cusack, despite her financial constraints, to refrain from working and to be the idealized mother figure that took care of house and children. As a soon-to-be married daughter, Cusack would have to learn that role. Lizzie Morrissey, an Irish-American diarist from East Boston training to become a teacher in the 1870s, also only came close to housework when she watched her widowed mother performing it.<sup>62</sup> As historian Timothy Meagher explains: "Irish Americans thus seemed to conceive of women's roles in strict terms of duty. The wife's role was to be a mother, the daughter's role was to work." Daughters, of course, labored outside of the home.<sup>63</sup>

Months before Cusack and Rooney's wedding in January 1893, Hannah Cusack began to provide the soon-to-be-bride a crash course in domestic responsibilities. Brimming with pride, Cusack wrote Rooney: "O, I almost forgot to tell you the most important thing! *I made a pie today*. Not all by myself, of course, but under Mama's 'bossing.'"<sup>64</sup> Cusack's earlier letters to Rooney depicted her attempts to understand novels, not ovens. She had never referred to cooking, cleaning, or sewing. The prospect of marriage and its new household roles changed that.

Now that Hannah Cusack would have a son-in-law of means who would support her daughter and herself, she taught her working daughter the domestic responsibilities necessary for married life. Once Cusack pushed Rooney closer to bourgeois goals and had proved to her mother that marriage would not disrupt her financial support, Katharine and Hannah Cusack's "duty" relationship no longer needed to express itself in terms of the mother and daughter roles they assumed while Cusack worked. John Rooney would provide for home and family now. "True Catholic" womanhood may have been the ideal, but it depended on Cusack's fostering in Rooney an appreciation for the importance of her "duty" to her mother in order for it to become reality. Cusack, nevertheless, had to learn her new role from scratch, because, while she may never have become a wife, she would certainly always be a daughter who provided for her mother.

62. Jane H. Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America," *American Quarterly* 44, 1 (March 1992), 54; Diary of Elizabeth Morrissey, Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, 21 March 1876 and 18 July 1876.

63. Meagher, 342.

64. KC to JR, October 1892, file 7.

The Cusack-Rooney letters reflect a compromise born of a fundamental conflict between children's obligations to parents and the Boston archdiocese's push for a more individual-centered approach to marriage. Cusack never denounced her mother's insistence that John Rooney save six thousand dollars, nor did she disagree that supporting her mother was her responsibility. By inspiring John Rooney to mirror her "duty" to her mother, she goaded him to relinquish his absolute disdain for greed and seek moderate economic advancement, household headship, and piety associated with "true Catholic" manhood. In imbibing the desire both to marry and to exhibit selflessness, Rooney reshaped his plan for entering into a financially strained marriage with Cusack into the related goals of making money, building a house, marrying Cusack, and supporting her family. Although she reaped the financial and emotional benefits of Rooney's new aspirations, Katharine Cusack did not break from her role as dutiful daughter.

She did, however, come as close as she possibly could to the Catholic middle-class ideal of marriage and nuclear family. The union, after all, did not destroy Hannah Cusack's unquestioned expectation that Katharine Cusack support her. With marriage, Rooney, the male household head, replaced Cusack as her mother's economic support, which spelled a demotion for Hannah Cusack while it elevated Katharine Cusack to female household head without short-changing her mother's monetary or emotional needs. After her marriage, Katharine (Cusack) Rooney joined other middle-class Catholic women's organizations, such as the League of Catholic Women and the Guild of the Infant Savior.<sup>65</sup> With the marriage, the entire Cusack family moved not only upward in economic prospects, but also closer to the middle-class or respectable nuclear family household.

The Rooney-Cusack marriage hybridized Cusack's devotion to her mother with the idealized middle-class Catholic family sanctioned by the overwhelmingly Irish leadership of the archdiocese. It thus also served as the catalyst for transformations in gender and family roles along lines of class. To make the relationship work, Cusack and Rooney embraced the obstacle of parental obligation; but in so doing, they changed its meaning from one between parent and child to one that bolstered larger American and Catholic justifications for ideal (married) manhood and womanhood. By transforming the "duty" ethos from an adult child's obligation to a parent into a principle that bolstered Catholic middle-class and religious claims to manhood and womanhood, Rooney and Cusack managed both to respect Hannah Cusack's wants and to assume new class-based religious and gender identities.

65. *Boston Globe*, 14 March 1915, 8 December 1918.

Through Cusack's steadfastness toward her sense of daughterly duty and local Catholic pressures to attain some upward mobility, Cusack and Rooney achieved the respectable social and gender roles of marriage. The values of the local Catholic church triumphed in the successful completion of their courtship; Cusack became a "true Catholic" married woman and Rooney traded some of his radical Catholic principles disapproved by the larger Catholic church for respectable married life. Yet, most of all, the couple satisfied Hannah Cusack and brought harmony to Katharine Cusack's daily life. "Maggie tells me that you took Mama out," Cusack wrote to Rooney with relief the month before their wedding, "and that repays me, because I wanted her to see the house, and am glad to think she has had a ride with you; I know she enjoyed it."<sup>66</sup>

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66. KC to JR, 5 December 1892, file 7.