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The Author of the Pamphlet "An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland" was Theobald Wolfe Tone - who simply signed himself a Northern Whig.

It was specially printed for the Society of United Irishmen of Belfast of which Tone was a founder member.

The Pamphlet bears no Printer's name but the Printer was in fact "John Chambers of No. 5 Abbey St, Dublin." Mr. J. McManus in his bibliography of Tone (I) tentatively assigns it to Belfast, but there can be no doubt about the place and the printer since in a letter from T.W. Tone, written to him from Belfast, 17th October, 1791: "We are all very impatient for the Pamphlet which should be here by This....."

The Society of United Irishmen are to meet on Tuesday night and then I suppose, certain resolutions will be adopted and in due course transmitted to Tandy, in pursuance of the conversation at which you assisted with Drennan, Rowan & etc (2).

In a second letter Tone scolds Chambers for the "Stupidity of your man" who has apparently sent off to Belfast a bundle of copies of the prospectus for the National Journal instead of the Argument.

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AN

ARGUMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE

CATHOLICS OF IRELAND.

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A B G U M E N T

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE

CATHOLICS.

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AN

ARGUMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE

*CATHOLICS OF IRELAND.*

IN WHICH

THE PRESENT POLITICAL STATE OF THAT  
COUNTRY, AND THE NECESSITY OF A PARLI-  
AMENTARY REFORM ARE CONSIDERED.

ADDRESSED TO

THE PEOPLE, AND MORE PARTICULARLY TO THE  
PROTESTANTS OF IRELAND.

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*DUBLIN:*

PRINTED BY P. BYRNE, No. 108, GRAFTON-STREET.

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M,DCC,XCI.

1791



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TO THE READER.

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**I**N the following Pamphlet I have omitted all general arguments in favour of a Parliamentary Reform, which equally apply to England and Ireland; and have confined myself almost entirely to such as exclusively apply to our own country. The general question has been so often and so ably handled, that the public mind is sufficiently informed; and it is by no means my wish to swell my book, and fatigue my Readers, by compiling arguments, which, however powerful, have been repeated, until we may pronounce, that if they have not convinced, conviction is hopeless. I have argued, therefore, little on the abstract right of the people to reform their  
A 2                      Legislature;

Legislature; for, after PAINE, who will, or who need, be heard on the subject?

IT may be necessary to premise, that when I use the term *Government*, I do not mean by it the Legislature, as it exists in theory, but a certain junto of men, of both countries, some of them Members of our Legislature, and others not, who possess the supreme power in this country.

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## TO THE PEOPLE,

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**B**EFORE I proceed to the object of this book, I think it necessary to acquaint the Reader, that I am a Protestant of the Church of Ireland, as by law established, and have again and again taken all the customary oaths by which we secure and appropriate to ourselves all degrees and professions, save one, to the utter exclusion of our Catholic Brethren. I am, therefore, no further interested in the event, than as a mere lover of justice, and a steady detester of tyranny, whether exercised by one man or one million.

THE present state of Ireland is such, as is not to be paralleled in history or fable : Inferior to no country in Europe in the  
gifts

gifts of nature, blest with a temperate sky and a fruitful soil, intersected by many great rivers, indented round her whole coast with the noblest harbours, abounding with all the necessary materials for unlimited commerce, teeming with inexhaustible mines of the most useful metals, filled by 4,000,000 of an ingenious and a gallant people, with bold hearts, and ardent spirits; posted right in the track between Europe and America, within 50 miles of England, 300 of France; yet with all these great advantages, unheard of and unknown, without pride, or power, or name, without ambassadors, army, or navy; not of half the consequence in the empire of which she has the honour to make a part, with the single county of York, or the loyal and well regulated town of Birmingham!

THESE are, or should be, to every true Irishman, mortifying considerations: It remains to examine what can be the cause of our so shameful depression, to discover and to apply with temper and with firmness the remedy; and thus to restore, or if not restore, to create a rank for our country among the nations of the earth.

THE

THE proximate cause of our disgrace is our evil government, the remote one is our own intestine division, which, if once removed, the former will be instantaneously reformed.

IT is necessary for the physician to know the disorder, and it is folly to conceal it from the patient himself. If he has the spirit of a man, he will bear the worst with intrepidity, and bear it with fortitude : Death is very terrible, but there are things more terrible than death.

THE misfortune of Ireland is, that we have *no National Government*, in which we differ from England, and from all Europe. In England the King is resident, and his presence begets infinite advantages ; the Government is English, with English views and interests only ; the people are very powerful, though they have not their due power : whoever is, or would be Minister, can secure or arrive at office only by studying and following their will, their passions, and their very prejudices : Hence the interests of King, Ministers, and People, move forward in one and the same direction, advanced or retarded by the same means, and cannot even in idea be separated.

BUT

BUT is it so in Ireland ?

WHAT is our Government? It is a phenomenon in politics, contravening all received and established opinions : It is a Government derived from another country, whose interest, so far from being the same with that of the people, directly crosses it at right angles : Does any man think that our rulers here recommend themselves to their creators in England, by promoting the interests of Ireland, when it can in the most remote degree interfere with the commerce of Great Britain ? \* But how is this foreign Government maintained? Look to your court calendar, to your pension list, to your concordatum, and you will find the answer written in *letters of*

\* If this be doubted, let the proceedings of last session with regard to the Arigna Iron Works and the Double Loom be remembered, to each of which the smallest parliamentary aid was refused. Why? Because they might interfere with English interests; though the former would have kept 250,000*l.* annually at home, the greater part of which goes to England; and the latter would at once have doubled the weaving power of the kingdom in the linen, silk, and callico branches. But above all, let the memorable debate on the East India Trade be recalled, when Administration boldly threw off the mask, and told Ireland she should have no such trade, because it might interfere with the interest of England. ☞ *They have such a trade in America, and they deserve to have it.*

gold :

*gold*: This unnatural influence must be supported by profligate means, and hence corruption is the only medium of Government in Ireland. The people is utterly disregarded and defied: Divided and distracted as they are, and distrustful of each other, they fall an easy prey to English rulers, or their Irish subalterns: The fear of danger is removed from Administration by our internal weakness, and the sense of shame speedily follows it: Hence it is, that we see Peculation protected, Venality avowed, the Peerage prostituted, the Commons corrupted. We see all this at the very hour, when every where but in Ireland reform is going forward, and leveling ancient abuses in the dust. Why are these things so? Because Ireland is struck with a political paralysis, that has withered her strength, and crushed her spirit: She is not half alive, one side is scarce animated, the other is dead; she has by her own law, as it were, amputated her right hand; she has outrun the Gospel precept, and cast her right eye into the fire, even before it has offended her: Religious intolerance and political bigotry, like the tyrant Mezentius, bind the living Protestant to the dead and half corrupted Catholic,

and beneath the putrid mass, even the embryo of effort is stifled : When the nation is thus circumstanced, it is not to be wondered at, if even an administration of boobies and blockheads presume to insult, and pillage, and contemn, and defy her.

UNDER such an Administration, if God Almighty could in his wrath suffer such an one long to exist, the virtue and the talents of the land would be blasted in the bud. No Irishman of rank could become a member or supporter of Government, without at once renouncing all pretensions to common decency, honesty, or honour : All great endowments of the mind, all lofty sentiments of the soul would be necessarily and eternally excluded ; and the Government, when once in such hands, must remain so ; political vice, like the principle of fermentation, would propagate itself, and contaminate every succeeding particle, until the fury of an enraged people, or the just anger of offended Heaven should at length, by one blow, destroy or annihilate the whole polluted mass !

BUT to quit hypothetical speculation, and descend to facts :

I HAVE said, that we have *no National Government*. Before the year 1782, it was  
not

not pretended that we had, and it is at least a curious, if not an useful speculation, to examine how we stand in that regard now. And I have little dread of being confuted, when I assert, that all we got by what we are pleased to dignify with the name of *Revolution*, was simply, *the means of doing good according to law, without recurring to the great rule of nature, which is above all positive statutes*: Whether we have done good or not, and if not, why we have omitted to do good is a serious question: The pride of the nation, the vanity of individuals concerned, the moderation of some honest men, the corruption of knaves I know may be alarmed, when I assert, that the Revolution of 1782, was the most bungling, imperfect business, that ever threw ridicule on a lofty epithet, by assuming it unworthily: It is not pleasant to any Irishman to make such a confession, but it cannot be helped if truth will have it so: It is much better that we should know and feel our real state, than delude ourselves or be gulled by our enemies with praises, which we do not deserve, or imaginary blessings which we do not enjoy.

I LEAVE to the admirers of that era to vent flowing declamations on its theoretic

tical advantages, and its visionary glories ; it is a fine subject, and peculiarly flattering to my countrymen ; many of whom were actors, and almost all spectators of it. Be mine the unpleasing task to strip it of its plumage and its tinsel, and shew the naked figure : The operation will be severe ; but if properly attended to, may give us a strong and striking lesson of caution and of wisdom.

THE Revolution of 1782, was a Revolution which enabled Irishmen to sell at a much higher price their honour, their integrity, and the interests of their country ; it was a Revolution, which, while at one stroke it doubled the value of every borough-monger in the kingdom, left three-fourths of our countrymen slaves as it found them, and the Government of Ireland in the base and wicked, and contemptible hands, who had spent their lives in degrading and plundering her ; nay, some of whom had given their last vote decidedly, though hopelessly, against this our famous Revolution : Who of the veteran enemies of the country lost his place or his pension ? who was called forth to station or office from the ranks of opposition ? not one ! The power remained in the hands of our enemies, again to be exerted for our ruin,

with

with this difference, that formerly we had our distreffes, our injuries, and our insults gratis, at the hands of England; but now we pay very dearly to receive the same with aggravation, through the hands of Irishmen;—yet this we boast of, and call a Revolution.

SEE how much the strength of *the people* has been augmented by the arrangement of 1782! For two successive sessions, we have seen measures of the most undeniable benefit, and the most unqualified necessity to the country, enforced by all the efforts of the most consummate ability, and repelled without even the shadow of argument by Administration; an Administration, consisting numerically of the individuals who had opposed the extension of your commerce in 1779, and the amelioration of your constitution in 1782. You find, or you are utterly senseless, in the loss of the Place Bill, the Responsibility Bill, the Pension Bill; in a word, all the measures of last session, that you have no weight whatsoever, that Administration despise and laugh at you, and that while you remain in your present state of apathy and ignorance, they will continue to insult and to contemn you.

WHY

WHY do I ſpeak thus of your famous exertions in 1782? Not to depreciate them below their value, for I honour, and I love the ſpirit that then animated you. I am ſure a great majority of thoſe who then conducted you, were actuated by a ſincere regard to your intereſt and your freedom; I am ſure that ſome of your leaders were men of high integrity, and ſome of conſummate wiſdom; I do believe that as much, or very nearly as much as could then be done, was done; and though I regret, yet I do not accuſe the caution that induced thoſe who acted for you, to ſtop ſhort in their honourable career: The minds of men were not at that time, perhaps, ripe for exertions, which a thouſand circumſtances that have ſince happened, cry aloud for: We are now, I hope, wiſer, bolder, and more liberal, and we have the great miſtreſs, dear-bought Experience, to warn us from paſt errors, and guide us on to future good.

I HOPE it appears from what I have ſaid, that the Revolution of 1782, is ſuch, as no Iriſhman of an independent ſpirit, and who feels for the honour and intereſt of his country, can acquieſce in *as final*. Much remains to be done, and it is fortunate

nate that the end proposed is so moderate and just, the means so fair, simple, and constitutional, as to leave no ground for accusation with the most profligate of our enemies, or apprehension with the most timid of our friends.

MY argument is simply this : That Ireland, as deriving her government from another country, requires a strength in the people which may enable them, if necessary, to counteract the influence of that government, should it ever be, as it indisputably has been, exerted, to thwart her prosperity : That this strength may be most constitutionally acquired, and safely and peaceably exerted through the medium of a Parliamentary Reform : And finally, that no reform is honourable, practicable, efficacious, or just, which does not include as a fundamental principle, the extension of elective franchise to the Roman Catholics, under modifications hereafter to be mentioned.

I BEG I may not be misunderstood or misrepresented in my first position. When I talk of English influence being predominant in this country, I do not mean to derogate from the due exertion of his Majesty's prerogative : I owe him allegiance,  
and

and if occasion should require it, I would be ready chearfully to spill my blood in his service; but the influence I mean, is not as between the King and his subjects, in matter of prerogative, but as between the government and people of England, and the government and people of Ireland, in matter of trade and commerce: I trust in God, we owe the English nation no allegiance; nor is it yet treason to assert, as I do, that she has acquired, and maintains an unjustifiable and dangerous weight and influence over the councils of Ireland, whose interest, wherever it clashes, or appears to clash with hers, must immediately give way: Surely this is no question of loyalty. The King of England is King also of Ireland; he is in theory, and I trust in practice, equally interested in the welfare of both countries; he cannot be offended that each of his kingdoms should by all honourable and just means encrease their own ability, to render him the service due to him; he cannot rejoice, when he hears that his faithful Commons of Ireland by their own law exclude themselves from a commerce with half the known world, in complaisance to a monopolizing English company, though he may, as the common father of  
both

both his realms, rejoice, when they vote 200,000*l.* to secure the very commerce in which they can never bear a part. It is therefore, I repeat it, no question of loyalty: If the King can be interested in the question, it must be on the side of justice, and of Ireland, because his happiness and his pride must be most gratified by the rising prosperity of his people, to which title we have as much claim as the people of England; we love him as well, we are as faithful subjects; and if we render him not as essential services, let our means be considered, and the blighting influence which perpetually visits the harvest of our hopes, and I believe it will be found, that our zeal in his service is only circumscribed by our inability.

IT is, therefore, extremely possible for the most truly loyal subject in this kingdom deeply to regret, and conscientiously to oppose the domineering of English influence, without trenching in the smallest degree on the rational loyalty, so long and so justly the boast of Ireland: His loyalty is to the King of Ireland, not to the Honourable United Company of Merchants trading, where he must never trade, to the East Indies: Nor is it to the Clothiers in York-

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shire,

shire, nor the Weavers of Manchester, nor yet to the constitutional reforming Blacksmiths of Birmingham, that he owes allegiance: His first duty is to his country, his second to his King, and both are now, and by God's blessing will, I hope, remain united and inseparable.

IN England we find a reform in Parliament is always popular, though it is but as a barrier against possible, not actual grievance: The people suffer in theory by the unequal distribution of the elective franchise; but practically, it is perhaps visionary to expect a Government that shall more carefully or steadily follow their real interests. No man can there be a Minister on any other terms. But reform in Ireland is no speculative remedy for possible evils: The Minister and the Government here hold their offices by a tenure very different from that of pursuing the public good. The people here are despised or defied; their will does not weigh a feather in the balance, when English influence, or the interest of their rulers, is thrown into the opposite scale. We have all the reasons, all the justice that English reformists can advance, and we have a thousand others, that in England never could exist: We  
 have

have in common with England the royal influence, and the ambition of Ministers to encounter ; but we have also the jealous interference of that country to meet in every branch of trade, every department of commerce ; and what barriers have we to oppose in our present state of representation ? None : Of *four* millions of people, three are actually and confessedly unrepresented ; of the remaining fourth, the electors do not exceed 60,000, and the members whom they return, supposing them all, what I wish with truth we could, men of integrity, must remain for ever a minority, for their number amounts but to 82.

I FEAR I am wasting time in proving an axiom : Need more be said, than that a nation governed by herself will pursue her interests more steadily, than if she were governed by another, whose interest might clash with hers ? Is not this more applicable, if the governing nation has a means of perpetrating the mischief without much odium, by making the governed sacrifice her interests with her own hand ? And can we deny that this is the case with Ireland ? I may be told that we are not governed by England, and some proud and hot-brained Irishman will again throw

across me the *Revolution of 1782*, wherein we “ *gloriously asserted our claim to legis-*  
“ *late externally, as well as internally, for*  
“ *ourselves*: And I will admit, that we did assert our claim, but I deny that we have availed ourselves of the exertion of the right: We are free in theory, we are slaves in fact: When high prerogative was tumbled to the ground, gentle influence succeeded, and with infinitely less noise and bustle, retains us in our bonds: Before 1782, England bound us by her edict; it was an odious and not a very safe exertion of power; *but it cost us nothing*: Since 1782, we are bound by English influence, acting through our own Parliament; we cannot in justice accuse her, for she is only to be traced by the mischief she silently and secretly distributes; but our suffering is aggravated by this galling circumstance, that we purchase restriction of trade, and invasion of constitution, at a very dear rate: Englishmen, under the old constitution, would ruin Ireland without fee or reward; their motive was to serve their own country; but Irishmen, under the new constitution, will not prefer the interest of England to that of Ireland,

Ireland, without weighty considerations ; they expect, and indeed not without some colour of justice, to be paid extravagantly for the daily parricide they commit against the land which gave them birth ; and to complete this dishonourable traffic, the purchase of their votes comes, not from the pocket of England, who is to benefit, but of Ireland, who is ruined by the sale.

THE Volunteers and people of Ireland were very soon after their imaginary Revolution, made, by grievous experience, sensible of the truth of what I have now asserted ; they saw the extent of this alarming disease, and they as soon discovered the cause and the remedy. They saw they had, literally, no weight in the Government, and they clamoured for what, even on the limited plan then proposed, would at least have mitigated the disorder—a *Parliamentary Reform*. But they built on too narrow a foundation, and the superstructure naturally overset, when it was scarcely raised above the ground : They set out with sacrificing the eternal dictates of justice, to temporizing and peddling expediency ; they failed, because they did not deserve to succeed.—Grasping at too much, they lost all ; and the

the fatal morning, when the Convention broke up at the Rotunda, in one moment demolished the glory, which five years of virtuous success had flattered them would be immortal.

I HAD the misfortune to see them on the day of their disgrace, when the great bubble burst, and carried rout and confusion, and dismay, among their ranks; when *three hundred* of the first gentlemen of Ireland, girt with swords, the representatives of the armed force of the kingdom, who by giving independence, had given to their Parliament the means of being virtuous, fled like deer to their counties, to return no more, after making a foolish profession of their pacific intentions; foolish, because it was evident that their anxiety was how they should reach their homes, without attachments and incarceration. I saw with sorrow their great leader obliged to descend to the farce of intreating them to form no rash resolution against that Government, which had in effect scourged them home in a state of ridiculous distress and obloquy; and I wondered then, like a young man, why such men, so circumstanced, with the eyes of Europe upon them,

them, should submit quietly to treatment, which a few years experience has shewn was inevitable; they were disgraced, because they were illiberal, and degraded, because they were unjust; through them the honor of their country was wounded, her name sunk, her glories forgotten, and from the last day of the Convention, there has been *no people in Ireland*.

FROM their failure we are taught this salutary truth, that no reform can ever be obtained, which shall not comprehensively embrace Irishmen of all denominations: The exclusion of the Catholics lost the question under circumstances, that must have otherwise carried it against all opposition; the people were then strong and confident, they had arms in their hands, and were in habits of succeeding; the same circumstances cannot easily be supposed again to combine in their favour; but if they did, they must again fail.

THE Almighty source of wisdom, and of goodness, has inseparably connected liberty and justice: We must adopt or reject them together; to be completely free, we must deserve to be so: It could not be consistent with his impartial love to all his creatures, that a monopolizing Aristocracy should

should succeed in wresting their unalienable rights from their oppressors, at the moment they were acting the oppressors themselves to millions of their fellow-subjects.

The question now resolves itself into this. Shall we be content to remain in our present oppressed and inglorious state, unknown and unheard of in Europe, the prey of England, the laughing-stock of the knaves, who plunder us? Or shall we temperately and constitutionally exert our power to procure a complete and radical emancipation to our country, by a reform in the representation of the people? If we chuse the former, then are Irishmen formed of materials, whose nature I cannot, and do not wish to understand: It is hopeless attempting to work on such spirits; but if they be of human feeling, if they partake of the common nature of man, if injustice and oppression have not extinguished every sentiment which raises us above the beasts that perish, and makes us feel that our existence is an emanation from the Divinity, then will I believe that my countrymen are not yet lost and buried in hopeless desperation; that to rouse them  
to



pacts, subject to stipulations. It will be for the wisdom and moderation of both parties to concede somewhat ; allowance must be made on the one hand for the difficult sacrifice of parting with power, obtained in injustice, and long held by force ; on the other hand there may be something to be pardoned in men condemned to ignorance by the law of the land, and whose minds have for a century been irritated by injuries, and inflamed by open insults, or still more offensive connivance and toleration.

BUT here a good old Protestant lady will tell me, that all compacts between us are in vain, for no faith, nor even oaths, are to be kept with heretics ; and I know she will have many to coincide in opinion with her. But if she be right, I marvel that the oath of an Irish Papist should ever be taken in a court of justice ; yet I have myself seen it done, before a Protestant Judge and Jury, who decided, as if the witness were actually credible, and without enquiry into the articles of his faith. What becomes of the wisdom of the Legislature, that has been able to devise no better means for the exclusion of Catholics, from  
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the professions and parliament, than oaths which, as not being in their conscience binding, might be taken and broken without offence? Yet we find, and to our infinite loss, that these oaths are to Catholics so formidable, so serious, and so obligatory, that they are content to renounce profit, honour, freedom, and even their country, rather than take them. Surely, if faith is not to be kept with heretics, there is not a Catholic in the kingdom but might be in Parliament to-morrow, had he no obstacle but the oaths to encounter. If therefore, three millions of people have for near a century chosen to remain in *absolute slavery*, rather than take certain oaths which they thought militated with their consciences; I trust, and believe there is an end of the argument, that oaths to heretics are not binding; an assertion the most artful and wicked that ever was devised, because it perpetually recurs on the unfortunate Catholic, who in vain may protest and swear, that it is false, and that he abjures and utterly denies it; still may the good Protestant withhold his belief, for "*faith is not to be kept with heretics.*" I wonder it never occurred to the inventors and supporters of this abominable slander,

which at once cuts up by the roots all confidence between man and man, that they might at last convert and convince the Catholics of its truth, or at least drive them to the fallacious principle of not being suspected for nothing ; a principle, which, if they were once to adopt, where is the Protestant interest of Ireland ?

BUT to drop this argument, which indeed scarcely deserves consideration : Let us see the actual state of property, and of the Catholics in Ireland at this day.

THE old families, the original proprietors of the soil, who were dispossessed and ruined by forfeitures, have long since fallen into decay : The representatives of a very great majority of them are, and have been in penury and ignorance, at the spade and the plough, without deeds or muniments of their estates for a century back : I do not say that this is universally the case ; but I am sure it is with an infinite majority : In the mean time, while the estates have been in Protestant hands, the Catholics who had made money by trade, the only road to wealth that was not blocked up against them by law, had no way to lay it out but in mortgages, many of them on those very lands. Since the relaxation

relaxation of the penal laws, many Catholics hold profitable leases under those tenures; many have purchased under the faith of those various acts of attainder and settlement, the repeal of which is assumed as the instant and necessary consequence of admitting Catholics to the rights of citizens. Is it to be thought that the wealthy and respectable part of the Catholics would promote or permit the unspeakable confusion in property, that would result from such a measure as is imputed to them; and this from no motive, but an abstract love of mere justice operating against their own obvious interest, and against a known law of the land, which says, that sixty years possession, however acquired, is a good foundation of property against all mankind: I hope it will not be asserted, that it would be the wish of the Catholics utterly to subvert all law; and in the very worst event, if they were mad and wicked enough to frame the wish, they could not have the power. The wealthy and moderate party of their own persuasion, with the whole Protestant interest, would form a barrier against invasion of property, strong and solid enough to satisfy and remove the doubts of the wise, the apprehensions of the cautious,

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the fears of the cowardly, every thing but the intolerance of the Protestant bigot, and the affected terror and real corruption of the English Partisan, who would see in the cordial union, and consolidated strength of Ireland, the downfall of his hopes, and the ruin of the profligate market of his vote and his interest.

BUT it will be said, that the Catholics are ignorant, and therefore incapable of liberty; and I have heard men of more imagination than judgment, make a flourishing declamation on the danger of blinding them, by suddenly pouring a flood of light on their eyes, which for a century have been buried in darkness: To the poetry of this I make no objection, but what is the common sense or justice of the argument? We plunge them by law, and continue them by statute, in gross ignorance, and then we make the incapacity we have created, an argument for their exclusion, from the common rights of man! We plead our crime in justification of itself: If ignorance be their condemnation, what has made them ignorant? Not the hand of Nature: For I presume they are born with capacities, pretty much like  
other

other men : It is the iniquitous and cruel injustice of Protestant bigotry, that has made them ignorant ; they are excluded by law from the possibility of education ; for I will not call the liberal connivance of the heads of our University, who suffer, perhaps by a strain on their strict duty, a few to smuggle a little of that learning, which is contraband to an Irish Papist, I will not, I say, allow that to be such an education as every Irishman has a right to demand ; they cannot obtain degrees ; those are paled in from them by oaths, *those oaths of which they are so regardless*, and therefore we find they do not enter our University : If Irish Catholics be bigots to their religion ; if that bigotry which makes them dangerous, results from ignorance, surely it is the duty of a conscientious Legislature, to labour by every means to remove the cause, and the effect will of itself cease ; but it is not the policy of their oppressors to part with an argument, of which they make so excellent use ; and therefore it is, that the Irish Catholic clergy are driven into foreign countries to pick up as they may, a wretched, rambling kind of institution, that deserves not the name  
of

of education. Can it be wondered, if the flock be not well taught by such pastors ; what can they learn, when thus exiled from their native country, but foreign habits and foreign prejudices ? What love can they feel for that constitution, what respect can they preach for those laws which have driven them forth as vagabonds over Europe ? Will any Catholic gentleman submit to this ? No ? And what follows ? That which daily experience shews to be one of the heavy misfortunes of Ireland, the consciences, the morals, and the religion of the bulk of the nation, are in the hands of men of low birth, low feelings, low habits, and no education. But surely, the wretched Priest, and his still more miserable flock, are not to be punished for the crime of ignorance, with which, as a pestilence, they have been visited by the unmitigable rage of Protestant persecution. Give them education, open their eyes, shew them what is law, in some other form than that of a penal statute ; give them franchise, as you have already in a certain degree given them property ; let them be citizens, let them be *men*.

BUT they are not prepared for liberty ?  
What do we mean by *prepared for liberty* ?

Was

Was the Polish nation prepared for liberty, when it was planted in one day? Were the French prepared for liberty? Yes, I shall be told, the Gentry were; and I answer, so are the Catholic Gentlemen of Ireland; the peasantry of all countries are alike, with an exception in favour of England, and that exception springing from liberty: They will follow their leaders; but I say, the Catholic Gentlemen of Ireland have had advantages of information far beyond either the Poles or the French, because they have lived in its neighbourhood, and seen that in practice which they knew but in speculation: Had Mirabeau waited to *prepare* his countrymen, he and they would have been slaves to this hour, and the Bastille had still hung over the ill-fated city of Paris. Is liberty a disease for which we are to be prepared as for inoculation; if so, and if fasting and abstinence, and long suffering, be preparation, there are no men under Heaven better prepared than the Catholics of Ireland.

But can we believe that our wise and benevolent Creator would constitute us so, that it would require a long institution to *prepare* us for that blessing, without which existence is but a burthen?

Do we prepare our sons to view the light of Heaven, to breathe the air, to tread the earth ?

LIBERTY is the vital principle of man : He that is prepared to live, is prepared for freedom.

WHATEVER is essential to the happy existence of his creatures, God has not willed should be difficult, or complex, or doubtful in its preparation : Plant then, with a righteous confidence in his goodness, the vigorous shoot of liberty in the land, and doubt not, but it shall strike root, and flourish, and spread, until the whole people shall repose beneath its shade in peace and happiness, and glory.

BUT it is objected, that certain tenets expressive of unconstitutional submission to their Holy Father, the Pope, in temporal as well as spiritual matters, is a sufficient ground for excluding the Roman Catholics from their rights. “ If this were so, it “ were a grievous fault,” and I may add, “ grievously has Ireland answered it.” But whatever truth there might have been in such an accusation in the dark ages of superstition, when, by the bye, Ireland did but share the blame with England, and all  
Europe ;

Europe ; yet now, in the days of illumination, at the close of the eighteenth century, such an opinion is too monstrous to obtain a moment's serious belief, unless with such as were determined to believe every thing which squared with their interested views : The best answer to such a calumny, if indeed it deserves any, is the conduct of the Catholics of England at this day, and their solemn declaration signed by their Gentry, their Clergy, and their Peers, sanctified besides by the unanimous decisions of seven of the first Catholic Universities in Europe, including that of Salamanca, of Valladolid, of Doway, and the Sorbonne \* ; wherein they concur in asserting, that neither the Pope and Cardinals, nor even a general Council, have the smallest pretension to interfere between Prince and Subject, as to allegiance or temporal matters. And I hope, as these opinions are solemnly given from Catholics to Catholics, they may have the fortune to escape the old and wicked censure, that, "*faith is not to be kept with heretics.*"

\* See Lord Petre's letter to the Bishop of St. David's.

IT is not fix months fince the Pope was publicly burned in effigy at Paris, the capital of that Monarch, whois fyled the eldeft fon of the church. Yet the time has been, when Philip of France thought he had a good title to the Crown of England, from the donation of the Holy Father: The fallacy lies in fupposing that what was once true in politics, is always true: I do believe the Pope has now more power in Ireland than in fome Catholic countries, or than he perhaps ought to have. But I confefs, I look on his power with little apprehenfion, becaufe I cannot fee to what evil purpofe it could be exerted; and with the lefs apprehenfion, as every liberal extenfion of property or franchise to Catholics will tend to diminifh it. Perfecution will keep alive the foolifh bigotry and fuperftition of any feft, as the experience of five thoufand years has demonftrated. Perfecution bound the Irish Papift to his Prieft, and the Prieft to the Pope; the bond of union is drawn tighter by oppreffion; relaxation will undo it. The emancipated and liberal Irishman, like the emancipated and liberal Frenchman, may go to mafs, may tell his beads, or fprinkle his

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his mistress with holy water ; but neither the one nor the other will attend to the rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican, or the idle anathemas, which indeed his Holiness is now-a-days too prudent and cautious to issue.

I COME now to an old and hackneyed argument against Irish Catholics, that they are Jacobites, and for bringing in the Pretender : To this I have an hundred answers, but with fair reasoners, it is probable that the first may be sufficient. I say the man is dead ; there is no Pretender : His brother, who survives him, is in religion, a Cardinal, a Popish Clergyman ; and what is some additional ground to think, he may not have lawful, or indeed any issue, is, that he is above sixty years of age : If however, any strenuous Protestant is dissatisfied with this answer as inconclusive, let him state his objections, and I shall, perhaps, in the tenth edition of my book, set myself to remove them. In the mean time, let him consider, that since the accession of the House of Brunswick, there have been two bloody rebellions on behalf of the Stuart family in England ; but not one sword or trigger drawn in the cause in Ireland.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER argument that has been often successfully used, is this: If the Catholics are admitted to franchise, they will get the upper hand, and attach themselves to France, *for Ireland is unable to exist as an independent State!* But France is a Popish country, and ruled by an absolute Monarch, whose will is the law; therefore it is better to remain in a state of qualified freedom, though it be not complete, under the protection of England, than sink into a province to France; *for to one or the other you must be content to be subject.*

THERE is no one position, moral, physical, or political, that I hear with such extreme exacerbation of mind, as this which denies to my country the possibility of independent existence: It is not however, my plan here to examine that question: I trust, whenever the necessity does arise, as at some time it infallibly must, it will be found that we are as competent to our own government, regulation *and defence*, as any State in Europe. Till the emergency does occur, it will but exasperate and inflame the minds of men, to investigate and demonstrate the infinite resources and provocations to independence, which every hour brings

brings forth in Ireland. I shall therefore here content myself with protesting on behalf of my country, against the position, as an infamous falsehood, insulting to her pride, and derogatory to her honour ; and I little doubt, if occasion should arise, but that I shall be able to prove it so.

To the argument founded on this spiritless and pitiful position, time has given an answer, by bringing forth that stupendous event, the Revolution in France, an event which I do but name, for who is he that can praise it as it merits ? Where is the dread now of absolute power, or the arbitrary nod of the Monarch in France ? Where is the intolerance of Popish bigotry ? The rights of man are at least as well understood there as here, and somewhat better practised. Their wise and venerable National Assembly, representatives, not of their constituents, merely but of man, whose nature they have exalted beyond the limits that even Providence seemed to have bounded it by, have with that disinterested attention to the true welfare of their species, which has marked and dignified all their proceedings, renounced the idea of conquest, and engraven that renunciation

on

on the altar, in the temple of their liberty : In that Assembly Protestants fit indiscriminately with Catholics : But I lose time in dwelling on circumstances, the mention of which at once supercedes the necessity of argument.

I COME now to a very serious argument. If you admit Catholics to vote, you must admit them to the House, and then you will have a Catholic Parliament. To this there are many answers : In the first place, it is incumbent on their opponents to shew the mischief resulting from even a Catholic Parliament. There has been so bold a spirit, so guarded a wisdom, so pure a patriotism exerted by a Parliament of Catholics in this kingdom, as the experience of modern Protestant Parliaments can give us no conception of : Have we ever read, or have we forgotten the manifesto of the Catholic Parliament held at Trim, in 1642 ? Let it be compared with our own declarations in 1782, and Catholics may well, with a generous confidence, stand the comparison.

BUT it will be said, that the last Catholic Parliament which we saw, set itself from the post, to resume the forfeited lands, and

and repeal the act of settlement. That Parliament was summoned by King James II. at a time when his Protestant subjects had expelled him from his throne and kingdom. The Irish Catholics with a generous, though misplaced loyalty, and with that ardent zeal which has on a thousand occasions outrun their judgment, regarded their Protestant Brethren, not merely as sectaries and schismatics, but as rebels to their lawful Prince, whom it was their duty as well as, perhaps, their inclination, to punish by rigid confiscation: The forfeitures and transfer of property were then recent, most of them within forty years. Many of the individuals who had been actually dispossessed, must have been living; the sons of many more; besides, it was a sudden and unhoped-for restoration of power to men, whom it had been the policy of Protestant ascendancy for 150 years to depress; and this restoration accomplished, not merely without the assistance, but absolutely against the consent of the Protestants of Ireland. Is it to be wondered at, under such circumstances, if the first exertions of that power were guided rather by resentment and passion, than reason?

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son? Is Catholicity to blame, or human nature? But see how different every thing is at this day! Most of the ancient Irish families are extinct: In the minds of the few remaining, one hundred and ten years of, peace have cooled all resentment; to the possessions of their ancestors, the law has barred their title, and it was law before the Revolution: Their civil rights will be not extorted, but restored; not wrung by fortuitous violence, but imparted with benevolent justice. Their restoration to the rank of man, will be a work of peaceful contract, not of implacable war with their Protestant Brethren.

BUT if all barriers between the two religions were beaten down, so far as civil matters are concerned, if the odious distinction of Protestant and Presbyterian, and Catholic, were abolished, and the three great sects blended together, under the common and sacred title of Irishman, what interest could a Catholic member of Parliament have, distinct from his Protestant brother sitting on the same bench, exercising the same function, bound by the same ties. Would liberty be less dear to him, justice less sacred, property less valuable

luable, infamy less dreadful? If the House of Commons were to be even wholly Catholic, still the other estates of the realm, the Peers and the King would sufficiently preserve the balance. I have supposed in this argument, what I peremptorily refuse to admit, that the whole House of Commons must be Catholic, and that they would of necessity follow such measures as would be prejudicial to the Protestant interest. But the fact is, that when we consider the great disproportion of property, or in other words power, in favour of the Protestants, added to the weight and influence of Government, there can be little fear of a majority of Catholic members existing in Parliament; and we know by historical experience, that when the House was open to both religions indifferently, no such majority existed, though in times when Catholicity flourished, and the Protestant interest was feeble, comparatively, to what we see at this day.

IF however, there be serious grounds for dreading a majority of Catholics, they may be removed by a very obvious mode; extend the elective franchise to such Catholics only as have a freehold of 10*l.* by

the year; and on the other hand, strike off that disgrace to our Constitution and our country, the wretched tribe of forty shilling freeholders, whom we see driven to their octennial market, by their landlords, as much their property as the sheep or the bullocks which they brand with their names. Thus will you at one stroke purge yourselves of the gross and feculent mass which contaminates the Protestant interest, and restore their natural and just weight to the sound and respectable part of the Catholic community, without throwing into their hands so much power as might enable them to dictate the law; but I again and again protest, that I conceive there is not a shadow of ground for such apprehension; but other men may be more cautious than I, and I would wish to obviate and satisfy the apprehensions of the most timid.

For my own part, I see Protestantism is no guard against corruption; I see the most profligate venality, the most shameless and avowed prostitution of principle go forward year after year, in assemblies, where no Catholic can by law appear: I see the people plundered and despised,  
powerless

powerless and ridiculous, held in contempt and defiance, and with such a prospect before my eyes, I for one, feel little dread at the thoughts of change, where no change can easily be for the worse. Religion has at this day little influence on politics; and when I contrast the National Assembly of Frenchmen and Catholics, with other great Bodies which I could name, I confess, I feel little propensity to boast that I have the honour to be an Irishman, and a Protestant.

I HAVE now examined such arguments as are most generally used to gloss over that monstrous injustice which has held for a century three millions of my countrymen in ignorance and bondage. I have endeavoured to give them such answers, as a very plain understanding could furnish; and I have a confidence that my attempt is but a precursor of many efforts, more worthy of the merits of the cause. The dark cloud which has so long enveloped the Irish Catholic with hopeless misery, at length begins to break, and the sun of liberty may once more illuminate his mind, and elevate his heart.

I HAVE

I HAVE hitherto considered the case of the Catholics in the view of expediency, and as with reference to Protestants I have done so, because I confess I was afraid of the lengths to which reason would inevitably lead me, if I were to take it up as a question of mere right, and with reference to the feelings of the Catholics themselves: They have remained now for above a century in slavery; they may have lost the wish for freedom; and at any rate, I am not very sure that the man is their friend, who points out to them their misery, and their degradation, at a time when it is not physically certain that their complete emancipation shall immediately follow: Perhaps even this feeble attempt on their behalf, may prejudice the cause which it is meant to defend. If it should be so, I may lament; but I shall never wish to recall it.

WHAT answer could we make to the Catholics of Ireland, if they were to rise, and with one voice, demand their rights as Citizens, and as Men? What reply justifiable to God, and to our conscience? None. We prate and babble, and write books, and publish them, filled with sentiments of freedom,

freedom, and abhorrence of tyranny, and lofty praises of *the Rights of Man!* Yet we are content to hold three millions of our fellow creatures, and fellow subjects, in degradation and infamy, and contempt, or to sum up all in one word, in *Slavery!*

ON what chapter of the *Rights of Man*, do we ground our title to liberty, in the moment that we are riveting the fetters of the wretched Roman Catholics of Ireland. Shall they not say to us, "Are we not men, as ye are, stamped with the image of our Maker, walking erect, beholding the same light, breathing the same air as Protestants: Hath not a Catholic hands; hath not a Catholic eyes, dimensions, organs, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt by the same weapons, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter, as a Protestant is. If ye prick us, do we not bleed? If ye tickle us, do we not laugh? If ye poison us, do we not die?—And if ye injure us, *shall we not revenge?* Hath a Catholic the mark of the beast in his forehead, that he should wander over his native soil like the accursed Cain, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him?"

God

God Almighty in his just anger, visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, not beyond the third or fourth generation, even of those that hate him ; and will nothing short of our eternal slavery satisfy the unmitigable rage of Protestant oppression ? How have *we* offended ? The offence of our ancestors, was their property and their power ; we have neither ; they are long since sacrificed, and you are in undisputed possession of the spoil. Do not then grudge us existence, or that for which alone man should exist—Liberty : Say not that we are unprepared ; Liberty prepares herself : Say not that we are ignorant, lest ye judge yourselves. Why are we so ? Enough has been done and suffered by us to satisfy not only justice and law, but cowardice, malice, and revenge ; it is time our persecution should cease. The nations of Europe are vindicating themselves into freedom ; ye talk about it yourselves, and do ye think that we will be left behind : If you will join us, we are ready to embrace you ; if you will not, shame and discomfiture await you. For us, whether supported or not, we are prepared for either event. If Freedom comes, we will clasp her to

our

our hearts, and surrender her, but with our last breath ; if slavery is still to be our portion, we have learned by bitter experience to endure ; and to that righteous and just God, who has created and preserves us, we commit our cause, nothing doubting, but in the fullness of his good time, that he will manifest his glorious mercies, even unto us ; though for wise purposes, he may think fit to continue us a little longer under the rod of our oppressors, the ministers of his wrath.”

IF such an appeal were made, *what should we answer ?* Let him that can, devise a reply ; I know of none.

THE argument now stands thus : To oppose the unconstitutional weight of Government, subject as that Government is to the still more unconstitutional and unjust bias of English influence, it is absolutely necessary that the weight of the people's scale should be encreased. This object can only be attained by a Reform in Parliament, and no reform is practicable, that shall not include the Catholics. These three steps are inseparably connected, and let not any man deceive himself, by supposing the first attainable without the second, or either without the third. Is the

present Government of Ireland such an one as ought to be opposed? Every good Irishman will answer, yes! Have we not sufficient experience, how fruitless all opposition is on the present system? The people are divided, each party afraid and jealous of the other; they have only the justice of their cause to support them, and that plea grievously weakened by the acknowledged exclusion of three-fourths of the nation from their rights as men: Government, *a foreign Government*, is a small, but a disciplined and compact body, with the sword, the purse, and the honours of Ireland at their disposal: It is easy to see the event of such an opposition to such an Administration. It follows, that to oppose it with success, the people must change their plan.

Do we not see the conduct of Government at this hour, and shall we not learn wisdom, even from our enemies? They know that the Catholics hold the balance between them and that fraction of the nation, which we chuse to dignify with the name of *the People*; and therefore, they court the Catholics. If they secure them, I should be glad to know, what they have to fear with the immense power and influence attached to office, with the command

mand of the treasury, and with the whole Catholic party, three-fourths of the kingdom, attached by gratitude to them, and alienated by repeated suspicion, and unremitting ill usage from their enemies.

IN a word, the alternative is, on the one hand Reform, and the Catholics, justice and liberty; on the other, an unconditional submission to the present, and every future Administration, who may think proper to follow their steps, and who may indulge with ease and safety their propensity to speculation and spoil, and insult, while the people remain timid and divided. Between these you must chuse, and chuse immediately, and that choice may be final.

IF the whole body of the people unite with cordial sincerity, and demand a general Reform in Parliament, which shall include restitution of the elective franchise to the Catholics; we shall then, and not otherwise, have an honest and independent representation of the people; we shall have a barrier of strength sufficient to defy the utmost efforts of the most profligate and powerful English Administration; we shall be enabled to avail ourselves of the infinite advantages with which Providence has endowed our country; corruption shall

be annihilated, Government shall become honest per-force, and thereby recover at least some of that respectability which a long course of political depravity has exhausted : In a word, we shall recover our rank, and become a nation in something beside the name.

IF on the other hand, we think reform too dear, when purchased by justice ; if we are still illiberal and blind bigots, who deny that civil liberty can exist out of the pale of Protestantism, if we withhold the sacred cup of *Liberty* from our Catholic Brother, and repel him from the communion of our natural rights, let us at least be consistent, and cease to murmur at the oppression of the Government which grinds us ; let us bear, if we can, without wincing the whips and goads of our own tyrants, with the consoling reflection, that we can act the tyrant in our turn, and gall the wretched slaves below us ; let Administration proceed to play upon the terrors of the Protestants, the hopes of the Catholics, and balancing the one party by the other, plunder and laugh at, and defy both ; let English influence meet and check our rising commerce at every turn ; let us remain obscure and wretched, and unknown in Europe ; let the bulk of the  
people

people continue barbarians, in hopelefs and incurable ignorance, and wretchednefs, and want : All is well, fo long as we can prevent the Catholics from rifing to a rank in fociety with ourfelves ; we will, in the fpirit of the envious man in the fable, bear to lofe one of our eyes, fo that our neighbour may lofe both, and grope about in utter darknefs.

BUT I will hope better things : The example of America, of Poland, and above all, of France, cannot on the minds of liberal men but force conviction. In France 200,000 Catholics deputed a Proteftant, St. Etienne, to the National Affembly, as their representative, with orders to procure, what has fince been accomplifhed, an abolition of all civil diftinctions, which were founded merely on religious opinions. In America, the Catholic and Proteftant fit equally in Congrefs, without any contention arifing, other than who fhall ferve his country beft : So may it be in Ireland ! So will it be, if men are fincere in their wifhes for her profperity and future elevation : Let them but confider what union has done in fmall ftates, what difcord in great ones : Let them look to their Government ; let them  
look

look to their fellow slaves, who by coalition with them, may rise to be their fellow citizens, and form a new order in their society, a new era in their history : Let them once cry *Reform, and the Catholics* and Ireland is free, independent, and happy.

### A NORTHERN WHIG,

BELFAST, AUGUST 1, 1791.





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Chambers was himself a leading member of The Society of United Irishmen and after the Rebellion of 1798 was banished to America where he died in 1837.

- (1) M.J. Mac Manus, A bibliography of Wolfe Tone, Dublin 1940.
- (2) Rebellion Papers, 620/19/29, State Paper Office, Dublin.
- (3) Rebellion Papers, 620/19/30, State Paper Office, Dublin.

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