

Invective Against Corry

Speech in Irish Parliament, February 14, 1800.

Has the gentleman done? Has he completely done? He was unparliamentary from the beginning to the end of his speech. There was scarce a word he uttered that was not a violation of the privileges of the House; but I did not call him to order—why? because the limited talents of some men render it impossible for them to be severe without being unparliamentary. But before I sit down I shall show him how to be severe and parliamentary at the same time. On any other occasion I should think myself justifiable in treating with silent contempt anything which might fall from that honourable member; but there are times when the insignificance of the accuser is lost in the magnitude of the accusation. I know the difficulty the honourable gentleman laboured under when he attacked me, conscious that, on a comparative view of our characters, public and private, there is nothing he could say which would injure me. The public would not believe the charge. I despise the falsehood. If such a charge were made by an honest man, I would answer it in the manner I shall do before I sit down. But I shall first reply to it when not made by an honest man.

The right honourable gentleman has called me ‘an unimpeached traitor.’ I ask, why not ‘traitor,’ unqualified by any epithet? I will tell him: it was because he dare not. It was the act of a coward, who raises his arm to strike, but has not courage to give the blow. I will not call him villain, because it would be unparliamentary, and he is a privy counsellor. I will not call him fool, because he happens to be chancellor of the exchequer. But I say he is one who has abused the privilege of Parliament and freedom of debate to the uttering language, which, if spoken out of the House, I should answer only with a blow. I care not how high his situation, how low his character, how contemptible his speech; whether a privy

counsellor or a parasite, my answer would be a blow. He has charged me with being connected with the rebels: the charge is utterly, totally, and meanly false. Does the honourable gentleman rely on the report of the House of Lords for the foundation of his assertion? If he does, I can prove to the committee there was a physical impossibility of that report being true. But I scorn to answer any man for my conduct, whether he be a political coxcomb, or whether he brought himself into power by a false glare of courage or not. I scorn to answer any wizard of the Castle throwing himself into fantastical airs. But if an honourable and independent man were to make a charge against me, I would say: 'You charge me with having an intercourse with the rebels, and you found your charge upon what is said to have appeared before a committee of the lords. Sir, the report of that committee is totally and egregiously irregular.' I will read a letter from Mr. Nelson, who had been examined before that committee; it states that what the report represents him as having spoken is not what he said.

From the situation that I held, and from the connections I had in the City of Dublin, it was necessary for me to hold intercourse with various descriptions of persons. The right honourable member might as well have been charged with a participation in the guilt of those traitors; for he had communicated with some of those very persons on the subject of parliamentary reform. The Irish government, too, were in communication with some of them.

The right honourable member has told me I deserted a profession where wealth and station were the reward of industry and talent. If I mistake not, that gentleman endeavoured to obtain those rewards by the same means; but he soon deserted the occupation of a barrister for those of a parasite and pander. He fled from the labour of study to flatter at the table of the great. He found the lords' parlour a better sphere for his exertions than the hall of the Four Courts; the house of a great man a more convenient way

to power and place; and that it was easier for a statesman of middling talents to sell his friends, than for a lawyer of no talents to sell his clients.

For myself, whatever corporate or other bodies have said or done to me, I from the bottom of my heart forgive them. I feel I have done too much for my country to be vexed at them. I would rather that they should not feel or acknowledge what I have done for them, and call me traitor, than have reason to say I sold them. I will always defend myself against the assassin; but with large bodies it is different. To the people I will bow: they may be my enemy—I never shall be theirs.

At the emancipation of Ireland, in 1782, I took a leading part in the foundation of that Constitution which is now endeavoured to be destroyed. Of that Constitution I was the author; in that Constitution I glory; and for it the honourable gentleman should bestow praise, not invent calumny. Notwithstanding my weak state of body, I come to give my last testimony against this union, so fatal to the liberties and interests of my country. I come to make common cause with these honourable and virtuous gentlemen around me; to try to save the Constitution; or if not to save the Constitution, at least to save our characters, and remove from our graves the foul disgrace of standing apart while a deadly blow is aimed at the independence of our country.

The right honourable gentleman says I fled from the country after exciting rebellion, and that I have returned to raise another. No such thing. The charge is false. The civil war had not commenced when I left the kingdom; and I could not have returned without taking a part. On one side there was the camp of the rebel; on the other, the camp of the minister, a greater traitor than that rebel. The stronghold of the Constitution was nowhere to be found. I agree that the rebel who rose against the government should have suffered; but I missed on the scaffold the right honourable gentleman. Two desperate parties were in arms against the Constitution. The right honourable gentleman belonged to one of those parties and deserved death. I could not join the rebel; I could not join the government;

I could not join torture; I could not join half-hanging; I could not join free quarter; I could take part with neither. I was therefore absent from a scene where I could not be active without self-reproach, nor indifferent with safety.

Many honourable gentlemen thought differently from me; I respect their opinions, but I keep my own; and I think now, as I thought then, that the treason of the minister against the liberties of the people was infinitely worse than the rebellion of the people against the minister.

I have returned, not as the right honourable member has said, to raise another storm; I have returned to discharge an honourable debt of gratitude to my country, that conferred a great reward for past services, which, I am proud to say, was not greater than my desert. I have returned to protect that Constitution, of which I was the parent and founder, from the assassination of such men as the honourable gentleman and his unworthy associates. They are corrupt; they are seditious; and they, at this very moment, are in a conspiracy against their country. I have returned to refute a libel as false as it is malicious, given to the public under the appellation of a report of a committee of the lords. Here I stand ready for impeachment or trial; I dare accusation. I defy the honourable gentleman; I defy the government; I defy their whole phalanx; let them come forth. I tell the ministers I will neither give them quarter nor take it. I am here to lay the shattered remains of my Constitution on the floor of this House in defence of the liberties of my country.