

# Irish Youth and English Whiggery

Speech in Conciliation Hall, June 22nd, 1846.

Sir, I do not apologise to the meeting for taking part in the discussion that has arisen. The observations I consider it my duty to make will be few, for my friends who preceded me have left me little to say. The principles they maintain, the opinions they hold, have been defended by them with courage and ability. I have embraced those principles—I profess those opinions. The defence which my friends have made is my defence. That it was no weak defence your applause sufficiently attests. That it was called for, no one will deny who heard the speech that was delivered by Mr. Fitzpatrick at the commencement of our proceedings this day. That gentleman reproached us with ‘the elaborate preparation of our speeches,’ and he did so in a speech that was evidently prepared. If it is a fault to speak with premeditation—if it is a fault so to train our thoughts and frame our language that we may appear before this assembly in a manner worthy of its character; if this be censurable, then is Mr. Fitzpatrick not exempt from blame.

In uttering these taunts he impairs his own title to forensic fame. He preaches against a practice in which, for the last few days, he must have been most sedulously engaged. He is a scholar, I believe, and in this instance will not consider the quotation inappropriate:—

‘Clodius accusat moechus.’

Sir, this gentleman, inspired, no doubt, with the zeal of a true patriot, rose to denounce past differences and he gave effect to his denunciation by provoking new dissensions. He was not present at the last battle—he had no opportunity of evincing his courage or of testing his skill—therefore, for his own especial benefit, he should get up a fresh one to-day. He

repudiates disunion, but the result is discord. He preaches peace, and preaches it so forcibly as to provoke a war. The attack has been begun—we have been struck, but from our position we will not flinch. The imputations with which we have been insulted, the charges with which we have been aggrieved, we shall meet, and boldly meet. That we suspect the integrity of our leader, we deny. That we have assailed him, let the people decide. You have our assurance that, in denouncing the Whigs, we designed no attack upon the leader of this Association. Accept that assurance, or reject it as you may find reason to do. If you believe us to be men of truth, accept it. If you believe us to be false, reject the assurance, and denounce our acts.

But we have been told that in denouncing the Whigs, we insulted the people. In warning the people against the Whigs, we are told that we implied a corrupt tendency in the people. Sir, we remembered what the Whigs had done in other times, and were prompted by the recollection to warn those whom they deceived before. If to warn be to insult, then do we plead guilty, and we await the penalty. Did I consider the defence of the Whigs that has been made here this day of such a nature as to induce you to look upon them with more favourable eyes than you did a few days since, I should not hesitate to restate my opinions upon the policy of that party. But I know your truth, and feel assured that the most eloquent advocate they could purchase would fail to effect a compromise of the national question—fail to induce your acceptance of the most ‘liberal measure’ they can concede as an equivalent for the independence you are ambitious to restore. Perhaps this sentiment ought not to have escaped me. We are young men, ‘juvenile orators,’ and should not venture to speak on your behalf. Mr. O’Connell, in his letter, alludes to our youth—Mr. Fitzpatrick reproves it. If youth be a fault, it is a fault we cannot help. Each day corrects it, however, and that is a consoling reflection. If it be an intrusion on our parts to come to this Hall, to aid your efforts and to propagate your principles, I can only say it is an intrusion which your applause has sanctioned. For myself, I think it right to say, that when I

came to Dublin this winter I did not expect that I should have had the honour of sustaining so conspicuous a part as I believe I have done in your councils. It was not my intention to have assumed this part. It was forced upon me, and, to the entreaty of my friends, I was induced to yield. Believe me, whatever a young man may gain by successful displays in public, he incurs much by these displays that pains and depresses him. If he wins the panegyric of some he is sure to excite the envy of others.

He is pained by suspicions, secret rumours, direct attacks. His motives are impugned, his acts condemned; these are the penalties attached to youth. More than this, if he suffers from the malice of his foes, he must submit to the sarcasm of his elder friends. In replying to the charges that have been made against us, we feel that we labour under a serious disadvantage. Youth is a season of promise more than of retrospect. We cannot rest upon the memory of past services—we cannot appeal to your gratitude. Upon our principles alone we take our stand—in your patriotism we place our trust. Mr. Fitzpatrick congratulates himself upon the ‘five millions’ that back him, and regrets that we can only muster ‘five.’ An error in his political arithmetic, no doubt. The ‘five millions’ are not against the five—perhaps it is not too much to say the ‘five millions’ are with the ‘five.’

One thing I know, that those who are familiar with us are aware that we do not speak in public what we do not speak in private—that between our public and our private sentiments there is no discrepancy—that we do not sneer in private at the men whom we eulogise in public. We do not make Repeal a jest, for we have made it a vow. As we have acted, thus we shall continue to act. You may exclude us from this Hall. I say you may exclude us from this Hall, but you will not separate us from the country. Your applause did not call forth our love of country—your denunciation will not repress it. Exclusion from this Hall will not affect our sentiments, our principles, our resolves. On the contrary, there are many things in a popular agitation that tend rather to enervate than strengthen sentiments

of a generous nature. There are many things in the depths of a political society that repel, offend, disgust. Removed from these, our hearts are pure, and our minds are free. Beyond these walls we have many incentives to love our country, and to serve her well. Her lofty mountains, her old ruins, full of a glorious history—her old music—the memories of her soldiers, her statesmen, and her poets—these you cannot deprive us of.

So long as we possess these, so long shall Ireland inspire our love and claim our service. Nor can I believe that you will forget our names. Least of all will you forget the men who gave to you a new literature. You will not forget the men who have given to you those songs that have cheered the heart of the old man and have kindled into fire the thoughts of youth—those songs which the peasant may teach the echo on the mountain, and which may yet be heard upon a field of triumph. This, sir, is certain, we shall leave this Hall as we entered it—the unpaid servants of our country. We shall leave it with our honour unimpaired, though our influence may be crushed—we shall leave it asserting the right of free opinion, and our determination to defend it—and if, hereafter, you regret the step you may have taken against us, and once more require our aid, though you may have acted towards us as the citizens of Rome once did towards Coriolanus of Corioli, we will not imitate his recreant revenge—we will not go over to the Volsci—but return to your ranks, and fight beneath the flag from which you drove us.