



AN ADDRESS TO THE
PEOPLE OF IRELAND
THEOBALD
WOLFE TONE

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND



By Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1796

Published By An Chartlann.



PREFACE

The following proclamation was found aboard the French ship of war *Le Hoche*, following the Battle of Tory Island, off the coast of County Donegal, in October 1798. The address was believed to have been written in late 1796 at the time of the attempted French expedition at Bantry Bay off the Cork coast which fate in the form of bad weather ultimately scuppered.

Tone would be captured, arrested and sentenced to death for high treason following the Battle of Tory Island and he would die on 19 November 1798, having committed suicide in his prison cell. The following address by Tone to the Irish people, intended to be distributed widely across the nation in the event of a successful French landing, has all the hallmarks of a proclamation, alike to that proclaimed by Emmet in 1803, that of the Fenians in 1867 and of that read aloud by Pearse at the General Post Office in 1916. It is thus not only one of Tone's finest writings, but also the first true proclamation of the Irish Republic.

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

At length the time is arrived when a friend to the Liberty and Independence of Ireland, may venture to speak the truth, and examine into the situation and interest of his country, without fear of being stopped short by that most unanswerable of all arguments, an information in the Court of King's Bench, at the suit of his Majesty's Attorney General.

It is long since every honest Irishman has mourned in secret over the misery and degradation of his native land, without daring to murmur a syllable in the way of complaint. Not even our groans were free! Six hundred years of oppression and slavery have passed in melancholy succession over our father's heads and our own, during which period we have been vilified by every evil, which tyranny could devise and cruelty execute; we have been scattered, like chaff, over the land, and our name has been forgotten among nations; we have been massacred and plundered, insulted and despised; we have been reduced to that lowest state of human degradation; we have almost ceased to respect ourselves; we have doubted whether the opinion of our oppressors was not just, and whether we were not in fact, framed for that submission, to which we have been bent by the pressure of so many centuries of hand, unremitting, unrelenting tyranny.

But if the judgements of Providence be slow, they are certain. The villain must not hope to walk in credit to his grave, nor the tyranny to insult for ever, with impunity, the misery, he has caused. The pride and arrogance of England have at length called down upon her head the tardy and lingering justice, which her manifold crimes have so long provoked; the sufferings of Ireland, prostrate and humble as she has been,

even to the dust, seem to have awakened the attention of him, who rules the destiny of nations; in his goodness and compassion he has at length regarded us, and placed in our hands the means, if we have the courage to be free.

Without being too much of an enthusiastic visionary, I think I may say I see a new order of things commencing in Europe. The stupendous revolution, which has taken place in France; the unparalleled succession of events, which have, in defiance of the united efforts of all the despots of Europe, established that mighty republic on the broad and firm basis of equal rights, liberties, and laws; the abasement, contrary to all human probability, of her enemies, every one of whom has, in his turn, been forced to yield to her ascendant genius, with the exception thus far, of Austria, and especially England, whose fall has only been delayed, to make her degradation more terrible, and the triumph of her victorious rival the more complete; all this, I say, has satisfied my mind, that the ancient system of tyranny must fall. In many nations it is already extinct, in others, it has received its death wound, and though it may for some time trail a feeble and lingering existence, its duration is ascertained, and its days already numbered. I do not look upon the French revolution as a question subject to the ordinary calculation of politics; *it is a thing which is to be*; and as all human experience has verified that the new doctrine ever finally subverts the old; as the Mosaic law subverted idolatry, as Christianity subverted the Jewish dispensation, as the Reformation subverted Popery, so, I am firmly convinced, the doctrine of Republicanism will firmly subvert that of Monarchy, and establish a system of just and rational Liberty, on the ruins of the Thrones of the Despots of Europe.

But whether this opinion be well or ill founded, the question I mean to examine will not be affected by the result.

Fortunately or unfortunately for Ireland, her cause is independent of the theory. The object for her immediate consideration, is not whether she shall adopt this or that form of Government, but whether she shall be independent under any. She has too many solid, substantial, heavy, existing grievances, to require much ingenuity, or subtle argument, to convince her of her interest and her duty, and the question on which we must take an instant determination will, if I mistake not, be decided as soon as it is stated.

The alternative which is now submitted to your choice, with regard to England is, in one word, UNION OR SEPARATION! You must determine, and that instantly, between slavery and independence, there is no third way. I will not insult you, by doubting what will be your decision. I anticipate your immediate and unanimous declaration, which establishes for ever Liberty to yourselves, and Independence to your country.

To a magnanimous people it is unnecessary to prove that it is *base*, to an enlightened people it is unnecessary to prove that it is *ruinous*, to exist in dependence on the will of a foreign power, and that power an ambitious rival. To you this is not matter of mere speculation – you feel it in your government, in your laws, in your manners, in your principles, in your education; with all the great moral and physical advantages, of which you are possessed, you are unnoticed and unknown as a nation in Europe; your bodies and your minds are bent down by the incumbent pressure of your tyrant; she, to maintain whose avarice and ambition you are forced to spill your best blood, in whose cause you fight without glory, and without profit, where victory but rivets your chains the faster, and where defeat adds to slavery, mortification and disgrace. In vain are you placed in the most advantageous position for

unlimited commerce, in vain are you blessed with a fruitful foil, with every requisite for trade and manufactures, with inexhaustible mines, with navigable rivers, and with the noblest harbours in Europe. All these advantages are blasted by the contagious presence of your imperious rival, before whose influence your strength is withered, your resources crushed, and the rising spirit of emulation strangled in the birth. It is England, who debauches and degrades your gentry; it is England, who starves your manufacturers, to drive them into her fleets and armies; it is England, who keeps your wretched peasantry half-fed, half-clothed, miserable and despised, defrauded of their just rights, as human beings, and reduced, if the innate spirit of your country did not support them, as it were by a miracle, below the level of the beasts of the field; it is England who buys your legislators, to betray you, and pays them by money levied on yourselves; it is England, who foments and perpetuates, as far as in her lies, the spirit of religious dissension among you, and that labours to keep asunder Irishman from Irishman, because that in your cordial Union among yourselves, she sees clearly the downfall of her usurpation, and the establishment of your liberties; it is England, who supports that rotten, aristocratic faction among you, which, though not the tenth part of your population, has arrogated to itself five-sixths of the property, and the whole of the patronage and power of your nation; a faction which to maintain itself by the power of England, is ready to sacrifice, and does daily sacrifice your dearest rights to her insatiable lust of gold power.

Look to the origin of your connection with Britain, that proud and selfish nation, and see what is the foundation of the authority of your oppressors! Six hundred years ago, the Pope, an Englishman, thought proper to confer the crown of Ireland

on Henry the 2d, King of England; and the King of England was pleased in return to guarantee to his countryman, the Pope, the payment of a certain tax *to be levied on the People of Ireland*; but were the People consulted, whose liberties and properties were thus bartered away between these two Englishmen? No such thing – their independence was sold by one foreigner to the other, without their privity or concurrence, and to consummate the injustice of this most infamous and audacious bargain – they were compelled themselves to raise the purchase money of their disgrace, *and to pay for being enslaved*. Such was the commencement of the British Monarchy in Ireland, and what have been its fruits? Six hundred years of continual intestine wars, marked with every circumstance of horror and barbarity, with the desolation of whole provinces, with massacres and confiscation and plunder, with fire, famine and pestilence, with murder to that horrible extent, that at length it was decreed, even by your own Legislature, to be no crime in an Englishman to kill *a mere Irishman*. When by these multiplied abominations; your strength was exhausted, and your spirit broken; when your oppressors made it their boast that you were *brayed as it were in a mortar*, this execrable tyranny of the sword was succeeded by the still more execrable tyranny of laws, framed with a diabolical sagacity to impoverish and degrade and brutalize you; laws even yet but imperfectly removed, and for whole partial repeal, extorted from your reluctant oppressors, you are indebted to the recent union among yourselves, to your consequent spirit, and to the combination of events produced by the French Revolution.

But to compensate you for the loss of your independent existence as a nation, for the destruction of your trade and manufactures, the plunder of your property, the interdiction of education, to three-fourths of your People, and their absolute

exclusion from a state of political existence, you have been gravely told that you participated in what is called in the cant of your enemies, *the inestimable blessings of the British Constitution*.

I will not here enter into the merits or demerits of that Constitution. You have read the productions, which have appeared on that subject, and it is therefore unnecessary for me to repeat them; on him, who is not convinced by the arguments of Payne, of the absurdity of hereditary monarchs, and hereditary legislators, where no man would admit of hereditary cobblers, who wished to have his shoes well-mended, I despair of making any impression, I will therefore for the sake of argument suppose, though I will by no means admit, that this Constitution is really as excellent as it is represented to be by its warmest panegyrists, who, by the bye, will ever be found amongst those who exist by its daily destruction, and I answer, in the first place, that you may, if you choose, adopt that Constitution as your own, when your independence is once recognized, and you come to organise your Government; but to quit this, which I look upon as a wild and idle supposition, I say in the second place, that you do not possess this excellent and happy Constitution! that, even in England, it is disfigured and distorted, but that in Ireland it is so smothered beneath a mass of corruption, as to be, in effect, no more the Constitution of England, as it exists in theory, than it is the Constitution of Constantinople or Japan.

In the first place what is your King? Your King is a foreigner, an Englishman, a native of a country, that holds you in utter contempt; whom you never see nor expect to see; who never condescends to visit Ireland, who, with all the ignorant prejudices and illiberal passions of his nation, distributes from his closet at St. James's, by the advice of the British Cabinet, the

honours and rewards of your country, either among English sycophants, or more despicable Irish apostates, whose strongest recommendation to his royal favour, is that they are ready at all times, and without scruple, to sacrifice the interest and independence of their native land to the avarice or ambition of England. Is there a man of you, that is not convinced, and that has not felt, that even the meanest Englishman considers himself as your superior, and despises an Irishman in his heart? And have you not had a thousand occasions to know that the King of England holds as rank and vulgar prejudices on that score as the lowest and most ignorant of his vassals? That he regards you, not as a nation of valuable subjects, but as a rabble of mutinous slaves, and that your whole realm is not of as much importance in his eyes as any one manufacturing town of England. People of Ireland, this is your *absentee* Monarch! This is the idol, before whom you are to fall down, and to worship, like another Moloch, with the sacrifice of your blood; to pamper whose pride and folly and ambition, you are daily called upon to devote your treasures and your lives, your individual liberties, and the glory and independence of your native land; and this is the sentiment, which is called loyalty by those, who wish to deceive and to mislead in order that they may plunder and oppress you.

But perhaps you find in the national spirit, in the patriotism and virtue of the other two estates of your Legislature, the Lords and the Commons, a protection from the ruinous effects of an Executive power, deposited in a foreign country, connected with you by no ties of interest or of glory, actuated solely by selfish motives, and illiberal prejudices, and who is represented by a fugacious personage, bound by no responsibility and amenable to no tribunal.

See then the redoubtable barrier against oppression, which you have in your House of Lords! In the very first instance one half of them are Englishmen, who never saw Ireland, who have not a foot of property there, who do not think it worth their while even to visit the country, from which they derive their titles, but who would of themselves be sufficient to stifle all opposition by their numbers, if those noble Lords, who are in the habit of attending Parliament were to be found, miraculously, in opposition to the mandate of the British Minister. The means, by which a peerage is obtained in Ireland, and the motives which determine the King of England, *the fountain of honour*, to raise his faithful subjects to that high rank, are of sufficient notoriety. It is well known, and has been asserted even in your Parliament, that the honours of the peerage are prostituted to the most infamous purpose of corruption; that they are bought and sold in open market, and at a stated price, or made a subject of a more ruinous, though less disgraceful commerce, in debauching the other branch of the Legislature; that sometimes a man is made a peer, because he can command two votes in the House of Commons, and sometimes because he can command five thousand pounds in money; sometimes because he has been obedient as a judge in trials, where the Crown has been concerned, and sometimes because he has been refractory in Parliament, and it is necessary to appease him. If there were any reason to expect a possibility of patriotism or public virtue from a body thus constituted, there are six and twenty bishops, many of them Englishmen, and all of them expectants of the English Government for promotion or translation, ready to strangle it in the birth. Such are the hereditary counsellors of the Crown in Ireland, the judges in the last resort, the impartial and incorruptible guardians of the Constitution, against the

encroachments of the people on the one side, and the King on the other; the people, with whom they have no common interest, and the King, who names the peerage and episcopacy, who distributes ribands and Stars, and mitres, and places and pensions, at his pleasure.

The Crown and the Lords being thus organized against you, and having confessedly their own distinct and separate interests to consult, at least it is hoped that the third estate, the Commons, your representatives, emanating from yourselves, deriving their existence from the choice of the people, of which they make a part, surely they at least will take care of your rights, your liberties, and your interest, which are their own; proud of the sacred deposit, which you have confided in their hands, they will magnanimously resist any attempt of the other two estates, should any such be made, to invade the inalienable privileges of their constituents; amenable to the tribunal of your opinion, they will dread the disgrace invariably attached to corruption in a Legislator, even more than death; should any courtly pander be found hardy enough to risqué the attempt to debauch their stern integrity, they will turn aside from his presence with horror and disgust, if indeed the first emotion of insulted virtue does not rather prompt them to seize the villain, to drag him from his den to public view, and denounce him to the nation as the most atrocious to all parricides, the assassin of his country.

I cannot continue this irony! the subject is too sorrowful to excite any other feeling than indignation. Who are these abominable slaves, so impudently called your representatives? How are they chosen? Who are their constituents? It is not so notorious as no longer to excite surprise, or scarcely resentment, that the most inestimable of our privileges, from which all others depend, the right to choose your Legislators is

made a daily subject of a base and villainous traffic? That a station the most honourable to which man can aspire, that of representing his fellow-citizens in the great council of the nation, is bought and sold, and that feats in Parliament are become a subject of dirty, commercial speculation; so that any fellow, even of the most infamous character, provided he can raise three thousand pounds, may in defiance of the public indignation and contempt, place himself triumphantly on the benches of your Legislature, and make laws to bind millions of men, any one of whom would scarcely trust himself alone in his company, or suffer him to enter his house, without previously locking up his spoons. The Temple of your liberties is filled with buyers and sellers, with money changers and thieves; with placemen and pensioners; those unclean and ominous harpies, gorged with the public spoil, and sucking still, like insatiable Vampires, the last drainings of the vital blood of their country; with fraudulent bankrupts, who take shelter in Parliament from the persecution of their creditors, and purchase with a part of their plunder, the privilege to retain the rest in security; with speculating lawyers, who, without principles and without practice, and destitute of talents to rise in their own profession, take up the more gainful trade of making in the Legislative those laws, which in the courts they are unable to expound, force on their way with inveterate perseverance, a servility that knows no scruple, and imprudence incapable of a blush, repel their abler and honester brethren, who can not bend to those vile means of advancement, and make a short cut through Parliament to the judgement-feat; with those miserable automations, the humble dependants of great men, who place them as their puppets in the House of Commons, and whose condition is, I know not whether more to be pitied or despised; with young coxcombs of

fortune, who think *a feat in the House*, like their whores, their horses, and their hounds, a necessary appendage to their rank and dignity; even the members for your counties, where, if at all, the public voice might be supposed to have some little influence, even in their election, a system of corruption universally prevails, less compendious than that, which exists in your boroughs, but more scandalous and destructive. I do not fear that any one man in Ireland, even on your Treasury bench will be found, with a forehead hard enough to deny one syllable of what I have here advanced, or even to assert that the picture is overcharged. Your Parliament has long lost all character, as it has lost all decency; every honest man despises it; the prostitutes, who compose it know this and tremble; in vain do they multiply laws for their protection, and persecute without remorse the slightest invasion of what they are pleased to vote to be their privileges; the sanction of character is wanting; the public opinion is pronounced against them, and nothing but the pressure of an incumbent force has prevented the indignant spirit of Ireland, from bursting forth long since, and levelling with the dust the edifice of her oppression.

From a Legislature, constituted as yours is, no good can flow. Those who compose it, have no common interest with the people – they feel that they are but a foreign colony, depending entirely for their existence on the connection with England, whose power alone secures them in possession of their usurpation. If they had the inclination (of which I am far from suspecting them) they have not the courage to be honest. The fact and truth is, that the great bulk of the aristocracy of Ireland, conscious that their estates were originally acquired by the most unjustifiable means, either by open robbery, sword in hand, or by the more infamous pillage of the laws, dare not oppose the will of the British Minister, from the apprehension

lest he should withdraw his protection from their party, and leave them to the mercy of the majority of their countrymen. It is vain to argue with men under the influence of so extreme a fear. Those of them, who are more enlightened, and who, of course, do not dread a resumption of property, which the lapse of time, and a change of circumstances, have rendered impossible, yet affect a terror they do not feel, to confirm the delusion of the rest, and profit of the panic, which in a great degree they have themselves caused, and diligently cultivated, to govern their party, and to perpetuate their monopoly in every department of the state. By these means they are enabled to make their bargain with the British Minister, and nothing can be imagined less difficult than the negotiation. Their language is simply this –

“Maintain us in our places, our pensions, and our power; suffer us to support our mistresses, our dependants, and ourselves, at the public expense; surrender to us, in a word, the entire patronage of the crown; in return we engage to surrender to you the commerce, the manufactures, the liberty and the independence of Ireland; we will support you in every measure, which you may devise, to impoverish, to divide, and to weaken our country; we will abet you in every mad and ruinous war, in which you may think proper to embark; we will squander the blood of Ireland, without limitation or reserve; *we will stand and fall with England*; suffer us only in return to appropriate to ourselves such portion of the public treasure as the sacrifices we may make to you may appear to deserve.”

To a proportion so just and reasonable in itself, it is not to be supposed the English Minister can be so captious as to raise the least objection. He purchases, in fact, for England every advantage she can possibly derive from the connection between the countries, without putting her to the expense of sixpence, for Ireland, who is sold, is also forced to raise the purchase money; and herein lies the essential difference

between the political situation of England and Ireland. In the former undoubtedly the Constitution is depraved and degraded, and corruption carried on to an enormous extent; the liberty of the people is, beyond contradiction, sacrificed to the arbitrary will and pleasure of the King; but at the same time their essential interests are, in all other respects, consulted by the Government. The Minister there studies to advance their trade and manufactures, by all possible means, justifiable, and unjustifiable, upon the same principle that the farmer manures the soil he means to cultivate, and feeds the beast he destines for labour. Under this point of view I have no hesitation to admit that England is essentially well and wisely governed, and a mere merchant or manufacturer, who looks no further than his warehouse or his shop, has no reason to wish for a change. But do you, my countrymen, lay your hands on your hearts, and ask yourselves, *is all this so with us?* I do not fear contradiction when I answer for you that the direct contrary is the fact, and that your legislators are *hired* and *paid* by the English Minister, (paid with your own money I beseech you to keep ever in memory) to destroy and smother your arts, manufactures and commerce in the cradle, lest they might by possibility interfere with the interest of England, who will be ever undoubtedly, better pleased to see you a colony of idlers, to consume her manufactures, and to recruit her fleets and armies, than to meet you in the markets of the world, an active, enterprising, and industrious rival. No English Minister would have the folly or the impudence to propose to the corrupt and profligate of his dependants a measure subversive of the interests of the nation, or if he were so utterly infatuated, which is indeed impossible, he would not be a Minister for four and twenty hours after. When a member of Parliament in England sells himself, it is always with a saving clause; there are things

he will not do, and which he never will be asked to do; but a member of Parliament in Ireland who sells himself (as they all do, or wish to do) is, politically speaking, damned without reserve; the condition of his bargain is to surrender his country to the mercy of England. I do not here speak of your liberties, for in that respect the people of England are nearly as badly off as yourselves, but in the name of God, consider how this connection affects your interests, and see how absolutely and utterly different your condition is from theirs, in that respect. The commerce of England is protected and cherished and fostered by the Government; on a question of trade, all consideration of party vanishes, every man, whatever be his political delinquency, is alike eager to forward any measure which promises to be beneficial, and even the most abject slaves in the English House of Commons, are honest upon that score. But how is it with prostitutes of the Irish House of Commons? The indispensable requisite, the fundamental principle of their bargain, I repeat it, is the sacrifice of their country to the avarice and ambition of England. I appeal with confidence to your own unvarying experience, to determine whether in Ireland there be any road to preferment, other than an implicit deference to the will of the English Minister. Is any man promoted, or will any man ever be promoted to power or station, at least while the connection holds, because he is, or is even suspected to be the friend of his country? Would not such a suspicion operate infallibly to his exclusion? And hence it is, that it is impossible under the present system, that you can ever have an honest Government, because the English Minister, who names your rulers, will be sure to exact from them such conditions and engagements as no honest Irishman can by possibility submit to, and consequently none but knaves and sycophants, who are ready without scruple to take this

abominable covenant, can fill place or office; it is not so in England, because there, as I have already said, the essential interests of the nation are equally the object of all parties, and a man may accept a situation in the Government, without sacrificing his integrity or his reputation; but I defy any man to take a share in the measures of the Irish Government, without a total surrender of all principle and character, as an Irishman. Number, I beseech you, your tyrants; consider the most virulent of your oppressors, man by man; review the whole of their political career, and see what are the means whereby they have become your rulers. Have they any other merit than that of blind submission to the will of England, a profligate eagerness to sacrifice the very existence of Ireland to her arbitrary will and pleasure? Turn then to those, who call themselves your patriots, and see whether they are not essentially as much your enemies, and as ready to prostrate you and themselves at the feet of your tyrants, as the most impudent and abandoned of her acknowledged hirelings. Do you not go to your Legislature, as to a comedy, to be amused by the talents of the actors, well knowing the part which each is to play, and what is to be the catastrophe of the piece? Can you not, on every question of importance, before hand with precision how every individual will vote, and upon what motives? Do you believe, on your honour and conscience, that you could find ten men in your entire Legislature, who act upon conviction or principle? Is not making your laws, as much a trade as making your shoes, and not the thousandth part so honest or so respectable? And if all this be so, what kind of Administration is that under which you groan, for a brave, a sagacious and an enlightened people with warm hearts, with quick feelings, and with strong resentments?

But I waste time in dwelling on grievances, and abuses, which you all know and feel. The difficulty in enumerating the sufferings of Ireland is not what to choose, but what to reject; so many abominations crowd at once on my mind, and every one more atrocious than the other. Let me turn from a subject so disgusting in all points of view, as your actual Government, and contemplate the brilliant prospect which lies before us, the promised land of liberty and happiness, to secure the possession of which, we have but to act with the spirit of men, and to profit of the great occasion, which Providence has at length afforded us. We have now the means, in the first place, to break that execrable slavery, by which, under the more plausible name of connection, we have been chained for six hundred years at the feet of England; we have in our hands independence for our country, the first blessing of nations, and liberty for ourselves, without which life is not worth preserving; we shall no longer be dragged perpetually from the line of our obvious interests, by the overbearing attraction of our tyrant, nor forced to run and prostrate ourselves at the feet of an English Minister, to obtain his permission to regulate the concerns of our country? The aristocracy of Ireland, which exists only by our slavery, and is maintained in its pomp and splendour by the sale of our lives, liberties, and properties will tumble in the dust; the People will be no longer mocked with the vain appearance of a Parliament, over which they have neither influence or control. Instead of a King, representing himself, a House of Lords representing themselves, and a House of Commons representing themselves, we shall have a wise and honest Legislature, chosen by the People, whom they will indeed represent, and whose interest, even for their own sakes, they will most strenuously support. Our commerce will be free, our arts encouraged, our manufactures protected, four

our enemies will no longer be our law-makers. The benches of our Legislature will no longer groan under the load of placemen and pensioners, the hirelings of a foreign power, and the betrayers of our country; we shall have upright Judges to administer the laws, for the road to the judgement-seat will no longer be through the mire of Parliamentary corruption; we shall have honest Juries to determine on our liberties, properties and lives, for the Crown will no longer nominate our Sheriffs, on the recommendation of this or that grandee; the host of useless offices, multiplied without end for the purposes of corruption, will be annihilated, and men will be made hereafter for places, and not places for men; the burdens of the people will be lightened, for it will be no longer the custom to buy majorities in Parliament; the taxes, which will be hereafter levied, will be honestly applied to the exigencies of the State, the regulation of commerce, the formation of a Navy, the making of roads, the cutting canals, the opening of mines, the deepening our harbours, and calling into activity the native energy of the land. Instead of the state of daily suicide wherein Ireland now exists, her resources will at length be actively employed for her interest and her glory. Admission to the Legislature will be no longer to be purchased with money, and the execrable system of jobbing, so long our disgrace and ruin, will be forever destroyed, the trade of Parliament will fail, and your borough-mongers become bankrupts. Your peasantry will be no longer seen in rags and misery, their complaints will be examined, and their sufferings removed; instead of the barbarous policy which has so long kept them in want and ignorance, it will be the interest as well as duty of national Government to redress their grievances and enlighten their minds. The unnatural union between Church and State, which has degraded Religion into an engine of policy, will be

dissolved, tithes the pest of agriculture will be abolished, the memory of religious dissensions will be lost when no sect shall have a right to govern their fellow-citizens, each sect will maintain their own Clergy, and no citizen shall be disenfranchised for worshipping God according to his conscience. To say all in one word, IRELAND SHALL BE INDEPENDENT. We shall be a Nation not a Province; Citizens not Slaves. Every man shall rank in the State according to his merit and talents. Our commerce shall extend into the four quarters of the globe, our flag shall be seen on the ocean, our name shall be known among the nations, and we shall at length assume that station, for which God and Nature have designed us.

I feel that I am proving an axiom. Can any honest man for a moment doubt that an independent nation will better regulate her own concerns than if she was subjugated to another country, whose interest it is to oppress her? I will therefore assume as a fact, that independence is an object of the highest possible advantage to Ireland, and I will briefly consider what are the weighty motives, for weighty indeed they must be, which have thus long induced her to forego so great a blessing and to remain in humble subjection to England.

The first and most striking, and in fact the true reason, is the dread of risking a contest with a power, which we are habituated to look upon as our superior. Every man agrees that independence is a good thing, if it could be had, but dreads to hazard the little he enjoys in surety for the speculation of a great benefit, the acquisition of which is remote, and attended with uncertainty and danger.

Not to dwell upon the pusillanimity of this mode of reasoning, the first answer I have to give is conclusive. It is no longer a matter of choice; we must take our party on the instant

and decidedly; we have now all we wanted; allies, arms, and ammunition, stores, artillery, disciplined troops, the best and bravest in Europe, besides the countless thousands of our brave and hardy peasantry, who will flock to the standard of their country. The sword is drawn, the Rubicon is passed, and we have no retreat; there remains now no alternative; if we were even inclined, we could not return to the state, in which we were three months ago. We must conquer England and her adherents, if any yet she has among ourselves, or they will conquer us, and then *vae victis!* To the brave and honest majority of my countrymen, who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the independence of Ireland, I do not now address myself; but to those timid and cautious speculators, who may hang back, and wait upon contingencies, and fluctuate and balance before they choose their party, to such men, and I hope at this glorious period, few such will be found, I appeal; and I desire them, even for their own sakes, to consider that in a war like that, wherein we are now engaged, there is no neutrality; we fight for our liberties, dearer far than life, and in such a contest he that is not with the people, is against them; him we do not find in our ranks, we must hold as an enemy, and an enemy in the highest degree, a deserter and a traitor, to his country. If any man dreads the issue of the contest, it is notwithstanding the interest as it is the duty, of even that man to come forward in the defence of the common cause, for it is only in the possibility of disunion among ourselves, that England can form the slightest hope of success in the contest.

If she sees all ranks and descriptions of Irishmen united and determined, she will balance, after the experience of America and France, before she will engage in a third crusade against the liberties of an entire nation. The sure way to avert the calamities of war from our country is to show we are to a man

resolved to face them with courage; or if war must be, the infallible means to insure its speedy and glorious termination, is to bring to bear on our enemy the consolidated force of the Irish nation. In the present crisis, it is therefore the interest even of the most cautious man to step forward in the cause of his country; unless he prefers to sacrifice his property, his honour, perhaps his existence to his fears, for I again repeat it, *In a war for our liberties, we can admit of no neutrality.*

A generous mind is not deterred from a glorious pursuit, because it is attended with danger. It is our duty to hazard every thing when the object is the independence of our native land, were our enemy more powerful than she has been described, or we have been used to conceive her. But let us approach this gigantic figure, by which we have been so long kept in awe and see whether our apprehension, as well as the artifice of our oppressors, have not magnified the object of our fears. The English fleet is very formidable, but we have little commerce, and during the short continuance of the war, we can dispense with it; a shot from a ship will not kill a man a quarter of a mile from the shore, and we have no occasion to go upon the seas to meet them. But either I am much deceived, or it will be found that so far from England being formidable by her fleet, it is there she will be found most vulnerable. Who are they, who man her vessels? TWO-THIRDS OF THEM ARE IRISHMEN; and will those brave and gallant fellows, thousands of whom have been pressed, and the rest driven by famine into her service, will they, I say, be ready to turn their arms against their native land, against their fathers, their brothers, their wives, their children and their friends? It is not to be supposed; besides that we have in our hands the means to secure their co-operation in the glorious contest wherein we are

engaged, and in due season it will be seen that we want neither the skill nor the spirit to employ them.

What I have said of the navy applies, in a great degree, to the army of England; if she is determined to make war upon us, she will not venture to do it with the native troops, for there are too many Irish in the ranks; she must therefore do it with foreign mercenaries, if she can find the means to land them; but the mercenaries are not to be had without money, and I entreat you to consider what will be the effect of a war with Ireland upon her finances. Four hundred millions of debt is no slight burden, and the British Minister may not always find lenders. It is no secret that he is, at this moment, in considerable difficulty, and I take it for granted we shall not be so mad as to part with a shilling of English property, until our liberty is established; but supporting he can even find money, money will not do every thing, the gold of Carthage did not save her from the iron of Rome, and I doubt whether in the present contest, the Bank paper of England will be found more efficacious.

But granting she is formidable, so are we; if she is near us, we are near her; our people are brave, and hardy, and poor; we are not debauched by luxury and sloth; we are used to toil, and fatigue, and scanty living; our miseries, for which we have to thank England, have well prepared us to throw off the yoke. We can dispense with feather-beds, with roast-beef, and strong-beer; war, if it makes any change in the diet of our peasants, must change it for the better; they may in that case taste meat and bread, delicacies to them, and which a great majority of them seldom see; our soil and our climate we can well support; we can sleep in our bogs, where our enemies will rot, and subsist on the mountains, where they will starve. We might upon principle and for our liberties; they fight, because they are ordered to do so. We are at home; they are in an enemies'

country. Under these circumstances, and especially with a just and righteous cause, he must be timid indeed, who could doubt of success.

England, with Ireland at her back, is undoubtedly formidable; England, with Ireland neuter, is still respectable, but England with Ireland in arms against her, I do not despair of feeling humbled with the dust. Add to what I have said, the discontents which exist, even in her own bosom, and which every years continuance of the war will increase; remember the state of Scotland two years since, and judge whether she may not seize the present great occasion, and like ourselves assert her ancient independence; see the mighty French Republic, Spain, and Holland united against her and friendly to Ireland, and then decide which of us has most to dread from the other.

I leave this point, the discussion of which is only necessary for timid souls, and I come to another, addressed to those of a more generous stamp. It may be said we are indebted to England for protection from our enemies, and that we are of course bound in gratitude and honour, not to desert her in the hour of difficulty. If this argument were founded in fact, I should be ashamed to offer a syllable against it, for with nations, as with individuals, I esteem honour the first of all objects, and no consideration of convenience or interest should be suffered for an instant to stand against it. But, in God's name, who are the enemies, against whom we are protected by England? With what one nation on Earth have we a shadow of difference? Of what people existing have we reason to complain, except England herself? It is true, indeed, that by this baneful connection, which in a thousand shapes presents itself for the destruction of our interests, we have dragged, as reluctant parties into every war, wherein ambition or avarice induces her to embark; we are forced to forego, for the time, the

modicum of commerce we possess, we are loaded with taxes, our people are pressed for seamen or lifted for soldiers to fight the battles of England, in the event of which we have no possible interests, unless indeed it be our interest to be defeated, for the prosperity of England has always been the depression of Ireland. In this very war, which she has in her pride and folly waged against the French Republic, we have supplied not less than two hundred thousand of our gallant countrymen to combat against our most essential interests; and this is the protection for which we are to be grateful! If a man sets my house on fire first, even though he should afterwards succeed in extinguishing it, am I to be grateful to such a man! If a man drags me into a quarrel for his own interests, and wherein I have nothing to do, am I to thank him, even though by our joint exertion I escape with my life after receiving a sound beating, and losing a great part of my property? See then whether the protection of England differs in any respect from the cases I have just mentioned. The truth and fact is, it is we that protect England; it is our provisions that victual her navy, it is our seaman who man her fleets, and our soldiers, who fill her armies; this is solid, substantial protection, and now that we are at last about to separate from her, for ever, she will soon experimentally feel, to her irrecoverable loss, which of the two nations it is that has thus long protected the other.

Independent of the consideration that this argument is a cowardly one (for what Irishman, or Irishwoman, would, in the hour of danger, seek shelter under the arm of an Englishman!) it involves a gross fallacy, inasmuch as it presumes that without the protection of England we could not exist. It is true that at this hour we have not a navy, neither should we ever have one to the end of time, if the connection with England should so long continue; but the moment that our

independence is established, and the resources of our country applied, not to debauch and corrupt our rulers to sacrifice our dearest interests, but to cherish and bring out the inborn energy of the land, we shall soon see an Irish navy on the ocean, we shall look for protection only to God, and our own courage. We have means far beyond those of half the independent states of Europe, of Denmark, of Sweden, of Portugal, of Naples, of Sardinia. Who at this hour protects America? Who protects Switzerland? The common interest of Europe protects the one, the valour of her people the other. We unite in our case both circumstances. When we have once broken the yoke of England, do not believe that the maritime powers will ever see us return to bondage; if even our own means were insufficient for our protection (which I will never admit), we should speedily find allies; and I presume there is hardly to be found an Irishman, who so little respects his country, or himself, as to doubt that with her own resources, and the assistance of France, Spain, and Holland, Ireland is abundantly competent to her own protection.

There is only one argument more, which suggests itself to my mind, in support of our dependence upon England, and that is, that the condition of Ireland is, latterly, much improved, and therefore we should not desire a change.

I admit our condition is improved, and why? In 1779, when England was embarrassed by her frantic crusade against America, we extorted from her necessities the extension of our trade this was a great improvement, but is it the connection with England we are to thank for that? So far from it, that the first improvement in our condition was the step we then made towards independence. In 1782 we broke another, and a weighty link of the chain, which bound us to England, by establishing an exclusive right of Legislature for ourselves; this

was also a great improvement in our condition, inasmuch as it placed us a step farther from England; we had then the means to be honest, if our Legislators had the inclination, and if we have not profited by the advantage, we then obtained, to its full extent, it is because we yet remained too near our enemy, and one end of our chain was still in the hands of the despot of England.

In 1793, when she was on the point of embarking in her second crusade against France, the union of the Dissenters and Catholics took place, and three millions of Irishmen were restored, in a great degree, to their rights; this was the last great improvement in our condition, and of the very highest importance, for by making us at length one people, it has enabled us, if it be not our own faults, to throw off the yoke for ever. Thus it appears that every step that we have made towards independence, has in the same degree bettered our condition; that we have become prosperous as we have become free; that while we were bound close to England, we were poor and oppressed; that in proportion as we have receded from her baneful influence, we have risen nearer to our proper level. I am ready therefore to allow this argument of the increasing prosperity of Ireland its full force, but I drew therefrom a conclusion very different from those, who advance it as a reason for our remaining in subjection to England - for I say that if the imperfect shadow of independence, which we have enjoyed for the last seventeen years, has produced, as all parties will acknowledge it has, such beneficial effects, what may we not expect from a full and complete enjoyment of actual, national independence, when the pressure of our ancient tyrant is once removed, and we are left at liberty to regulate our own concerns, to study our own interests, to cultivate our means, to augment our resources, to profit of our

natural advantages, in a word, to bring into play all the latent energy of our country, *“that noble and neglected island, for which God has done so much, and man so little!”*

Look, I beseech you, to America! See the improvement in her condition since she nobly asserted her independence, on a provocation which, when set beside your grievances, is not even worthy to be named. Before the struggle she too was flourishing in a degree far beyond what you have ever experienced; England too was then infinitely more formidable in every point of view than at this hour; but neither the fear of risking the enjoyments she actually possessed, nor the terror of the power of her oppressors, prevented America from putting all to the hazard, and despising every consideration of convenience or of danger, where her liberty was at stake; she humbled her tyrants at her feet, and see how she has been rewarded! Contemplate the situation of America before her independence, and see whether every motive, which actuated her in the contest, does not apply to you with tenfold force; compare her laws, compare her government with yours, if I must call that a government; which is indeed a subversion of all just principle, and a total destruction of the ends, for which men submit to be controlled, and see whether it is not worth the struggle, to place yourselves in a situation, equally happy as hers for yourselves and your friends, and ten times more formidable for your enemies.

I have now done, my countrymen, and I do most earnestly beseech you, as Irishmen, as citizens, as husbands, as fathers, by everything most dear to you, to consider the sacred obligation that you are called upon to discharge, to emancipate your country from a foreign yoke, and to restore to liberty yourselves and your children; look to your own resources, look to those of your friends, look to those of your enemies;

remember that you must instantly decide; remember that you have no alternative between liberty and independence, or slavery and submission; remember the wrongs you have sustained from England for six hundred years, and the implacable hatred, or still more insufferable contempt which, even at this moment, she feels for you; look at the nations of the earth emancipating themselves around you. If all this does not rouse you, then are you indeed what your enemies have long called you, A BESOTTED PEOPLE! You have now arms in your hands, turn them instantly on your tyrants; remember, if this great crisis escapes you, you are lost for ever, and Ireland will go down to posterity, branded with the infamy, of which the history of the world has hitherto, for the honour of human nature, furnished but *one instance*. The Cappadocians had once the offer of liberty, they rejected it, and returned to their chains! Irishmen! Shall it be said that you furnish the second, and more disgraceful instance? No, my countrymen, you will embrace your liberty with transport, and for your chains you will *break them on the heads of your oppressors*; you will show for the honour of Ireland, that you have sensibility to feel, and courage to resent, and means to revenge your wrongs; one short, one glorious effort, and your liberty is established. NOW OR NEVER; NOW, AND FOR EVER!