

LETTER TO FATHER JOHN KENYON

My Dear Father Kenyon – So you don't understand my prospectus or my letters to J. Martin, save on "one theory," and that the wrong theory. You and I, then, are not only in different degrees of longitude, but are out of one another's latitude. Do we look at the world now not only from different points of view (that we probably always did), but from such remote points, and through such variously contorted *media*, that we can't even perceive it is the same world we are looking at? Have our two paths been diverging – or has one of us been sitting still while the other has gone forward, or back, or round? And which has been sitting, which expatiating? I admit that in the case of a man (*à grege me*) who has never been but once engrossed and possessed by a great cause, whose whole life, and energy, and passion converged themselves once to one focus, and were then dissipated into the general atmosphere, who dashed himself one good time against the hard world, and was smashed to smithereens – in the case of such a fellow as this, I admit that the possibility is *he* may be the stationary and sitting-still individual. His life, or the fragment of it, then and there crystalises, and he never grows older, but is truly dead and a ghost. There now is an admission for you.

Nevertheless here I am, or the fragment of me, dwelling in the United States, likely to be a citizen of the same, surrounded by a world of people, all alive and life-like, dealing and talking with them every day – for they do not know that I am a ghost, and even if they did would not be at all afraid – and I cannot but take an interest (of a certain spectral sort) in them and their fortunes. Not only that, but I must work also at something, in a somnambulistic manner, while above ground. And I seem to myself to be actuated by the very same sort of motives, and to be moved by the same impulses, passions and affections as ever. I do still (I think) abhor injustice and oppression, and hold the same notions of right and wrong. Now, in looking back, and trying to analyse my own feelings, or principles, or whatever it was, that made me act and write as I did in Ireland, I have found that

there was perhaps less of love in it than hate – less of filial affection to my country than of scornful impatience at the thought that I had the misfortune, I and my children, of being born in a country which suffered itself to be oppressed and humiliated by another; less devotion to truth and justice than raging wrath against cant and insolence. And, hatred being the thing I chiefly cherished and cultivated, the thing which I specially hated was the *British system* – everywhere, at home and abroad, as it works in England itself, in India, on the Continent of Europe, and in Ireland. Living in Ireland, and wishing to feel proud, not ashamed, of Ireland, it was there first and most that I had to fight with that great enemy. For it is a great, or at least a big and strong thing, the British system. It has money in its purse, and a code of opinion received to a really wonderful extent by all mankind. It is so big that it keeps many things in their place by attraction, and many other things, me, for example, by repulsion. I also depend on it and revolve round it, not like a satellite, but at least like an aerolite, wishing always that I could strike it between wind and water, and shiver its timbers.

As for Ireland and her destiny, all that now depends absolutely upon the destinies of the British Empire. So far as I can judge now, by all the *indicia* I am aware of, Ireland is not even likely to be one of the powers or agencies that will destroy the enemy; rather she will help, and is helping, to save him. The stillness and deadness of Ireland are wonderful to me. I don't believe that I can pretend to understand the phenomenon – but there it is. Whatever is now moving action and articulation in Ireland (for I count nothing on the *Dundalk Democrat* and a few seditious placards) seems to be not only British, but more British than the British themselves. On that subject I have not patience to dilate.

Well, all my behaviour from Nov. '45 down to this Nov. '57 seems to myself to be consistent, to be of one piece. I have not only contended with the enemy of mankind constantly, but on the same argument, varying it only with varying circumstances “*coelum non animam mutans.*” In Ireland I sought to rouse up national pride to such a point that we could “dismember the Empire,” which would have ruined the whole affair and sent the enemy (that is, the British system)

a naked beggar on the world. Ireland just then was suffering the worst by that system, and, would have gained the most by its overthrow. I was Irish, and intensely Irish, so my business then was clear and plain. But now I meet that evil power here also; he is everywhere, and nowhere more active and mischievous than in these United States. I perceive in the institutions, and of late in the tendencies, proclivities, aspirations (these are vile, vague words) of the Southern States a special hostility to the British system; not hostility arising from the accident of England being active in suppressing and loud in denouncing slavery, but hostility founded on essential differences in the two types of human society. You seem to imagine that my plans look to an arraying of the United States, or at least the Southern States (after disruption) against England. Yes, but not in the way you mean. England would rather quarrel with the North than with the South, and so long as she is able to order cotton and pay for it the South will never quarrel with her. But the South is trying one form of civilisation with signal success; England has tried another (I should say *the* other), and is going shortly to ruin. I want to promote the success of the one, and the ruin of the other. Consider this one point alone – the danger, weakness, and unsoundness of England arise in great measure from her vast manufactures. She keeps two millions of people clothing the world, and so has become a nation of hucksters. Let her be furnished these few years to come with more and cheaper cotton – crammed, surfeited, choked with cotton, and she will soon lose entirely, what is even now so much impaired, the military spirit without which a nation cannot live. Besides, if there were no grudge to be satisfied against the enemy at all, for the mere well-being of these Southern States and of the Africans who now or hereafter may be slaves therein, I should zealously maintain the cause of slavery, and try to make the people here proud and fond of it as a national institution, and advocate its extension by re-opening the trade in negroes. You say, in this letter of yours, “Actively to promote the system for its own sake would be something monstrous.” Why? I cannot as much as conceive any reason for this judgement. Actively I promote it for its own sake, and shall promote it. It is good in itself, good in its relations with other countries, good every way. And I do much want to know what was in

your mind when you wrote? I bethink me that I do not perfectly know the position held just now by the Catholic Church with the regard to the *enslavement* of men. Whatever that may be, however, it has no application to negro slaves bought on the coast of Africa. To enslave *them* is impossible or to set them free either; they are born and bred slaves.