

# STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE CATHOLICS

## I.

Statement of the light in which the late act for the partial repeal of the penal laws, is considered by the Catholics of Ireland.

In the statement I am about to make, I would be understood to give merely my opinion from appearances, as they strike me; I am not acquainted with any intentions of the Catholics, from authority; I speak only from conjecture as to their *future conduct*; as to their *present feelings*, I collect it from such communication as I occasionally hold with members of their body.

The Catholics consider the late advantages which they obtained, as so much extorted from the necessities of Government, under a lucky combination of circumstances; of course all gratitude is out of the question. Knowing, however, their own internal weakness, they are extremely anxious and irritable on the least appearance of attack; and certainly the line of conduct which has been uniformly followed, during and since the passing of their bill, does in nowise tend to lessen their jealousies and their fears.

The excluding them from the freedom of this city, is, in my humble judgement, a very unwise measure. The accession of strength to them, if they succeeded, would be nothing; but their pride is wounded, and, still more, their apprehensions are perpetuated, by the maintaining, in trifling objects, the principle of exclusion. They conclude that the animosity against them is as violent as ever, and only waits for a convenient opportunity to break out in perhaps a renewal of some of the old Popery laws. This circumstance, therefore, is one cause of the discontent which I know exists in their body.

But the late prosecutions have given them, as they consider, much more serious cause for alarm. They certainly, and, as I believe universally, consider them as part of a system, the ultimate object of which is to reduce them to their former condition, perhaps to a worse one. They look on them as fabrications of their enemies, who do not themselves believe a syllable of the evidence adduced to support them; and the terror produced by these prosecutions appears to me to be general.

What they say is this: In order to prepare the way here, and more especially in England, for reducing them to their former slavery, it is first necessary to destroy their characters as dutiful and loyal subjects. For this purpose, insurrections have been raised and fomented by their enemies, in various quarters. The army and the law are then let loose upon them, until repeated executions of the mere rabble have established the fact, and alarmed, in some degree, the property of the kingdom. It is then said the rabble could never act on a system if they were not regulated by men in a higher sphere. Discoveries are pretended to be made, and respectable individuals, especially those who have formerly been active in supporting the late General Committee, are seized and thrown into jail on the testimony of the vilest wretches. It is true, those attempts have failed, either from the blunders or the perjury of the inferior instruments; but, if they had succeeded, the next step would have been to strike at the principal Catholics of Dublin, and then it would have been held up here and in England as a regular chain of conspiracy; first, that the *mere instruments* had been punished; through them they had come at the *agents* in different parts of the country, and at last they had made out the *prime movers* of the plot in the capital. Such are the discourses I have lately a thousand times heard, and I am sure they have made a very deep and serious impression on the minds of the principal Catholics of Dublin, the

men whose names carry the greatest weight with the body at large throughout the Kingdom.

What they conclude from all this is, that there is no safety for them but in running together for support; and I observe, the men among them who used to be the most timid on former occasions, perhaps from that very timidity, most forward on the present. They look on their late acquittal as a crisis in their affairs. If they use it with spirit, it will be a triumph to their cause; if not, it will be looked on merely as an escape, and it will be said that they were fully content with avoiding the gallows. For these reasons they seem determined to take some steps, and, probably, strong ones, immediately.

Such is the result of my observations on what is going forward here. I give no opinion of my own, but merely state what I hear among Catholics with whom I communicate, and in the foregoing sentiments I am sure that a great majority of them are sincere.

## II.

Reasons for the discontent of the Catholics, on the late act for the partial repeal of the penal laws.

It has been a matter of surprise that the degree of favour afforded to the Catholics of Ireland, by the Legislature, in the present session, on the gracious and paternal recommendation of his Majesty, has not produced a greater apparent degree of gratitude on their part; and still more, that any thing like tumult or disturbance should continue to exist in the country. A very brief and plain statement will at once explain the fact, and exonerate the Catholics from the charge of either levity or ingratitude.

To his Majesty, for his goodness and affection to his Catholic subjects, and more particularly for his last most gracious interposition in their behalf, they feel the most lively and animated sensations of grateful acknowledgment; at the same time, it is with the deepest regret that they cannot but see his benign wishes to procure the cordial union of all his subjects in support of an excellent constitution, in a great degree frustrated, and his intended benevolence to his loyal subjects rendered void by the conduct of certain personages in power here, whose wish seems to be to perpetuate disunion among his people, and to destroy all sense of obligation in the very moment of conferring a favour.

The Catholics of Ireland were prepared and willing to allow for every degree of prejudice and opposition to their emancipation, previous to his Majesty's gracious recommendation of their state to the wisdom of his Parliament; but after that signal proof of the royal wisdom, clemency, and goodness, it was with the utmost degree of anxiety and alarm that they saw, early in the late session, a personage, who, from

his elevated station, must be presumed to carry great weight and influence in Administration, rise in his place, and oppose the measure of intended relief with the utmost pertinacity and virulence, while other and inferior servants of Government, held language not inferior in violence and outrage. It was matter of little less terror and alarm to them, when a secret committee was instituted, and it was industriously hinted about that discoveries of great crimination were expected to be made against certain of the most active members of their body; and though those persons were so conscious of their innocence as to offer, to a great personage here, to be examined in the most public and solemn manner, touching any matter which could be alleged against them, yet, comparing the present measure with the general discourses and known views of those who set it on foot, they could not but consider it as levelled at their hopes of success. After some time, a report from that committee was published, wherein, by a continued series of misrepresentation and misstatement; by suppression of dates and signatures; by separation of concurring facts, and juxtaposition of remote ones, an impression was laboured to be made on the public mind of what was too grossly false to be directly asserted, that those members of the Catholic body had been concerned in existing insurrections or tumults in certain parts of the country, and had actually sent money to the insurgents, commonly called "Defenders." And this report was accompanied with a promise of future discoveries, which have never since appeared, and which, it is presumed, were never made, but which were stated to be of a nature so gross, that, when revealed, they would appal the nation. This report and promise, the Catholics of Ireland did, and do, consider as an outrage upon truth, and a direct attack upon the honour of their body, made for the purpose of rendering them suspected by their Sovereign, and odious to

their fellow subjects, thereby more securely and certainly to thwart their hopes of emancipation, and to render nugatory his Majesty's royal interposition in their behalf. And further, when at length the bill for their relief was in the very act of passing, it was accompanied with the most serious and violent invective from the same elevated character who had uniformly opposed its progress, and with the most positive declarations that no future degree of favour was ever to be hoped for, under any circumstances; a mode of conduct altogether opposite from any thing like conciliation or regard, and tending directly to frustrate his Majesty's gracious wish, expressed repeatedly from the throne, to unite all ranks and descriptions of his subjects in support of our excellent constitution.

When the bill had passed, the General Committee of the Catholics was called together; they expressed their gratitude in the warmest manner to their Sovereign and to Parliament; and then, having, in a great degree, accomplished the object of their delegation, to avoid the most remote appearance of disrespect to the Legislature, they dissolved their body. But this has not saved them; for, notwithstanding their delegates were honoured by a most gracious reception from Majesty itself, who, out of his paternal goodness, was pleased to admit them to his presence, yet a bill has since been introduced, and carried by the same influence which has ever been found so hostile to the Catholics, reflecting, by direct inference, in the severest manner, on the said General Committee, as an unlawful and tumultuous assembly; and thereby, in a certain degree, censuring the conduct of our most excellent Sovereign himself. This bill, and the language uniformly held by the mover and supporters thereof during its progress, the Catholics also consider as a severe and unjust charge against their body, and as, in fact, an effort of posthumous malice against their late General Committee, after

its dissolution; all which has and does only tend to lessen the value of any benefit conceded, by mingling suspicion and insult in the very moment of conferring an obligation.

The same influence of which the Catholics complain, has been, ever since the passing of the bill, exerted to prevent their reaping any benefit even from the privileges of which, by law, they are now capable. In the city of Dublin, where that influence is omnipotent, it has been exerted to prevent their obtaining their freedom, and, as if to mark the line of separation more strongly, in the very moment when their applications were rejected, the right which was withheld from them, was granted as a matter of favour, and with every circumstance of the most flattering compliment, to one of the most scurrilous and abusive of their calumniators—a circumstance of unnecessary insult, which has made a deep impression on their minds, and which, combined with others, they cannot but trace up to the same source.

In the University of Dublin, an attempt has lately been made, by the same personage, to throw difficulties in the way of Catholics obtaining degrees, which, though defeated by one or two learned members of that body, still confirms the existence of that principle of exclusion which would, if carried into effect, continue the Catholics of Ireland, what no good subject should wish to see them, a divided people, with a separate interest. In the appointment of magistrates, the same principle was taken up at first, but has since, in a certain degree, been foregone.

In the militia, a new and untried measure, which certainly demanded, in times like the present, the utmost degree of delicacy and conciliation, the same principle has, and, as the Catholics cannot but think, under the same influence, to a very great degree, been adopted. Very few Catholic gentlemen, such as would naturally have an influence among their own people, have been admitted to the rank of officers, which is the more

extraordinary, as their ranks are filled by their members; on the contrary, the fears of an ignorant populace being excited, when, in some counties, they broke out into a tumultuous resistance to the law, instead of explaining the nature thereof to the unhappy wretches, they were subjected to severe military execution; and, what is still more grievous, advantage has been taken of these disturbances, most untruly and maliciously to insinuate that the leading Catholics have been concerned in fomenting the same; whereas the truth and fact is, that the disturbances had no relation whatever to any Catholic question, but originated solely in the fears of the populace of being trepanned and sent for soldiers out of the kingdom, which fears were much aggravated from seeing scarcely any officers appointed in whom they had trust or confidence.

The Catholics, therefore, seeing the language held by men in high authority, in the very moment of concession; seeing the line studiously drawn between them and their Protestant brethren, wherever the influence of which they so much complain can at all operate; seeing themselves continually vilified and abused, by the most false and scandalous imputations, and knowing well that the first step to robbing them of their lately recovered privileges, will be to render them suspected by their gracious King, and odious to their fellow subjects of other persuasions, cannot but feel the most deep and anxious uneasiness at what appears, to their apprehension, the continuation of the old spirit of persecution, if indeed it be not the commencement of a regular system, formed to reduce them to their ancient state of depression and contempt.

Under these circumstances, they cannot be expected to be cordial in the support of a Government so much the object of their fears, and which is controlled by an influence so inimical to them; and they regret it the more, because it fetters their zeal to

testify their warm attachment to the best of Sovereigns, whom, above all his predecessors, they are bound by gratitude, as well as duty, to reverence and love. On the contrary, were this imperious persecuting spirit abandoned, the fears of the people would be removed, all disturbances tranquilized, his Majesty's Government meet with that cordial support from the Catholics which gratitude prompts them to, and nothing but the conduct they have of late experienced, and still more apprehend, could suspend; and, finally, Ireland, instead of requiring, as she does, an army of observation of thirty thousand men, deducted from the force of the empire in a perilous time, would be able and willing freely to concur and exert her whole strength in the common cause.

In a time of war, and especially of a war on the principles of the present, which alternative would be most for the glory of his Majesty and the honour and advantage of Great Britain, is submitted to those who are fully competent to judge.

*August 20, 1793.*