

ON THE NECESSITY OF DOMESTIC UNION

It is the singular fate of this country, in which she differs from all the rest of Europe, that in writing or speaking of her Government, it is necessary to set out by proving certain principles, which are everywhere else received as axioms. This is the more vexatious, because, in fact, there is nothing so difficult to be proved as that kind of truth which explains itself. In every language there must be certain terms; in every science, certain principles, which are the most simple and uncompounded, and to explain these, use must be made of others less obvious and determinate. If, therefore, I should not be fortunate enough to be very clear in elucidating the subject of this essay, I beg it may be remembered, that the principles I am to develop would everywhere but in Ireland, be looked upon as so clear, that elucidation would be impossible, or, at least, unnecessary.

Having premised this much, I shall venture, however it may shock the prejudices of many of my countrymen, to lay down my thesis, which is simply this: "That union amongst the people, is better for any nation than hatred and animosity." I beg I may not be supported to assert a paradox merely to show my ingenuity, for I am seriously convinced of the truth of the above position.

Before I proceed to prove it, I shall take the liberty to borrow from mathematics one maxim, which is, by the practice of Ireland, utterly rejected, and yet is, notwithstanding, very true. I mean this: "The whole is greater than a part." I know that my antagonists may object the authority of Hesiod, who says

that a part is more than the whole.¹ But I answer that Hesiod was but a poet, in the first place, and in the next, we know nothing of his public principles, so that for aught that appears, he may have been a Tory. This being merely an abstract point, I believe I need not be very particular in proving it. It may be sufficient to say, that as the continent must be greater than the thing contained, the whole, containing all the parts, must be greater than any one of them; and if any man is inclined to cavil or doubt my argument, let him make the experiment of a long walk with a shoe too short for his foot, and I apprehend he will feel sensibly that I am right, and become a convert to truth and reason.

My thesis, that union is better than discord, might, I should apprehend, be thought as clear and obvious as the aforesaid maxim, did not I see the conduct of the whole of one party in this nation, and a great majority of the other, regulated by maxims diametrically opposite to it. Certainly they must see some lurking fallacy at the bottom of it, which escapes the duller organs of many ardent and true well wishers to Ireland, who, with all the ingenuity, sincerity, and diligence, they can exert, have not yet been able to discover it, and of which number, I confess myself one; for I cannot suppose that they would admit the truth of the principle, and yet square their conduct by rules flatly contradictory to it, or that God has given them reason to discover it, only that they may avoid it.

There is no man in Ireland, who, if the question were put to him in general terms, would not at once admit the affirmative; I therefore shall assume that, on the abstract merits of the case, union is better than discord, and that it is in a moral, religious, and political light, a more interesting and delightful spectacle, to see men embracing in amity and love, than cutting each other's throats, or roasting each other at a stake.

¹ *Opera et dies*, line 40.

I have now got through, or perhaps I should say, got over my two heads; it remains to reduce them to practice, and apply them to the situation of Ireland at this day; I therefore say, first: Our whole people consists of Catholics, Protestants, and Presbyterians, and is, therefore, greater than any one of these sects, and equal to them altogether. This being matter of fact, will probably be conceded to me; but my thesis, when referred to Ireland, being matter of opinion, and, moreover, perplexed, complicated, and thwarted by all manner of interests, prejudices, passions, and every obstacle that can impede truth in its progress, will require somewhat of time, attention, and patience, to examine and ascertain it.

To prepare the way for this enquiry, the most momentous which ever came under the consideration of Ireland, it will be necessary to take a short glance at her situation, with reference to England; because I believe it will appear, that, independent of those general arguments, which apply to all countries, and which I find myself grow too serious to repeat in a ludicrous manner, there are some peculiar to herself, and those of the strongest, weightiest, most cogent, most just, and most powerful, which can influence human decision.

Ireland is a small country, connected by a mysterious bond of union with a larger, a poor country with a richer; her people are not one half so numerous, her capital in trade probably not one tenth as great, her skill and dexterity in mechanic arts, far below that of Great Britain. These would be great disadvantages, even if she were blest by an independent, and, therefore, an honest administration. But this is not, nor in the nature of things can it be, the case. She is governed by men sent from England, to do the business of England, and who hold the honours, the emoluments, the sword, and the purse of Ireland. From the situation, natural protections, and habits of the two kingdoms,

there is and must be a perpetual rivalry in trade between them. Trade is regulated by laws, laws are made by Parliament, Parliament is uniformly and irresistibly swayed by Government, and the Government is English. It is easy, therefore, to see what will be the event, when the question of trade arises between Ireland and England. I believe no man will be impudent enough to deny this to be a fair state of the case; but if there be any of so hardy a forehead, I would refer him to a very recent transaction. The session before the last, our House of Commons voted £200,000 to enforce the claims of the British merchants to trade to Nootka Sound, "because the interests of both countries were the same." In the last session, an attempt was made to enquire whether, by any possibility, we could ever obtain a share of that trade, to secure which, we were so flippant with our blood and money. But we were then taught that it was extremely possible "that the interests of both countries might differ materially;" for the argument which stifled this unseasonable enquiry, was, "that it would interfere with the English East India Company;" and with this answer, the Parliament and people were satisfied, as I suppose, for they yet acquiesce under it.

Considering this, therefore, merely as a question concerning the commercial interests of Ireland, there can be no doubt but that an internal union of all her people, in a grand, previous, and indispensable requisite to secure and extend the trade we have so lately extorted. England has 8,000,000 of united people, and they are free; Ireland has 4,000,000, of whom much above one half are degraded, and ought to be discontented slaves. Instead of watching the insidious arts of our Government here, we are watching each other; one party looking for advantages, contemptible if they could be obtained, and power unjust, if it could be exerted, the others so long cowed and rebuked, that they appear to have lost their spirit; the generous

energies of their nature are stifled, and it is only by their figure, which the hand of foolish and wicked tyranny has been unable to deface, that they appear to be men.

The English Government here was founded, has been supported, and now exists but in the disunion of Irishmen. God forbid I should wish to see it subverted, but surely it is no bad pledge for the good conduct of rulers, that they should have a wholesome fear of the spirit of a people united in interest and sentiment. This I am sure of; that a good Government would have nothing to apprehend from such an event, as the general conciliation of the people of Ireland; and, for any other, the more general, the more determined, and the more active opposition they met with, the better for the country.

Ireland is paralytic; she is worse; she is not merely dead of one side, whilst the other is unaffected, but both are in a continual and painful and destructive struggle, consuming to waste and to destroy each other.