

THE ENGLISH GOVERNMENT AND THE IRISH PRESBYTERIANS.

By John Mitchel.

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I observe that the English judges have at length, amidst their more important avocations, found time to deliver their judgment on the Presbyterian marriage question, and that judgment is *against* us. Doubtless, the House of Lords will, when *they* are quite at leisure, finally confirm the decision of the judges – but they must not be hurried. It is true that many a family in Ulster is at this moment uncertain whether they have been born in lawful wedlock or otherwise; and if otherwise, when it shall please the legislature to pass an act, declaratory or enacting, to make their mothers honest women and themselves legitimate, or *quasi* legitimate. It is true also that, in the present unsettled state of the law, men are abandoning their wives and families; distrust and suspicion are taking up their abode in many a happy home; collateral relatives are greedily eyeing the possessions of those whose legitimacy is thus kept so long *sub judice*. All this may be so; but that august legislature of ours! – have they not the Canada wheat bill, the Bishop of Derry's limitation of actions bills, the apprehension of offenders bill, and so many other bills, to settle and pass? Even since this marriage question came into their court, what a mass of public business have they not disposed of? Have they not taken order, about the gates of Somnauth and Lord Ellenborough's proclamation? – have they not thanked Lord Ashburton for saving them from the Americans? Nay, have they not, by a might effort, with the single casting voice of a Lord Chancellor, thrown out the important dogs bill? And shall we expect that we, obscure Presbyterians of Ulster, are to draw off their lordly attention from such weighty concerns, and fix them upon our petty family affairs?

Seriously – the Presbyterians are beginning to reflect upon this, and to ask themselves whether the reasonable wishes, the highest and dearest interests of so influential a body, *could* be so completely disregarded if our court of last resort were seated in Dublin, and were relieved from the charge of legislating throughout the four quarters of the globe, and over all the degrees of latitude and longitude. But if it indeed be so, as some of the speakers in the General Assembly sitting in Belfast have plainly declared, that it is not merely neglect we have to complain of – if there be a settled purpose, on the part of the government and high church party, to crush Dissent and Presbyterianism altogether – then I would fain know on what support that government relies when Sir James Graham stands up in the House of Commons and announces their “determination” to maintain the Legislative Union and the Irish church establishment. How long would they be able to maintain either one or the other if the Irish Presbyterians declared against them? Let the Presbyterian body throw their weight into the scale against those inviolable palladia of Sir James Graham’s – already trembling in the balance – and neither church nor Union is worth one month’s purchase. “They are *determined*,” quoth he, to maintain the Legislative Union and the church establishment! – and what if we join now with our Catholic countrymen to say, “*we are determined* to have an end of them both.”

I believe this is not an improbable case. There is an agitation of the public mind in Ulster which is rapidly tending, nobody can doubt whither. Our thoughts are more and more recalled to the times when our fathers were not ashamed of the name of Irishmen, and even of *United Irishmen*. For all our devotedness to England since that sad time, we may now ask, *what has been our return?* Has our trade been fostered or even let alone? Have our manufactures been encouraged or not discouraged? Has our religion been honoured, respected, or even exempted from contumely and insult? These questions require no answers.

It needed not this decision of the English judges to make *me* a Repealer. In 1798 my father was a United Irishman. I have been a Repealer since 1832; and my children shall be brought up in such principles that *whatever* form Irish nationality shall take in their day

to resist English domination (if English domination survive till then), their place shall be on the side of their country. But I confess that I rejoice in every additional insult that is flung on Presbyterians by a British government. Let the present course of policy be persevered in a little longer, and Ulster will be as Irish as it was fifty years ago.

A PRESBYTERIAN REPEALER.