

# WHAT THE AMERICAN WAR IS FOR

By John Mitchel.

To The Editor of the Irish American.

PARIS, Aug. 28, 1861.

Every Irishman in Ireland, England and Scotland, has by this time read, or has heard read, Meagher's story of the battle of Bull Run. Needless to tell you with what interest I have followed him in the hot, sweltering marsh through those Virginia Woods. In imagination I have bivouacked with our good, careless, brave and jovial countrymen in the march where Sherman installed them, and could almost fancy that I heard from afar the jest and song that whiled away the night in all the rich intonations of those two and thirty counties of our hearts. My pulse has bounded along with the spanking narrative as the Sixty-ninth, pitching blankets and haversacks to the devil, went at the enemy with a rush and a ringing cheer, the green flag dancing above the bayonets in line below. Why can I not wish that glowing mass of Irish valour to overthrow and trample down everything that opposes it? – because, *because*, standing in the fiery gap, barring the road to Richmond, stands many a rank of Irish breed as true and brave; and along their line rides a bold Virginian Galway man, than whom no nobler Irishman trod the field that bloody day, nor one that more dearly loves the green. It is Lieutenant-Colonel Moore, commanding the First Virginia Regiment. He stands there like every other good Southerner, to defend the "sacred soil" of his country, to defend that same pleasant and hospitable home where two years ago, he entertained Smith O'Brien like an Irish Prince. "On to Richmond" there is positively no way save over his dead body, and many a tall fellow's along with him. What had he done to you? How had any Southerner injured you, that you should carry fire and sword into their peaceful shades? Think how Governor Wise stemmed and turned back the foul current of Know-Nothingism in Virginia, and in all the South – and would you sack his house and hang him up at his own door?

“The last days of the 69<sup>th</sup> in Virginia!” Pray God they be indeed the last.

One thing, at all events, the Southerners have learned – that wherever again they see the green flag flying in the ranks of the North, right opposite to *that* they had better array their choicest troops. What a wild and strange destiny is ours – Irish brigade fronting Irish brigade in deadly conflict, to settle the constitutional question between State rights and Federal power! To fight for the Pope at Ancons and Castelfidardo was generous and pious; to fight for the King of France at Cremona and Steenkirk and Fontenoy, was just and chivalrous; but to fight for Lincoln and Seward, Sumner and Banks! – why the British service itself is hardly a more unnatural employment for Irishmen.

I know that some persons may, even still, be ready to reply: - We did not fight for Lincoln or for Seward, but for the supremacy of the laws and to maintain the Union.

Hitherto I have abstained from this subject in my correspondence, because I saw that our friends at the North were in no temper to listen; now, perhaps, they are somewhat cooler; and you will indulge me while I say to them that those who hounded them on to this war under the pretence of vindicating law or maintaining the Union, *lied*. Mr. Seward may be what else you will, but he is certainly not a blockhead; and therefore it never entered into his mind for one moment that the South could be coerced back into the Union, or that any *law* would ever again be vindicated at the South save what the South would make for its own government. It was *because* the secession was irrevocable and the Union was gone for ever that Mr. Lincoln’s gang (call it cabinet if you choose) launched their armies against the South; they would at least burst the new Confederation as much as possible; would at least keep Baltimore, Washington, St. Louis, Chesapeake Bay – as much as they could; and by pretending to treat the Southerners as rebels, would avoid an equitable division of the Federal property. It is the case of a dissolution of partnership, where one partner happening to be in possession of the stock and the books, trumps up a criminal prosecution against the other, and so keeps all. Such and so noble and statesmanlike is the war policy of the Yankee.

He does the business cheaply, too; for he does it principally with Irish and German soldiers, with rowdies from the cities, and prisoners from the gaol; and if he never sees their faces again, if they *all* lie stark in Virginia forests, he will turn up his eyes, and say God's will be done.