

# ADDRESS TO THE IRISH CONFEDERATION, 21st April, 1847.

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Sir, I rise for the purpose of bringing forward a report, drawn up by my friend Mr. Mitchel, on the recently proposed scheme of rearing in the back woods of Canada an Irish nationality, with its Irish Catholic church, by means of a joint stock company of London merchants. Before I proceed to make the few observations which I am desirous of making, I wish to be understood that for my opinions on emigration in general, and on this scheme in particular, I alone am responsible. Mr. Godley may be very sincere, but he is an Imperialist, opposed to the nationality of Ireland, and desirous only of benefitting the empire. I, on the contrary, am an Irish nationalist, desirous of freeing my country from the empire's yoke should the empire fall in ruins around. His opinions may, therefore, appear very right to him, but on that account they appear very wrong to me. I am willing to acquit him of all interested motives; and although I understand he is Irish-born and a landlord, I wish to treat him just as I find him in his memorial, a mere British imperialist.

Christianity, you are aware, sir, has long been a very profitable article of exclusively British export. We cannot then wonder that British economists should begin to regard nationality as raw material of colonial produce. And this scheme of Mr. Godley's being the first yet given to the world for growing these interesting exotics (which cannot bloom at home), it is right that we should understand it. There are some seven millions of us, of all classes, living here still; with the whole resources of the island lying in our grasp, if we would only grasp them, and as yet we have not been able to found a nationality at home. Mr. Godley, however, sir, can do the matter quite easily abroad – all he wants are two millions of Irish beggars, a London company, like the Irish Society, which in the days of James planted its little

nationality in Derry, a capital of twenty-seven millions of pounds, and what is termed “elbow-room” – and the thing is done.

The plan is most perfect, and necessary for our existence. It appears we have a superabundant population – that there are too many of us to live comfortably here – too many of us to found a nationality here. It appears too, sir, that two millions more of us must die quietly here too, unless, as Mr. Godley says, “England will spoonfed the whole people for years, or banish the superabundant number to the other side of the earth.” Now, sir, there is another thing for England to do, which the very benevolent and very imperial Mr. Godley does not seem at all to understand. It is to loose – to take her hand out of our pocket – to cease robbing us – to cease murdering our people at the rate of four a minute, and let us live; it is simply to leave us to ourselves. I am disposed to treat Mr. Godley and the Irish landlords who have supported him in this matter in a friendly spirit. But really the scheme is so transparent and so cruel a humbug, that its bare enunciation is a national insult so deep – its effect would be a national loss so irreparable, that I cannot regard its advocates as very sensitive to the honour of my country, or very enthusiastic for her national welfare. Sir, it is useless to cloak the fact – this scheme, although Mr. Godley may not know it, is one feature in that conspiracy which at present exists between the English Whigs and some of the Irish landlords. It is a gigantic complement to Lord John Russell’s vagrancy bill and to the quarter acre clause of the outdoor relief act. It is a plan, although Mr. Godley may not intend it, for the transportation of the unfortunate tenant, whom the ejection propensities of some men may throw upon the world, for whose existence as paupers they may not desire to pay, and whose retributive vengeance they dread to excite.

It is an attempt to clear this island by exciting those who, under just management, would be the foundation of her greatest wealth – to increase the food-producing powers of a British colony by destroying the physical power of the Irish people – to perpetuate on us the doom of a foreigner’s farm, and to create in Canada an increased market for British manufactures.

Sir, let no man mistake Mr. Godley, and let not Mr. Godley mistake himself. The existence – not speaking of the welfare – of “the Irish peasant” is, although he may not believe it, his smallest consideration. His true object, although he may not see it, is to consolidate farms in Ireland by depopulating her surface – to sink her for ever into the state of a food-grower for the London market, by removing the native mouths which should eat that native food – to increase the wealth of a tyrant empire, by still further reducing the emaciated province. His plan is not, nor does it pretend to be, a palliative of, or remedy for, the present famine. The million and a half of tenant farmers he proposes to transport cannot be removed till the year 1850. Ere then, sir, Ireland will be a nation or a wilderness. But granting that in 1850 she will be neither – granting that we are firmly determined to die on quietly for a year or two, at the rate of four a minute – granting, what I utterly deny, that even last year this island did not produce food sufficient for her population – granting that Mr. Godley’s object is, as he states, permanently to reduce that population down to the limits of its food – his scheme, even for that object, is utterly ineffective. If carried out, it may clear estates, but of itself it cannot depopulate the country. No possible amount of emigration can ever depopulate any land.

On the contrary, it invariably increases the number of births. The two Spanish provinces from which the greatest numbers emigrated to America became, in consequence, more populous, and so in every other instance. If Mr. Godley carried his scheme into effect, the consequence would either be an excessive pauper population – unless there was a balancing emigration of Englishmen here – or an excessive yearly mortality of the young. No, sir, emigration can never sweep a population from its native soil. There is one way only of doing that – by destroying its industry, and abstracting its means of subsistence. “That,” says Malthus, “does the business at once.” Lord John Russell is perfectly satisfied of this truth – by it England has destroyed two millions here this year, and Mr. Godley’s benevolent object is, not to give a spur to Irish industry, that Irish subsistence may be no longer cut off, but to make the murderous system of this year systematic and permanent.

Sir, I shall not follow the proposed victims of this imperial cold-blooded juggle into the blissful labour-market of Canada – I shall not stoop to notice the mockery of setting up an Irish nationality in a British colony along with exported priests, and blacksmith's forges, and Manchester warehouses, even under the inspiring joint-stock liberatorship of a London company – for, and it please it you, sir, the advance of science and British capital is so great, that the world can now do without such souls as Leonidas, and Tell, and Epaminondas, and Washington, and Hofer, and fools of that old cut. Formerly heroism, devotion, the power given by Heaven to great men, was needed to free the smallest land or the fewest people.

Now, sir, economy, division of labour, capital, and Stock-Exchange debentures, can effect what Kosciusko failed to do for Poland – what our own Tone failed to accomplish here. I cannot further allude to this maddening mockery. Even the provocation of Mr. Godley shall not induce me to blaspheme the nationality which is a religion to me, nor to speak lightly of that freedom which is a religion to the world.

Turn, sir, for an instant, however, to the mere financial loss which it is proposed by this scheme to inflict upon our country. A million-and-a-half men are worth something to the land which nursed them. Of her produce and her wealth she has made their sinew and bone, and whatever spirit of manhood is in them. There is not a Canadian farmer – not one of this company of Mark-lane capitalists would not purchase an Irishman at as high a rate as a negro slave. His labour would be productive of profit to his purchaser and to the country whose wealth his labour increases. If, then, we send to a British colony a million-and-a-half of men, we precisely, valuing each man at the low rate of 30/., make a present to that colony and the empire to which it belongs of 45 millions of money. Canada gains 45 millions, and we lose not only that, but labour, which a national government here would turn into treble the amount.

We give our greatest enemy our labour fund – our only means of attaining great national wealth. This is the precise proposal made by Mr. Godley. Nor does he stop even there; but, having shown how Ireland may be robbed to that amount, he further proposes that

Ireland shall pay one-third of the expenses of the robbery – that we shall fling after our exiled countrymen into the sea eight millions of money. A plan of national plunder more cool and more stupendous, you will not find even in the history of Ireland.

When I look at it – when I see the aristocracy of Ireland patronising and advocating a project so infamous for the robbery and abasement of their native land – when I see those whose right position should now be at the head of their people, consulting for the national salvation, and determined to end, for ever, Imperialism, which has laid low today two millions of their brothers – when I see them compounding with a tyrant government for power of inflicting transportation of the living, by giving to that government impunity for the murder of the dead – when I think of the severance of all the ties which bind the native to his native sod – of the tears and groans, and the breaking hearts, and the agony of exile, and the mournful recollections, and the national humiliation and disgrace which, by this measure, they contemplate for my country, I cannot but bow my head in shame and sorrow, and weep that I am an Irishman.

And, sir, when I see the foreign rulers of the island which is our own by a higher law than English law – which the God of nations gave to us for an integral nationality, to live on, to love, to defend, to die for – when I see these foreign marauders paving the way for this impious scheme, by voting us vagabonds on our own soil, and subjecting each of us, individually, to imprisonment when they shall have reduced us to beggary – when I see them intimating their approval of this measure, presuming that tyranny can make us remember our rights as men – presuming that we shall fly from the post with which Heaven has entrusted us, rather than meet their desolating “law” – when I see this, I cannot but believe that to no other people on earth dare such a proposal be made.

High and low – the noble and the mendicant – the merchant, the student, and the workman – we are, as a people, an infamy and a byword. I, for one, feel that, as an Irishman, I am a disgrace to the earth – a vile pretender to the name of man – a libel and a hypocrisy before God. So are you all. I speak of no particular class. The Irish noble, glittering in the tinsel of slavery, swollen with abasing titles

and dishonouring “honours,” is the meaner slave because he is a noble; the Irish gentleman, whose national pride is in an Irish pig – whose national history is the record of Irish horses on the English turf – whose ambition is the vices and accent of his country’s tyrants – is the baser man because he is a gentleman. Your Irish Tory is a timid, wavering fool, afraid of the government, which is afraid of him, and of the people, who would take him to their heart of hearts tomorrow. Your Irish Whig – I shall not speak of him.

You are all slaves. ‘Tis time you should learn the truth – ‘tis time you should open your eyes to your own abasement, and open your hearts to the sorrows of your country. False flatterers – sycophants of your vices – have told you, you are a brave and a noble people – that you are the bravest and noblest people of Europe, and so forth. Now, I, one of you – one of the class, in false language, called “the people” – one, too, of that native race which the English government proposes to brush off the Irish soil – tell you, you are no such thing. You are nobles, citizens, merchants, farmers, beggars, and all – what your present masters and owners call you – an inferior caste, because they *are* your masters and owners. You are at this present moment the most humiliated, the most pitiable, the most helpless, the most despised people, with a white skin, on the face of God’s whole earth. You are not Irish *men*, but Irish slaves – a mean and broken species. For forty-seven years to what tyranny have you not submitted – to what depths of obsequious servitude have you not sunk! What insult has been too keen for you to bear – what degradation too gross – what oppression too grinding – what wrong too sore – what cruelty too cruel for your natures, slaves? You saw your ancient constitution – your only constitution, broken to atoms – your nationalist “incorporated” with a piratical empire – your flag outlawed from the nations – your bravest, your only brave, hanged or exiled. For long years you saw all the horrors of martial law, of drumhead courts of English justice, of the pitch cap, the triangle, the gibbet, the gallows – you saw homes in flames, fathers swinging from lamp-posts, young men shot down like dogs, and women shrieking before a ruthless soldiery like Mary le More, and you bore it all.

You saw trade after trade systematically destroyed – haggard operatives staggering by the thousand through your streets – manufacture after manufactures hunted from the land, and English goods borne victoriously over the graves of your murdered countrymen – and you bore it.

You saw the union jack, the standard of your infamy, floating in insulting triumph from every stronghold of the Irish nation, and you felt no insult. You saw your national seat of government turned into a provincial office, and the wealthiest and highest among you bent before the managing clerk, and was obsequious to the meanest menial there. You saw your senate-house used as an English bank for the circulation of English coin, and within the sacred walls you discounted the national honour.

English mercenaries spy into your homes – English hymns of conquest are chanted in your theatres – English soldiery parade your streets and squares, and fire *feux de joie* in your parks over your conquered country, and you cheer them on.

For these forty-seven years the English have treated you in every capacity as an inferior caste, and you submitted to be so treated. They fed you on their refuse and their offal – on food which to this day they tell you is fit for you and you alone; they placed English beggars over you in every county, in every office, in every system, under every cabinet; they placed their brand upon your very arms, and still you were not stung into manhood. Have you indeed the souls, the passions, the intellects, the feelings of men?

Are you all abased – all broken? Alas! Why point to the agonies of today? Why must I say that we, a people of nine millions, coolly stood by this year and saw two millions of ourselves cut down by that which is more desolating than all the artillery, the bayonets, the musketry, and the sabres of Britain – her law? We saw that law, murdering by the million, proceed in its continuous, unceasing attacks, as it is now proceeding; and against these attacks we have taken no measures – no attitude of self-defence.

To what extreme of tyranny are you prepared to submit? Before another month 500,000 more fathers of families will be, by one stroke of Lord Bessborough's pen, flung under the range of that murderous

weapon of England which has already murdered two millions of victims.

And here comes this insulting scheme to transport, to a foreign soil, those unfortunates who may live out the coming summer of want and typhus. Now, then, choose at last – choose whether you will wait on quietly till the most agonising of deaths, the most horrid of diseases, and the most cruel of infamous projects shall have swept you all from the Irish soil; or whether you will at once spring to your feet from your apathy and your degradation, and win your spurs of nationhood like men.

If the last, tell these landlords, as I tell them now, that there is on this little island of ours, desolate though it be, room and plenty for us all – that you do not desire to drive them from her bosom, but that they shall not drive you – that your love for her is as great as theirs, and your right to live on her soil the same.

Tell them that their place is not in the secret offices of the slaughtering alien, but on their own soil, at your head, consulting for your safety, and leading you to freedom – tell them that Nationality needs no “outdoor relief” – that it has no surplus population – but work, and love, and happiness, for all whom it may bless. Tell them, too, that, whether they come or not, your course shall be the same – that you, at all events, will not be traitors to your trust – that you will not fly, like a herd of goats before the tiger, from the post which God, in distributing the people of the earth for their mutual protection, has assigned to you – that He gave to all Irish this island-rock for a home – and that here you, at all events, come what may, shall die.

So, even should Irish Nationality perish for ever – should our race and name be indeed extinguished – should the memories of our fathers, the murder of our brothers, sink unavenged into the eternity of chaos – should the green island of ocean sparkle no more with verdure, but glisten in the Atlantic with the whitening bones of her children – even so, the world will recognise in the nobility of our death a grand example of patriotism and manhood; and Heaven itself, moved to tears and wrath, looking down upon the land where we fell, will avenge the fate of a nation of heroes.



