

# “FENIANS” IN PARLIAMENT.

By Charles Kickham.

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We are promised a new departure in Irish politics. The “party of action” – meaning the “Fenians” – are to be all at once transformed into constitutionalists and parliamentarians, and are henceforth to devote all their energies to return “Fenian” as representatives of Ireland to the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland.

At least, all that will come to pass if certain suggestions of Mr. DAVITT, Mr. JOHN DEVOY, and some other Irish-American gentlemen will be acted upon. Mr. DAVITT, in a lecture which he delivered at Brooklyn a few weeks ago, expressly declared that he would advocate parliamentary agitation in Ireland. “The National” (that is, the Fenian) “party,” he said, “should send representatives to the House of Commons,” because the genuine national sentiment does not find expression there, and it is desirable that it should. Therefore, Mr. DAVITT said on his return to Ireland, “as a loyal Irishman, under certain conditions and restrictions,” he should advise that some such course of action should be pursued. And, moreover, he sketched the lines on which the National members should operate.

Mr. DEVOY also declared himself in favour of Parliamentary agitation. “I fully approve of the policy,” he said, “which he (Mr. DAVITT) proposes for the National party.” He went further; he said his opinion was that the National party should not only control parliamentary elections, but also elections for boards of poor-law guardians, town commissioners, and city corporations. He desires, however, most particularly that the Nationalists should sweep away the men who now misrepresent us, and “obtain control of the public voice of the country,” in order that should a *rapprochement* he thought possible between the party of action in Ireland and the Russians, when applied to, should not be able to say: -

“Gentlemen, we have no doubt of your sincerity, but you are only a small party; you don’t represent Ireland, and we can’t afford to make alliances with small parties without power or standing in their country. All your members of

Parliament are loyal to England, and your local public bodies present addresses of loyalty to every little representative of English power who comes among them. These are the only tests we know, and they show that you have no weight in the country.”

Let us consider what this all means. The National party are to send Nationalists – that is, Fenians, or members of the revolutionary party – as representatives of Ireland to the English House of Commons. But a Nationalist must of necessity cease to be a Nationalist when he enters the House of Commons. He will be assumed to have freely acknowledged the right of England to rule Ireland, since he will give her Government counsel and advice, and enable them to say that as all classes, creeds, and every variety of shade of Irish opinion finds free representation and untrammelled expression in the Imperial Parliament, therefore is Ireland well content with her bondage. Furthermore, as a Nationalist – that is, an Irishman who believes that so long as a vestige of foreign rule remains in his country, so long will it decay and languish, and who hopes to secure her perfect freedom and prosperity by revolution – he will have to renounce his most cherished convictions, and vow fealty to English rule in Ireland; he will have to take an oath of allegiance to Queen VICTORIA, and will thenceforth be bound in honour to assist in the preservation of the integrity of the English Empire. It would, therefore, appear to be impossible that an Irish Nationalist – using the word in its proper signification – could become a member of Parliament without renouncing his national opinions.

But if by some mysterious agency – some occult trick-of-the-loop business – he could reconcile it with his conscience to appear in a dual capacity – as two single gentlemen rolled into one – as a revolutionist and as a constitutional member of the Imperial Parliament, in what respect would he differ from a member of the ordinary type? In nothing that we can see. He might talk taller, perhaps, but talk goes for little. The programme laid down for his guidance is really not more advanced than that which is supposed to guide the ordinary Home Rule member. According to Mr. DAVITT, he should declare – as the Home Rulers do – that self-government is the chief want of Ireland, and proceed to show that it is nothing of the

sort – as the Home Rulers do – by endeavouring to improve the rule of England in Ireland, and thereby make it acceptable to the Irish people, who are believed to be firmly convinced that the English Parliament is incompetent to rule their country. To that end the Nationalist members – like the Home Rule members – are to oppose coercion; to procure such an adjustment of the Land Question as shall make evictions impossible, unless for non-payment of a fair rent; to develop Irish industries; to advocate a system of education which shall not be anti-national; and to insist on the right of Irishmen to bear arms. All these things the Home Rulers do just as well, if not better, than Nationalist members would do. Mr. DEVOY, it is true, insists that the true solution of the Land Question lies in the abolition of landlordism – by confiscation apparently; but revolution should precede confiscation, and revolution will hardly be brought about by Parliamentary agitation.

Again, for argument sake, admitting that merely the presence in Parliament, and in local boards, of Irish Nationalists would prove that Ireland is anxiously engaged in an earnest effort to obtain her independence, could they be elected in sufficient numbers to make a respectable demonstration. We doubt it. The franchise is still a packed jury – as it has always been – in Ireland, and the full volume of the popular voice in favour of popular candidates cannot be heard in their favour. Besides, there is the certain hostile influence of the clergy to be taken into account. On the whole, we consider it unlikely that with the present limited franchise, a majority of Nationalist representatives at the elections could be secured. Failure in that respect would, moreover, seem to indicate weakness, when no weakness really exists. Great stress is laid, however, on the moral effect of having Nationalists occupying representatives' positions. It would prove, it is argued, that Ireland is deeply and desperately disaffected – that the vast majority of her people are in a condition bordering on frenzy, and on the verge of revolt. But to our mind it would prove nothing of the kind; it would, on the contrary, appear to show that this country was becoming rapidly West-Britonized and finally conquered, since men who had hitherto plotted and conspired in secret to subvert English rule by force, had become suddenly alive to the errors of their ways;

accepted that rule as an evil which should be endured, and were content to labour for its improvement strictly within the lines of the Constitution. It would seem to show that – as Mr. WEBB desires we should do – we had accepted the English connection as perpetually binding, and had made up our minds to do the very best we could under such distressing circumstances “legally and constitutionally.”

The Nationalist who would have us believe that, by becoming a member of the English Parliament, he is thereby proclaiming to the world that Ireland is disaffected by English rule, we have always regarded as a fraud and a sham. Nothing that Mr. DEVOY or Mr. DAVITT said on the subject has induced us to change that opinion. Nationalists as such have no business dabbling in agitation – their very “reason for being” consists in the inflexible resolution which they should hold to not meddle with it. It is amazing that men so able and so devotedly patriotic as Messrs. DEVOY and DAVITT cannot see that by engaging in agitation and by taking part in elections they are, in fact, playing into the hands of their enemies. The rulers of England, we feel quite sure, would be only too well pleased that the Irish should send to Parliament none others to represent them save Nationalists, because they would then know they had Ireland safe. They would wheedle, cajole, flatter and humbug them, and allow them the utmost latitude in the way of speaking seditiously, and making themselves generally disagreeable, firm in the conviction that they were thereby consummating the very last conquest of Ireland.

It would be quite intelligible if these gentlemen conceived that the National party should, to a certain extent, sympathise with the efforts made by the members of the “party of action” within the House of Commons, but we confess that we are incapable of fathoming the hidden meaning – if there be any – for replacing such members by others who would be logically out of place there, and would not probably be so effective. Mr. PARNELL tells us that with twenty members pledged to a “policy of combat,” he could do almost anything, and a Home Rule organ last week told us that with such a force the Irish party could “disrupt” the House of Commons – blow it and all that is in it to metaphorical smithereens. Well, let them try by all means; we heartily approve, though we are dubious of the success of

their enterprise. But for all that we hold to the conviction, which has stood the test of lengthened experiment, and has never been controverted, that the English Parliament is no place for an Irish patriot – or Nationalist – any more than it is for an Irish gentleman.