

LETTER TO CHARLES GAVAN DUFFY.

By John Mitchel.

8 ONTARIO TERRACE, RATHMINES, 7th Jan, 1848.

DEAR DUFFY, - If the public has any curiosity (of which I have seen no symptom) to know why I renounced connexion with the *Nation* – or if you desire, on your own account, that a statement of my reasons and motives should appear – I will make the statement shortly, and you can do as you please with it.

Our differences of opinion, as you well know, are not a matter of yesterday. For some months past, I have found myself precluded from speaking to the public through the *Nation*, with that full freedom and boldness which I had formerly used, by objections and remonstrances from you, to the effect, that what I wrote was ‘seditious’ or ‘impolitic.’ This kind of restriction, slight and casual at first, became gradually more constant and annoying; and that, while the times demanded, in my opinion, more and more unmitigated plain speaking, as to the actual relation of Ireland towards the English government, and the real designs of that Government against the lives and properties of Irishmen.

The failure of the ‘Irish Council,’ the hurried calling together of the English Parliament, the bill for disarming the Irish people, and the horrid delight with which that bill was hailed by the landlords of this country – these things rapidly brought our differences to an issue. The effect wrought upon *me* by all the events I saw passing, was a thorough conviction that Irish landlords had finally taken their side *against* the people, and *for* the foreign enemy – that all the symptoms of landlord ‘nationality,’ which had deluded us into the ‘Irish Council,’ and kept us so long vainly wooing the aristocracy into the ranks of their countrymen, were a deliberate fraud – were, in fact, a demonstration intended to act upon English – and that the disarming bill was the first fruit of a new and more strict alliance between traitors at home and foes abroad.

I desired to say all this to the people plainly. I desired to point out to them that this infamous bill, falsely entitled – ‘for the Prevention of Crime,’ was merely an engine to crush TENANT RIGHT, and all other popular right, and to enable the landlords to eject, distrain, and exterminate in peace and security. I desired to preach to them, that every farmer in Ireland has a right to his land in perpetuity (let ‘Law’ say as it will) – that no landlord who denies that right ought to receive any rent – that Tenant-Right, however, though the universal right of all Irish farmers, never had been, and never would be recognised or secured by English law – that there was and will be no other way of establishing and securing that right, except, as in Ulster, by successful intimidation, that is to say, by the determined public opinion of *armed men* – that, *therefore*, the power calling itself a ‘Government,’ which called on the people of Ireland to deliver up their arms, under any pretext, must be the mortal enemy of that people, their rights, their liberties, and their lives. I desired to warn my countrymen accordingly, that if they should carry their guns to the police stations, when ordered by Lord Clarendon, they would be putting weapons into the hands of their deadly foes, and committing virtual suicide. I desired to preach to them that the country is actually in a state of war – a war of ‘property’ against poverty – a war of ‘law’ against life; and that their safety lay, not in trusting to any laws or legislation of the enemies’ Parliament, but solely in their determination to stand upon their own individual rights, defend those to the last, and sell their lives and lands as dear as they could.

I desired also to show that the new Poor Law, enacted under pretence of relieving the destitute, was really intended, and is calculated to increase and deepen the pauperism of the country – to break down the farmers, as well as the landlords, by degrees, and uproot them gradually from the soil, so as to make the lands of Ireland pass (unencumbered by excessive population) into the hands of English capitalists, and under the more absolute sway of English government. In short, I wished to make them recognise in the Poor Law, what it really is – an elaborate machinery for making final conquest of Ireland by ‘law.’ I therefore urged, from the first, that this law ought to be resisted and defeated – that Guardians ought not to

act under it, but in defiance of it – that Rate payers ought to offer steady and deliberate passive resistance to it – and that every district ought to organize some voluntary mode of relieving its own poor; and for this purpose, as well as to stop the traffic with England, that the people should determine to suffer no grain or cattle to leave the country.

With reference to the future direction which should be given to the energies of the country, and of the Irish Confederation, I desired, in the first place, once for all, to turn men's mind away from the English Parliament, and from parliamentary and constitutional agitation of all kinds. I have made up my mind, inasmuch as the mass of the people have no franchises, and are not likely to get any; and inasmuch as the constituencies, being very small, very poor, and growing smaller and poorer continually, are so easily gained over by corruption and bribery; and inasmuch as any combination of the 'gentry' with the people is now and henceforth impossible – that, for all these reasons, any organization for parliamentary or constitutional action, would be merely throwing away time and strength, and ensuring our own perpetual defeat. Therefore, I desired that the *Nation* and the Confederation should rather employ themselves in promulgating sound instruction upon military affairs – upon the natural lines of defence which make the island so strong, and the method of making these available – upon the construction and defence of field-works, and especially upon the use of proper arms – not with a view to any immediate insurrection, but in order that the stupid 'legal and constitutional' shouting, voting, and 'agitating' that have made our country an abomination to the whole earth, should be changed into a deliberate study of the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare; and that the true and only method of regenerating Ireland, might, in course of time, recommend itself to a nation so long abused and deluded by 'legal' humbug.

These are my doctrines – and these are what I wished to enforce in the *Nation*. I knew that it would be 'illegal' to do so. I knew that it would subject you, as proprietor of that paper, to prosecutions for 'sedition,' &c. I knew, besides, that your own views did not at all agree with mine; and I could not assuredly expect you to incur legal risks

for the sake of promulgating another man's opinions. Therefore, when I found – which I did during the progress of the Coercion bill – that no one journal could possibly represent two sets of opinions so very incompatible as yours and mine; and when you informed me that the columns of the *Nation* should no longer be open even to such a modified and subdued exposition of my doctrines as they had heretofore been, I at once removed all difficulty, by ending the connexion which had subsisted between us more than two years.

I have not entered into any details of the difficulties and disagreements that preceded this final step; but I cannot avoid mentioning the circumstance that, during the last week of my connexion with the *Nation*, you felt it necessary to suppress a portion of my speech delivered by me in the Irish Confederation, which you considered seditious and impolitic. I do not impugn your motives for this; but, if there had been no other reason urging me to the course I have taken, this alone would have been enough to make me resolve on never writing another line in the *Nation*. I am bound to add, that I did not discover the fact of this suppression until the next morning after I had closed my connexion with the *Nation*; so that it did not actually influence me, though it fully justifies me in what I have done.

In this letter, you will observe that I have not attempted to describe or characterise your opinions. I leave that to yourself. You have the *Nation* at your command, and have had *five* opportunities of expounding your own policy since I had one. It is enough to say, that the present policy of the *Nation* does not suit *me*. If you publish this, I hope there will be no possibility of any future misrepresentations and vague rumours about the causes of our differences, such as you say are current.

I remain, faithfully yours,
JOHN MITCHEL.