

THE CREED OF “THE NATION.”

Published as a booklet by the Irish Confederation, May
1848.



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Published by An Chartlann.



A new era has commenced in Irish Journalism – the reign of terror. The jailer of Kilmainham is henceforth censor of the Dublin press. Whosoever shall adjure the young men of Ireland to *be* men, to abandon the sensual and slavish vices that degrade them, and lift up their souls to contemplate the examples of TONE and DAVIS, will write with the fetters of the jailer gaping for their hands. We are solemnly forewarned by statute law of a new offence which conscience and justice ignore. Forgery, manslaughter, coining, arson, and preaching the gospel of Irish Independence are crimes of equal penalty by the law of England. And some victims, it is said, are already prejudged and convicted. The law officers of the crown, I am assured, await but this very number of THE NATION to make a formidable example. And Mr. KEMMIS pauses for his instructions, impatient to “slip the slave’s handcuffs on, and snap the lock.”

A reign of terror was the natural crisis of such a contest; it is a symptom of progress, or, at worst, a symptom that the end is approaching. And surely it is not far distant. The sluggish fever that has hung so long on the country, wasting and smothering its energy, will kindle into a preternatural fire, the very breath of which is victory, or collapse into helpless inanition and death. I do not fear or doubt the issue; law cannot purge and fire cannot burn “treason” to their English rulers out of the heart of the Irish people; but if it were otherwise any conclusive result might well be welcome to a country which has suffered so miserably from eternal experiments and hope for ever deferred.

The popular journalists, from the accident of their position, stand in the front of this battle. The Government and the people are awaiting this day with deep anxiety, the manner they will bear themselves in the contest – for the fate of a great struggle sometimes depends on these preliminary skirmishes. I believe there are journalists in all the four provinces who will bear themselves like men. They have helped to kindle this flame which England threatens to extinguish in the blood of our people, and they cannot complain that they are called upon to testify to their individual faith. Early or late, it was inevitable.

For myself, I hope to perform my duty without discredit to the cause or the country. I will not yield an inch in this just quarrel with my life. But this crisis, which may deprive me of the power of defending or explaining my opinions, hastens the performance of a duty I have been meditating for some weeks past. I desire to rescue the actual principles of THE NATION from misrepresentations cast upon them by Cabinet Ministers in the Parliament of England, and petty journals in both countries. They have attributed to THE NATION principles which I abhor; and to the entire movement objects which I know the men most trusted in its foremost ranks repudiate and denounce. The lives and honour of too many men are staked on this contest, to permit doubt or equivocation to hang over it. To fight so formidable a battle with enthusiasm we must not be ashamed of the banner that floats above our ranks. I am not ashamed of the principles of THE NATION. They are rational and definite enough to content my judgment, and sufficiently just and humane to satisfy my conscience. If I fall in this struggle, I believe in my soul no man ever suffered for a juster cause.

In the first place, this is a national, not an anarchical movement. THE NATION is an Irish, not a Jacobin journal. To me liberty has still meant more light, more justice, more order. It has typified a higher moral and social condition of existence. It has never meant, and it shall never mean, any barbarous community of ignorance and rapine – any right to murder or to rob. I am a nationalist. Nationality is broad, comprehensive, and universal; inspiring generous emotions, and compassing noble ends. I, for one, will never consent to dwarf it down to the selfish schemes of a class in society, or the pedantic theories of a sect in politics. I would not combat tyranny with new tyranny, but with justice. I rely, as I have always done, on honour, truth, and courage, for the deliverance of my country, not at all upon brute ferocity or rancorous hatred. I rely on the sword of the patriot, not on the bludgeon of the assassin.

The past has taken hostages from our honour. We have been exciting, and triumphing in the growth of nationality among the wealthy and cultivated classes. I shall never consent to scoff at it, trample upon it, or scatter it to the winds, because other hopes have arisen. I did indeed desire their help; I did in all truth and sincerity

canvass it, offering in return cordial sympathy and mutual support; and in the name of honour and justice I will maintain these pledges till the last hour of my life. THE NATION, then, is not a Jacobin or anarchical journal, as Lord JOHN RUSSELL, Sir G. GREY, the *Mail*, the *Post*, and the *Packet* represent it. Whatever be its offences, this is not one of them. It preaches a Revolution, not of robbery, but of reconstruction and justice; a Revolution which I verily believe will benefit every man in Ireland who does not wilfully court his own ruin by making himself its enemy and its victim.

A Revolution I know to be inevitable. No policy and no force can avert it. This country exhibits all the symptoms that infallibly precede it, and all the abuses that justify it to GOD and man. It must come, and speedily too, either by negotiation or the sword. And as we are driven to “open and advised speaking,” by the tyrannical prohibition of it, let me add that I hold it to be among the clearest and most unequivocal duties of Irishmen at this hour, to further it in either course. I love peace, I fear disorder – I hate anarchy; but the sudden and violent remedy of an hour, though it pain us to the quick, is better than the perpetual helplessness of disease. If this is our only resource, let it come. It is just and well-timed; for of all nations that have arisen for their liberty, and achieved it among the plaudits of mankind, there is not one which suffered so deeply, or won the right of resistance by a patience more forbearing and protracted than our own.

But we must not contemplate results so tremendous through a mist, but in their actual relation to us. I believe the public opinion of Ireland to be as well disposed to peace at this hour as ever it was, or ought to become. Peace upon honourable terms. I am well convinced there is no possibility of preserving the connexion, either by force, or by unworthy compromise. An INDEPENDENT IRISH Parliament, elected by the widest popular suffrage, a RESPONSIBLE MINISTER for Ireland, and a VICEROY of IRISH BIRTH, will content the country; and they will defend such a settlement against all aggression from without or from within. Such a Parliament would inevitably establish Tenant Right, abolish the Established Church, providing for existing interests, and endeavour to settle the claims of labour upon some solid and satisfactory basis. But one step further in the direction

of Revolution I do not believe it would go. I laugh to scorn the fear of a Jacobin ascendancy in such an assembly. Jacobinism may domineer in a clique or a crowd, but not in the Irish nation. It would be impossible to elect fairly in Ireland, three hundred representatives, a majority of whom would not prefer justice and clemency to justice and vengeance. I know most of the men foremost in the Confederate section of Repealers throughout Ireland, and they are exactly the men of highest personal character and most unequivocal success in their respective pursuits and professions.

It is impossible to conceive a class less fit to become the ministers of a system of anarchy. They afford a grave and substantial guarantee for justice and order. The Catholic Clergy supply another. From the very nature of their position, and their relation to the whole Christian world, they must always be opposed to violence and confusion. But there is a stronger guarantee in the character of the people. There may be desperate and irreconcilable agrarian quarrels where tyranny has struck too hard for human endurance, but the natural instincts of the people are generous and humane. The sordid Radicalism of COBBETT never found favour among them, and the desolating doctrines of Jacobinism are utterly unknown. Their murders, in their wildest excesses, have still an element of justice in them, and mean a life for a life; they have not presumed to erect themselves into a philosophy of the knife or the guillotine.

I maintain, therefore, that such a settlement made by negotiation between the two countries would preserve all the existing rights that ought to be preserved, and would promise permanence, as far as any settlement can, in such a stormy era of human affairs.

I would prefer it to a Republic won by insurrection. I am deeply convinced a large majority of the Repealers of Ireland share this feeling? And why? Not from any unmanly abhorrence of war, which is noble and glorious waged for our country, but because insurrection would plant deadly animosities between men of the same Irish race; and because the sudden transition of a people from Provincialism to Republicanism, passing through no intermediate state, is a doubtful experiment.

Democracy, I believe, is the destiny of the world. Probably we are contemporary with the last race of Kings. Certainly if the experiment in France be carried to a successful issue Republics will prevail over western Europe. But is Ireland in a condition to commence this experiment, with justice to the cause or advantage to herself? I dare not say yes. LAMARTINE has pronounced that nations are lost who anticipate the period of their maturity. The United States, long trained in self-government and self-reliance, reared up for public liberty by individual discipline, condensed into a firm and enduring Republic. But Mexico, rude, disorganised, immature, following her example, broke into hostile factions, and fell under the sway of a military despot. If I could choose for my country I would prefer at this hour to see it ruled as a sovereign state by its own Senate, under the sway of the crown. I would prefer it simply because the settled authority of an ancient Monarchy affords the best guarantee for order and liberty, and the surest bulwark for the present, against the struggles of selfish and rival ambitions. I profess no enthusiastic loyalty to the reigning family. Such a sentiment is very noble when it is genuine and well bestowed; but I cannot create and I scorn to feign it. I never canvassed the question with any Irishman in whom loyalty was not a convenient phrase, for love of peace and social security. With me it means no more. Whatever is best for Ireland, and intrinsically just, I regard as right and best. It is there my allegiance is given.

If the Catholic Prelates and Clergy universally, if such of the Protestant gentry and middle classes as actually desire it in their secret souls, demand this settlement, I believe we shall have it before the harvest is ripe.

The English ministry may threaten and protest, but they know the resources, diplomacy, and desperate resolution of the national party; and they wait but a reasonable excuse to capitulate. There is no class in England except the aristocracy who would resist it for an hour. When the Council of Three Hundred is convened on the requisition of 300,000 armed men, at a new Dungannon, the example of CHARLES JAMES FOX will justify his disciples in a speedy surrender. There is no wiser precedent in his history.

If these classes do not move, or if they move in vain, negotiation is at an end; the sword will arbitrate it. The English interest in Ireland will have signed its own death-warrant; its destruction will be utter, absolute, and eternal.

It is no light thing to predict or countenance revolution. But in the history of mankind there is no case where a clearer justification for resistance can be found than in ours. In physical resources this island is fit and entitled to rule itself. More fit and better entitled than the majority of sovereign states in Europe. Any pretence to the contrary is mere insolence and folly. It lies under the same skies as England. It bears as fruitfully, and teems with the same natural resources and capacities. That it should be a slave while its nearest neighbour is a sovereign, that it should be a beggar while its sister is a *millionaire* raises a just suspicion of foul play somewhere. But when it is seen that a system of external Government is forced upon it at the point of the bayonet, that its wealth is exhausted in subsidies to England – a subsidy of absentee rent, a subsidy of taxes to pay the iniquitous national debt, a subsidy of trade to purchase in England the manufactures systematically suppressed at home – the cause of its beggary cannot be doubtful. Generation after generation of Englishmen have indeed admitted the malpractice of all English Governors in Ireland – except themselves. Under this system we have grown poorer, meaner, idler, and more turbulent, year after year. No class prospered under it, no man prospered under it except at the price of his honour. At last the culminating point of ruin was reached. A famine which fell upon Europe tested it to the core. Every state in Christendom from the great powers to the pettiest dukedom of Italy and Germany protected its people from starvation; for the rulers were of their own blood and race. Here the revenue of three years was squandered in one, in ignorant and audacious experiments, made in defiance of counsel and remonstrance from all classes of Irishmen. Every man in the nation was robbed by this system – multitudes were utterly ruined and beggared. The poor remnant of our trade has daily dwindled under it, till every town in the land furnishes its list of bankrupts and its more mendicant list of place-beggars. But the imagination of man cannot conceive the fearful murder committed on

the mass of the people. The most destructive wars, the inhuman massacres whose memory appals mankind; the scourges of God, the plagues and the cholera, never desolated a nation like this famine. Men fell dead daily in the streets and by the wayside, and were flung coffinless into the earth. Whole districts were swept bare, as a desert, of human life. Men fled from it into exile, dying in multitudes on the sea, or perishing in foreign countries, till a new plague sprung from the stench of their unburied corpses. A population, larger than that of many free states of Europe, fell by these inhuman deaths.

It is the solemn verdict of dispassionate men, fully acquainted with the facts that this massacre is absolute chargeable on the Foreign Government. That an Irish Parliament, familiar with the resources of the country, could have saved these lives with a moiety of the millions squandered by foreign ignorance. A fearful and tremendous verdict. In the midst of this desolation, a cry like that of a martyr's voice from the flames still rose from the ranks of the people, demanding a native Parliament as the only safeguard of the country. While this demand was a helpless wail it was scoffed at; when it became a threat, it was answered with the Coercion Bill; since it has swelled into the voice of angry, skilful, and determined men, they seek to choke it in our throats with this bill of felony. We are answered on the right and on the left with the felon's gyves. And, at last, the Prime Minister of England, looking upon this awful desolation which has made our country a graveyard and a lazar-house, tells us that the "interest of England" (so his threat runs" demands the continuance of this system, and that he will resist our just claims with the sword of the empire. What can we answer but the sword of Ireland? If famine has weakened the right arm of the people it has not paralysed His arm who rules the destinies of battles and fights by the side of the oppressed.

Let it be remembered that while the statesmen of England unite in denying us justice, no one of them all sees, or so much as pretends to see, any road to prosperity for Ireland; even to the fatness of contented slavery. It is their deliberate verdict that we must endure our present condition because "the interest of England" demands it. More or less ingeniously disguised, this is their ultimatum.

And shall the hopes of this ancient kingdom, for whose dear loves our fathers shed their life-blood, generation after generation, be yielded up at such a bidding? Shall we tamely submit to see the last remnant of the Irish race and name sacrificed to the greedy and insolent spirit of English dominion? With God's blessing, no. We will sustain our natural right to this island against all enemies, and by whatever weapons the occasion may demand. All Ireland, from sea to sea, is arming and organising to uphold and enforce it. The bare array of this formidable power, strengthened by the examples of popular success throughout Europe – the threatening aspect of foreign nations – the sympathy of the English people – the terrible facilities of retaliation which we possess, running parallel with every vein of English power and prosperity – and the triumphant justice of our case, may give us a peaceful victory. Heaven send it! But, if not, my conscience is clear that we are able and entitled to take it. This is my belief. I seek no ingenious form of expression to shroud the naked thought. If we cannot save our country by peace, I am for war. And that we may save it by peace or war, I am for the universal arming and organisation of the people.

War, is a sound of terror to property and capital. Many men who are impatient of oppression tremble still more before the remedy. Among certain of the middle classes I know Repeal is losing sympathy on this account. A vague fear of danger and confusion has penetrated the very marrow of their bones. They tremble in a fever of uncertainty, between the ills they have and the other ills they fear. In such a struggle their allegiance to their country grows weaker day by day. And a system of fraud has been practised to inflame their panic. Our designs have been openly described as a reign of terror, commencing with the plunder of private property, and ending with the lamp-post and the guillotine. I see no reason why we should not quiet these fears. It is hard to be called upon to plead that we do not desire to turn our country into a pandemonium, but it is worse to permit discredit to fall upon the cause of Ireland.

I have said that the vast majority of Repealers would accept and defend a monarchical constitution. I am sure the number who sigh for the communism of M. BLANC or the anarchy of M. BLANQUI might

be packed in an omnibus. For myself I do not believe it is in the scheme of Providence to create a heaven upon earth (after the model of FOURIER), and I am sure it is not worth while creating a hell upon earth for the chance. The organisation of labour is a great and pressing duty – a duty which no state can postpone with safety; but the philosophy of it must be learned by experiments limited to phenomena more manageable than the entire trade and commerce of a nation. To tumble down the complicated structure of society that an honest fanatic may endeavour to build it up anew, like a house of cards, is certainly no part of the scheme of Irish Repealers. They have in general a veneration for the traditions, and a trust in the intellectual resources, of their own country, and mean to erect no fantastic mimicry of foreign fashions, but an Irish nation. The sober freedom which WASHINGTON founded and made permanent, spiritualised by whatever truths social philosophy has actually established, may well content them. It is all mankind have attained outside the utopias of the poets and dreamers. I affirm, then, that the capitalist, the merchant, or the trader, has nothing to fear. Neither Repeal nor Republic threatens their interest.

The fears of the landlords are better founded. A revolution, in which they resisted the people, would, indeed, leave them no alternative but a speedy fight. Repeal, I am well convinced, is their sole resource. Tenant-right, which they blindly resist, would treble the productiveness of the land, and make a just rent an easy burthen. This is what they may still attain, if they are wise and honest. The bulk of the nation demands only justice. They do not desire to rouse the den of furious passions that sleeps in the breast of the injured people. To teach them a savage lawlessness – to stimulate a thirst for plunder, is no part of their desire. Contempt for obligations and authority, do not make citizens but banditti; and I know, from intimate experience, that the moral and intellectual character of the people, as a new nation, more than any mere material prosperity, engages the hopes of the men foremost in the movement.

Some Confederates, driven to desperation by the aspect of the country, have, indeed, denounced ruin to all their class. The panic of personal fear may have naturally exaggerated the real tendency of

these sentiments; I am convinced it has. Revolution has lost its ferocity in the world, and I do not believe in any settled design among any party of men, however small, to revive it in this country. But certain I am, as of life or death, that such is not the purpose of the Irish Confederation. They are not desolators or anarchists. They have not as a body pronounced or countenanced any such doctrines.

For this journal I reiterate my declaration, that it is not now, never was, and never shall be, while I control it, an organ of anarchy. I have resisted here and every other where all attempts to befoul this noble cause with the doctrines of rapine or the blood of Irishmen. The principle that teaches the labouring classes to regard their own interest as the *only* honest one is as selfish and fraudulent as the worst dogmas of despotism. I believe it is not wise – I am sure it is not just – to afford our enemies the smallest justification for charging such opinions upon us. As a national policy it is mistaken in the last degree. When justice itself comes like a robber, we are compelled to knock it on the head. But generous sentiments have a magic charm. They find reception and welcome where brute force thunders in vain. And with us who plead in justification of our designs the confusion and despair into which our country has been cast, it would be hopeless folly to offer as an alternative new uncertainty and confusion.

As a stimulus to the people, I do not believe in it. In Revolutions, it is not the promptings of self-interest or the cravings of necessity, but passion and imagination which are the true conquerors. Men fight for something nobler than their own aggrandisement. Powerful as self-interest rules in the human heart what struggle for liberty but was influenced by some diviner impulse, in itself intrinsically unselfish? To hate his enemies and pamper his own interests and passions degrade a man to a savage. We are not Mohaws or Ojibeways but Christian men who fight not without the hope and purpose that GOD's justice may prevail.

This is the creed of THE NATION. I am entitled to answer for myself and my fellow-labourers alone; but I believe it is substantially the creed of the Irish Confederation. They do not demand Republicanism – they demand the legislative independence of Ireland, and will guard it jealously if it come by free negotiation. If

independence must come by force, a Republic is inevitable and welcome. But in a free parliament, or a free congress, the rights of private property, the just rights of every class in the state will be sacred. I proclaimed at the opening of this movement and I will practise to the end of it – to the last throes of revolution – a national amnesty; full forgiveness of the past – the quarrels of yesterday, the quarrels of 300 years.

If ever the spirit of sectarian ascendancy or social disorganisation develop itself into a power in Ireland, may I perish dishonourably if I shall not be found combating it.

These are my opinions. I believe they are founded of Justice and Humanity. If they are Felony by the law of England, it will be so much the worse for the law, in the end.

CHARLES GAVAN DUFFY.

April 29, 1848.