

THE OREGON – IRELAND.

By John Mitchel.

From *The Nation*, 6 December, 1845.

On the shores of the Pacific Ocean, six thousand miles from England, lies a vast, bare, untilled, and almost uninhabited country, ranged over by a few tribes of hunting Indians, and looking out upon a mighty ocean, whose waters are seldom disturbed by a ship's keel. No subjects of the English crown reside in it – no revenue is derived from it; and it is so distant and so ill-adapted for a commercial settlement as to offer few temptations to emigrants from these countries.

Ireland is within sight of the British shores, has eight millions of inhabitants, who pass for British subjects, is worth to Great Britain (under the present arrangement) in money and value, a great many millions by the year, is fertile in soil, and so situated upon the Atlantic high-way as to invite the commerce of all the world.

Again, the Oregon is at present, with respect to England, just as it stood thirty years ago. The Hudson's Bay fur-traders are driving their trade as usual; and, save some loud vaunting in which the journals of the United States have indulged, there is nothing to attract the special attention of our governors thither.

Ireland proclaims herself to be on the brink of a dreadful famine; her whole social frame is out of joint – she is crying aloud to that Legislature which has assumed the office of governing her, entreating that they would either actually *govern*, or admit their incapacity for it – that they would either perform the ordinary duties of a Legislature, or, once for all, abdicate their -tions??¹

Such seems to be the relative importance of Oregon and Ireland, and their relative claims at the present moment upon the attention of Government. Well, there have been frequent and lengthened Cabinet Councils held of late – more than usually earnest consultation amongst the QUEEN'S advisers; and Parliament, it is nearly certain, will meet some weeks earlier than was customary. And what is the

¹ Transcriber's note. Illegible in scan. Possibly "actions" or "elections"?

subject of so much anxious deliberation? – the motive of summoning Parliament so hastily? Why, “it is understood” that our relations with America – that the Oregon question, the Whig or Tory ministry question – *any* question, but the pressing, vital, terrible question, of Ireland – forms the subject discussion. Or if, amongst the rumours that transpire through the press, the name of Ireland occurs, as forming an item in the deliberations of our governors, it is with some dark hint like this – “The militia are to be embodied; through the counties of England they are to be called to arms, not by ballot, but by tuck of drum – and their destination is *Ireland*.”

Thus, amidst the urgent business of securing ports on the Pacific, of providing ships to bombard the American cities, and of out-manoeuving Lord JOHN RUSSELL, the only Irish question seems to be – how can she be most effectually kept down? While the blessings of British civilization are being forced upon New Zealand, and India, and Oregon – while two cunning quacks are fighting out their claims to Downing-street – the *government* of Ireland seems likely to come at last to simple military occupation – to the court-martial, the gibbet, and the bayonet. So much of the “glorious constitution” will be left us still.

But in the rapid progress which affairs are making to that consummation, we cannot but see hope for our country. The present machinery of Irish government is fast becoming, in the eyes of all parties, palpably inadequate to do its work. The question of Whig or Tory, so vital in England, seems to have lost its significance here; Irish interests, as distinct from English, or even as *against* English, are assuming a tangible shape; and, while England is bent on gaining Oregon, or conquering New Zealand, Irishmen of all sections are beginning to perceive that they have a country to win at home – that a Government of Ireland has other problems to solve than what is the *minimum* of beggarly “boons” that will content her, and of military and police that will keep her under.

Nay, from this Oregon question itself who fails to see a dawn of hope arising? Who can forget that the cause of Ireland has been, ere now, brought to issue on the American continent – that it was to *us*, as well as to General GATES, BURGOYNE surrendered his army at

Saratoga – that WASHINGTON, at York-town, delivered over Lord CORNWALLIS and his troops, bound hand and foot to the Irish nation.

If there is to be a war between England and the United States, 'tis impossible for us to pretend sympathy with the former. We shall have allies, not enemies, on the banks of the Columbia; and distant and desolate as are those tracts beyond the Rocky Mountains, even there may arise the opportunity for demanding and regaining our place among the nations.