

LETTER TO THE IRISH CONFEDERATION.

By John Mitchel.

TO THE ACTING SECRETARY,
IRISH CONFEDERATION.

8 Ontario Terrace,
Rathmines.
7th February, 1848.

DEAR SIR, - The resolutions adopted by the meeting of Dublin Confederates on Friday last virtually exclude me from all participation in the working of the Irish Confederation. I, therefore, resign my place on the Council, and my office as Inspector of Clubs for the province of Ulster.

The first of those resolutions recites our fundamental rule, pledging us to use, for the liberation of Ireland, all political, social, and moral influences within our reach; the second announces 'that the *only* hope of the liberation of this country lies in a movement in which all classes of Irishmen shall be fairly represented, and by which the interests of none shall be endangered' – which I believe pledges you now to use only those political and social influences which are *not* within your reach.

The third declares the Irish Confederation 'entertains a confident hope' of a combination of classes in Ireland against English dominion: - but I do not entertain a confident hope, or any hope at all, of that result.

The fourth forbids the expression of sentiments 'calculated to repel or alarm any section of our fellow-countrymen' – but I will belong to no society where I cannot express sentiments in favour of absolute Tenant-Right, and where I cannot recommend the only known method of establishing that right, namely, *armed opinion*; and this always 'repels and alarms' that section of our fellow-countrymen called the 'gentry.'

The fifth disclaims all intention of involving the country in civil war, or of ‘invading the just rights of any section of its people’ (by which I understand the rights called by landlord ‘rights of property’); but I desire to free the country, although in that process it should be involved in civil war, and although the said ‘rights of property’ should be invaded or even destroyed – a thing which I consider highly probable.

The sixth condemns resistance to the payment of rents and rates in all cases; but I mean to recommend such resistance in certain cases, as one of the ‘political, moral, and social influences’ whereby this island is to be freed from British rule, from slavery and debasement of mind and body, and from ultimate extinction as a nation.

The seventh, referring to the Coercion Act, asserts the right to use arms ‘for legitimate purposes,’ and at the same time condemns the ‘perpetration of crimes;’ thus implying that the Act in question is intended and calculated for the prevention of crime, and, consequently, acknowledging, on the part of the Confederation, that the Act is a *bona fide* measure for the good government of this country; but I hold that Act to be the result of a conspiracy between the enemies of the people, in order to thin the population by famine and slaughter; I hold the ostensible object of it, namely, the ‘prevention of crime and outrage,’ to be a false pretext, and its real object to be the same for which robbers have always disarmed their victims.

The eighth declares it to be a fatal misdirection of the public mind to divert it from constitutional action; but I hold that we have no constitution in Ireland; that it is a fatal misdirection of the public mind to assert we have; and that ‘constitutional action’ is a worn-out humbug.

The ninth asserts, for the first time, that the ‘force of opinion’ mentioned in our fundamental rules, means the force of opinion *exercised in constitutional operations* (which is not true), and ‘that no means of a contrary character can be recommended or promoted through the Confederation,’ which would debar the Confederation from all those means which I think applicable or adequate, and render its whole organisation worse than useless.

The tenth, while it 'emphatically disavows' all the principles which I hold, repudiates any right to control *private opinions*; but as I do not mean to keep my opinions private, I shall not be able to avail myself of that liberal proviso.

Until these resolutions, therefore, shall be all set aside, and the act of Friday evening entirely undone, I can take no part in the conduct of the Confederation. I deny, indeed, as I denied in the public meeting, the competency of the Dublin members to modify or alter the constitution of the whole body, or to put an arbitrary interpretation upon its rules, and that without even giving notice to any of the Clubs or country members of their intention so to do. But I do not insist upon this point. I shall not demand a repetition of our late discussion in the Clubs, nor seek to keep the people any longer engaged in a by-battle about 'policy;' still less do I wish to lead a secession and set up another fragment of a party pretending to point out the people's path to liberty.

On the other hand, I do not choose to attend your meetings in order to thwart, or neutralize, or bring into contempt, all your legal and constitutional proceedings. I find myself in a minority, and am content to assume that the exposition of policy, solemnly adopted after three days' discussion in Dublin, will be ratified by the Confederates at large. But I believe it is a miserable mistake. I believe the original free constitution of the Confederation still remains in force, and that public opinion will soon compel the council to reverse the act of imbecile despotism, which they consummated on Friday night.

Relying upon this confident expectation, upon the thorough honesty and worth of most of my late political associates, and, more than all, upon the manly spirit of independence and fair play, which gave life to our Confederacy at first, and is the life and soul of it still, I am unwilling to renounce connexion for ever with the only genuine National organisation in the country. Paralysed as the Irish Confederation is at present, mesmerised by the landlord influence, and bewildered by constitutional law, it is still the only body in Ireland that is making, or thinks it is making any single honest effort to rid the island of English dominion. I, therefore, only withdraw from active interference in the proceedings of the Confederation; and so soon as it

shall be once more open to all repealers of the Union (be they physical-force revolutionists, aristocrats, democrats, Chartists, Orangemen, Whigs, or Thugs), I will be found in your ranks again.

I have the honour to remain, etc.,

JOHN MITCHEL.