

ADDRESS AT LIMERICK MEETING, 30 APRIL 1848.

By John Mitchel.

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Mr. Chairman and citizens of Limerick, my first duty is to thank you, which I do cordially and sincerely, for the generous reception you have this night given to those who have been selected for prosecution by the British government – a reception which, notwithstanding what has occurred outside that door, must be called a triumphant one.

I have seen nothing in all this mob violence to make me despond for a moment. The people *are* the true source of legitimate power; that howling multitude outside are a thousand times preferable to the howling legislators of England, who yelled against Smith O'Brien. I am no drawing-room democrat, who can discourse of the powers and virtues of the people only while they are smiling and cheering around me. Mob law itself in Ireland is far better than government law – that well-ordered and civilised system that slays its million of human beings within the year. I tell you that rather than endure one other year of British dominion, I would take a provisional government selected out of the men that are bellowing there in the street.

Sir, I fear that I am unfortunately the cause of your meeting this night being disturbed. I think, however, the matter arises out of a misapprehension. There is a great difference surely between bearing testimony to one's approval of a man's general conduct, and identifying oneself with all his acts. It is one thing to offer encouragement and support to a person singled out by government (which is the enemy of us all), as the especial object of its vengeance; and it is quite another thing to adopt for your own every particular sentiment, saying, and doing, of the individual in question. This difference I feel bound to note and acknowledge to-night; and I do so with alacrity and with gratitude. You need not fear, my friends, that I will misinterpret the compliment that has been paid me, in inviting me to your city on this occasion. You need not fear that I have accepted

your invitation in order that I might thrust any particular opinions of my own down your throats, or in order to induce a belief that there is between me and your distinguished guests – Smith O’Brien and Thomas Meagher – a more thorough identification than there is, or needs to be. We don’t want this thorough identification.

Some of the things I have done and written these gentlemen have both condemned, as believing either that they were wrong in themselves, or that the time had not come for them. And I cannot be even with my friends in this matter – I am not able to repudiate any of their public acts. Can I repudiate, for instance, the last speech of Mr. O’Brien in the British Parliament – one of the noblest, clearest statements of Ireland’s case – the very haughtiest, grandest defiance flung in the face of Ireland’s enemies, that ever yet fell from the lips of man?

Or can I condemn the alternative put by Mr. Meagher, who says, when the last constitutional appeal shall be made, and shall fail – “Then, up with the barricades, and invoke the God of Battles?” Can I repudiate this – who hold that constitutional appeals are long since closed against us, and that we have even now no recourse, except – when we have the means, and the pluck to do it – the barricades and the God of Battles? No; all the seditions and treasons of these gentlemen I adopt and accept, and I ask for more.

Whatever has been done or said by the most disaffected person in all Ireland against the existence of the party which calls itself the government – nothing can go too far for me. Whatever public treasons there are in this land, I have stomach for them all. But, sir, have we not had in Ireland somewhat too much of this adopting and avowing, or also repudiating and disavowing, what has been said or done by others? Might we not, perhaps, act with advantage less as parties, and more as mere men, each of us on his own individual responsibility?

For myself, though an active member of the Irish Confederation, I declare that I do not belong to the Young Ireland party, or to any party. I have found myself unsuited to party ties and trammels altogether; I have been found not to draw quietly either in single or double harness. I very soon quarrelled with the old Repeal Association; and as for the Confederation, it has once or twice nearly

quarrelled with me. Not many weeks ago the Council of the Confederation, headed by Smith O'Brien and Mr. Meagher, thought it necessary to disavow my proceedings. Very well; what harm came of it? I merely retorted in the most good-humoured way in the world, by setting them at defiance; and things went on afterwards more smoothly than ever. In short, I have long felt that I belong to a party of one member – a party whose basis of action is to think and act for itself – whose one fundamental rule is, to speak its mind. Its secretary, committee, librarian and treasurer, are all one in the same person; and in its proceedings I assure you there reigns the most unbroken unanimity.

Seriously, sir, I know no other way of ensuring both honest unanimity and independent co-operation than this very way of mine; and with this views and sentiments, you may be sure I am not likely to misconceive the motive of your kindness in asking me to join your party to-night. I am here I believe as your guest on one account alone. You will say whether I state it truly. I am here not as a Jacobin (which I am not) – nor as a Communist (which I am not) – nor even as a Republican (which I am); but simply and merely because I am a bitter and irreconcilable enemy to the British government.

Will you forgive me for speaking so much about myself, on this, the first time, I have had the honour to address an audience in the south of Ireland? I assure you it is not my habit; nor would I do so to-night, but that I found myself, on my arrival in Limerick to-day, in a rather singular position. I found some twenty or thirty poor fellows who had risen very early in the morning for no other purpose but to hoot me as I came into town. I have no ill-will, I assure you, against those who hooted, nor even against those who set them on to hoot. I believe it all arose out of some expressions in my paper, **THE UNITED IRISHMAN**, which were construed as disrespectful to the memory of one whom – whatever I may think of him – most Catholics revere as their Emancipator. I think the passage did not really convey the gross and degrading imputation on O'Connell's memory that has been spelled out of it; but at any rate I must acknowledge that the feeling on the part of these people against me is not an unnatural one,

and that is merely an exaggerated and perverted example of a sentiment creditable in itself.

But sir, while I admit this, I must also insist on my right to hold and to express, on all public questions, and on the characters of public men, the opinions which I have honestly formed. I established that paper in order to assert and vindicate this right, as well as all other rights of Irishmen, and especially the rights of labouring people like my friends who hooted me this morning. And I must inform them that I value the hootings of a mob just as little as the indictment of an Attorney-General, and, further, that I had rather never be invited to a public assembly, nor appear in a public place, nor sit at good men's feasts – I had rather be overwhelmed by state prosecutions and by the execration of my countrymen, all at once, than yield or waive the privilege of saying what I think for a single hour.

Enough now about these personal matters. As to the position of our great cause, I think it is full of peril as well as full of hope. In proportion as the Irish nation has been gathering up strength and spirit to rid its soil of their enemies, those enemies have also been collecting their strength and hardening their hearts to hold our country in our despite. It is fortunate, I think, that those who have taken a forward part in rousing our people to these hopes and efforts are the first to bear the brunt of the danger. It is better that they should be called to encounter it in the courts of justice first than that it should fall on a people not yet prepared in the field. But while we meet the enemy in the Queen's Bench, we have a right to call upon you to sustain us by a firm and universal avowal of your opinion. On the constituents of Smith O'Brien especially devolves this duty. While the British Parliament calls his exertions "treason" and "felony," it is for his constituents to declare that in all this treason and felony he is doing his duty by them. And more than this; it is your duty further to prepare systematically to sustain him, if it come to that, in arms.

May I presume to address the women of Limerick. It is the first time I have ever been in the presence of the daughters of those heroines who held the breach against King William; and they will understand me when I say, that no Irishwoman ought so much as to speak to a man who has not provided himself with arms. No lady is

too delicate for the culinary operation of casting bullets. No hand is too white to make up cartridges. And I hope, if it be needful to come to the last resort, that the citizens of Limerick, male and female, will not disgrace their paternal and maternal ancestors.

Before sitting down now, I wish to contradict one calumny. It has been said of me – Lord Clarendon has had it posted up over Dublin – that I have been inciting the people to plunder and massacre; that my object is to raise a hasty and immature insurrection; that I want to plunder houses, to rob banks, to break into shops and stores. Need I refute this outrageous calumny? Who ever heard me stimulate my countrymen to civil war against their own flesh and blood? My friends, we have no enemies here save the British government and their abettors. A war of assassination and plunder against our countrymen would be a wound to our own vitals. I shall say no more of this; but again heartily thanking you for your kindness, I conclude by urging you once more to stand by and sustain Smith O'Brien against his enemies and yours – to sustain him, not for his sake, but for your own.

If yet you are not lost to common sense,
Assist your patriot in your own defence;
The foolish cant – *he went too far* – despise,
And know that to be brave is to be wise.