

DEMOCRACY AND NATIONALITY.

By The O'Rahilly.

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Last month two articles were published in the columns of *Irish Freedom* advocating an active alliance between Democracy and the Separatists. The advice of the writers of these two papers is of the same nature, and so plausible are they, in the form in which they are presented, that they would be likely to convince many that a mutual advantage is to be derived from such an alliance. Nevertheless, the present writer cannot but regard such a possibility with the gravest misgivings, and he feels compelled to point out the dangers to which he considers the National cause would be laid open by the adoption of any such official programme.

The writers of the articles above mentioned have appealed to Caesar; then to Caesar let them go. They seek to support their theories by an appeal to history; but in history they will find naught save the gravest warnings against the course which they advocate. O'Connell sought to strengthen his National movement by linking it with the agitation for religious emancipation. In the early eighties the National demand had peasant proprietorship as a yoke-fellow. What is the result? O'Connell obtained the right for Catholic barristers to take silk, and incidentally, to take the oath of allegiance to England's Queen. He also made it possible for Irish Catholics to sit in the English House of Commons, and for their descendants at the present day to proclaim to all and sundry their passionate attachment to the British Empire. The Land League secured the Land Acts, and *pas a pas*, the destruction of the last remnant of the Irish aristocracy, who have been driven, together with what talent and wealth they might possess, to swell the prestige of England's capital.

But what of the *National* movement? Was Ireland one step nearer independence in 1829 than she was at the beginning of the Catholic Emancipation agitation? Is she one step nearer it now than

she was on the day that the Land League first saw the light? The truth is, that to link the National demand with any subsidiary question is really to play into England's hands by providing her with a safety valve which she can open at any moment that she feels the pressure in the Irish boiler is likely to prove dangerous. Thus, the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act, immediately dissipated the vast pent-up energy generated by O'Connell's movement, and at the same time secured the 'loyalty' of thousands of Catholics who before the passage of the Bill would have at any moment been ready to rise in arms against England, and this result was obtained, because these men had been taught to regard religious emancipation as the chief object of the struggle. In the same way, some decades later, the passage of the Land Act took the wind out of the sails of the National movement, and at the same time provided England with a most excellent and remunerative investment for her funds.

The arguments used by both the writers in last month's *Freedom* amount to just this—'Irishmen,' they say in effect, 'will not be willing to struggle simply and solely for the liberty of their country, for the love of Ireland, and for the honour of Ireland. They would not consider the 'game worth the candle.' You must offer them some immediate personal advantage before you can hope to tempt them to risk anything. If you can hold out as an inducement that their stomachs or their pockets will be fuller when Ireland is free, then they will be willing to fight for Irish freedom, but if not they will cling to the *status quo* on the theory that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't.' This is a perfectly just and fair, though perhaps not particularly eloquent, statement of these writers' argument. Nay, to go further, it is a perfectly true statement of the attitude of a great number of Irishmen at the present moment. But the weakness of the position lies in the advocacy of the theory that sops should be thrown to these people in order to gain their adhesion to the National cause; for Ireland will never be freed by day-labourers. Not the obedience of servants, not the obedience of children, not the allegiance of employees, who would transfer that allegiance to a higher bidder, but the love of sons who would sacrifice all for her sake, is what is required from those who would fight for Ireland's liberation. The spirit that frees nations is not

the spirit of huxters, but the spirit of that Christian of old, who said: 'In the cause of heaven I would myself gladly suffer eternal damnation.'

These writers have been tempted by the numerical strength of the 'hurlers on the ditch' to advocate that such a bid should be made for their allegiance. But they forget that in such a cause mere numbers is by no means the most important item. The motive force of the men who would free Ireland must be an almost fanatical enthusiasm and belief in the holiness of their cause, and such enthusiasm and belief are not bred by deliberate calculations of the main chance and careful weighings of personal advantage.

RAPPAREE.