

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FENIAN BROTHERHOOD, IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

By Irish Republican Brotherhood.

*From Address of Gen. John O'Neill, President F.B., to the
Officers and Members of the Fenian Brotherhood, published
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The national character of every people, and the principles which govern their actions, become of vital import when the community is placed, as it were, on trial before the world. The kindly sympathies which attach man to his fellow-man, and which, developing the highest instincts of his nature, constitute a bond of humanity stronger and more durable than the selfish considerations of interest, should always be directed in favour of right and justice, and against wrong and iniquity in every form. Hence, when an oppressed nationality endeavour by revolution to assert their claims to the God-given boon of liberty, it is both expedient and in entire accordance with the usages of society, that they should place on record the reasons that impel them to resort to such means, the objects in view, and the principles on which they rely to demonstrate the justice of their cause.

It has been the misfortune of the people of Ireland that their oppressors have transmitted to the world nearly all that it has received concerning our history and character. The victims of a relentless and long continued persecution, we have been represented by our tyrants in the light best calculated to subserve their own interests, and to screen the illegality of their usurped authority over a people who, though cut down by armed force, and for seven hundred years trodden under foot by an unscrupulous power, have never ceased to struggle for their rights, have never for an instant surrendered their claim to

that independence which is the true life of a nation, as slavery, whether voluntary or accepted, is its virtual death. Our history has been falsified, our acts have been misconstrued, our motives and sentiments have been misrepresented by the agents of the power which has profited by our misery and enslavement; until a large proportion of our fellow-men, viewing us through this distorted medium, have come to regard us, as a race, as not only incapable of self-government, but actually unfit to be entrusted with the management of our own affairs. To remove an idea so erroneous, and to correct an impression so unjust to a people who have long and generously sacrificed in the cause of liberty, the Congress of the Fenian Brotherhood, who in this generation represent the nationalists of Ireland, and embody their aspirations for the freedom of their native land, make this declaration of the principles by which our organization is actuated and guided; and we ask our fellow-men at large, and particularly the friends of freedom, everywhere, to respect our honour as truthful and liberty-loving men, and to judge us, not by the misrepresentations of our enemies, but by the principles we profess and the acts by which we prove our adherence to them.

We believe and declare that freedom—the right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’—is inherent in every creature made in the image and likeness of God, and that, however individuals, by crime or violation of the laws passed for the maintenance and well-being of society, may forfeit any portion of those rights, the enslavement of a homogeneous people, either by foreign power or domestic tyranny, cannot, under any circumstances, be justified. The God of nature, in placing between the English and Irish nations not only the distinctions marked by differences of national character, but, also, natural barriers, which,—in spite of special legislation, designed to obliterate the nationality of Ireland, have kept them separate and distinct as peoples,—has written on imperishable record the claims of our country to independent national existence, and made earth and sea the witnesses to the inviolability of our charter of freedom. Even had any generation of our race proved recreant, and voluntarily agreed to surrender their rights as men, the limits fixed to human existence, and the utter inability of man to legislate for anything appertaining to

himself beyond this mortal sphere, are the seal and testimony set by the Almighty Creator on each of his creatures, to teach them, through all time, that the inalienable and indefeasible rights imparted with their being must come down to them undiminished and unimpaired by the follies or the crimes of their predecessors. But the title of our people upon this point is clear and unimpeachable. Through over twenty successive generations, they have never ceased to protest and struggle against the plunder of their national rights. From age to age the legacy of patriotic effort has been transmitted from sire to son; and the dungeon, the scaffold, and the battle-field have proved the fidelity with which the sacred trust has been discharged. The Irish people of to-day are still the custodians of that great trust; and, in their name, the Fenian Brotherhood has been organized to demand, and with the blessing of Heaven, to achieve, what so many of our race have attempted before—the liberation of our country from the domination of England. We demand it in the name of every man of Irish blood throughout the whole earth; and we desire to accomplish it solely for the benefit of every Irishman, without distinction of creed, or class, or political idea. We claim the land of our fathers for the benefit of the people whose birth right it is, who love it with a filial affection, and who, by the eternal decree of their Maker, have earned, in the sweat of their brows, the right to live upon, to possess, and to enjoy it. We seek injury to no man; our quarrel is not with any class, but with the government which has robbed and murdered our people, and with those who sustain it in its tyranny and usurpation. If in our onward march to liberty any such oppose us, arrayed under the flag of the oppressor,—which has been the symbol of slavery in Ireland, and is the ensign of the enemy of liberty everywhere, on their heads, not ours, be the consequences. We ask only justice for ourselves and our kindred; and the vindication of that principle requires that an alien power shall no longer be permitted, undisturbed, to devour our substance, while those who produce it by their toil, wither and pine in bondage which at once destroys their bodies and debases their souls. Our motto is, ‘Ireland—Free and Independent,’ for her own people first; and, then, when her free will and action are untrammelled and unquestioned, for the freedom, the elevation, and the happiness of

humanity, the world over. No narrow or restricted views confine our action. In the language of our Executive, 'Faction we abhor; sectionalism we scorn.' We seek all the rights that, as men, belong to us; and we seek them for the whole of our people; we make no reservation, we tolerate no distinction that would divide the true children of Ireland.

We have been accused of irreligion, and of seeking to undermine those great moral principles which, reminding men that their first duty is to their Creator, underlie and preserve the whole framework of society. The accusation is untrue and unjust. The genius of the Irish people is essentially religious; their history is a record of enduring faith; of constancy under persecution; of the noblest sacrifices cheerfully made in the sustainment of religion and morality; of tolerance and charity in the hour of triumph; and the whole course of our organization proves that, in this respect, too, it truly represents and accords with the character of our race. Religion—the pure and reverential homage which man offers to his Maker—we regard as a sentiment too sacred to be mixed up with the strife of earthly interests; and we leave it, untouched, between the conscience of the individual and Him to whom the tribute is due. Content with the discharge of the second great duty that devolves on man, we do not ask of our brother at what altar he worships, satisfied when he honestly serves his country, and leaving to his own sense of right the obligations which he alone can discharge.

Representing the power which fifteen millions of the Irish people, scattered between the old world and the new, must necessarily exercise, if they be true to their country—we have adopted the alternative of revolution, because the slavery to which our kindred are subjected has become too galling for human endurance, too degrading to be submitted to unresistingly by beings endowed with the attributes of men. Our rights, the possession of our native soil, are kept from us by force, by the power which grasped both with armed hands. By force and arms alone can they be restored to us in their original integrity; and by force and the strength of our own arms we propose to win them back. The task of their recovery belongs to us in the first place; and by our efforts to consolidate and organize our people, we

but record our acceptance of the duty, and our determination to acquit ourselves of it like true men and faithful children of our country.

Our cause is a just and holy one; it is the struggle of right against wrong, of freedom against oppression. It is not alone the cause of a nation striving for its own independence: it is the effort of enslaved humanity to emancipate itself from the thralldom and debasement of feudal tyranny.

The elevation of a down-trodden people is a benefit conferred upon the whole family of nations; and of none might this be said more truly than of Ireland, which, from her position and resources, is capable, if once free, not alone of rendering her own population happy and prosperous, but of diffusing, by example and influence, the spirit of independence throughout the world, wherever her scattered children are to be found.

As a people, we have ever loved liberty, and struggled for its attainment; as a people, we are in favour of liberty to-day, not in the ungenerous sense of those who would monopolize its blessings, to the exclusion of their fellow-men—but liberty as universal as the beneficence of the Deity, of which it is the emanation; as impartial as His justice, which commands that we shall do unto others as we would be done by. Save this, we desire nothing for our race or our country. And, as we have commenced this struggle, determined to persevere in it until Heaven and the power of our own right arms shall have crowned our efforts with success, we ask the lovers of liberty everywhere to extend to our cause the aid and sympathy which it should receive from those who profess to be the friends of human freedom. We ask them to regard us fairly, and to judge us not by the standard of opinion of any individual, but by our own conduct, and the official acts and policy of our own elected representatives, who are the only legitimate exponents of our sentiments and principles. And, when the hour to strike shall have arrived, and we set our faces once more towards the foe,—determined to do or die in the final effort,—in the name of the God of Justice, whose inspiration and blessing we invoke for our cause; for the sake of our common humanity, the advancement of which we seek; and by the memory of our martyred dead, who perished that others might live as freemen, we ask that the good

wishes of all liberty-loving men, and especially the aid and influence of the great American nation, shall be cast on the side of Liberty and Ireland, in the struggle to which we now commit ourselves, 'our lives, our fortunes, and sacred honour.'