

To Charles Gavan Duffy, Editor of the *Nation*

TENAKILL, ABBEYLEIX,
January 11th, 1847.

I am one of those who never joined the Repeal Association or the Repeal Movement—one of Mr. O’Connell’s ‘creeping, crawling, cowardly creatures’—though I was a Repealer in private feeling at one time, for I hardly know that I can say I am one now, having almost taken a hatred and disgust to this my own country and countrymen.

I did not join the agitation, because I saw—not from reflection, but from natural instinct, the same instinct that makes one shrink from eating carrion—that the leaders and their measures, means, and proceedings, were intrinsically and essentially, vile and base; and such as never could or ought to succeed.

Before I embarked in the boat I looked at the crew and the commander; the same boat which you and others mistook in ’43 for a war-frigate, because she hoisted gaudy colours, and that her captain swore terribly; I knew her at once for a leaky collier-smack; with a craven crew to man her, and a sworn dastard and foresworn traitor at the helm—a fact which you and Young Ireland would seem never to have discovered until he ordered the boat to be stranded, and yourselves set ashore.

I would fain become one of the ‘National’ party, if they could consent to act along with me and I with them. But I confess I have my many doubts—I have had them all along; and they have been terribly

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strengthened by the two last numbers of the *Nation*. I mean those of December 26 and January 2; the last (January 9) I have not yet seen. It is not figure, but fact, that reading those two numbers made me ill.

I have long been intending to write to you to resolve those doubts, and have only been prevented by sickness. I must now defer doing so for some little time longer, and my reason for writing this present hurried note is this: it has just occurred to me that, at the meeting on Wednesday, an Association may possibly be formed on such a basis, and resolutions or pledges adopted of such a character, as would exclude and excommunicate me and many beside.

These resolutions or pledges may relate either—1st, to the end; 2nd, to the means. Now remark—1st, As to the end:—Should the end be defined strictly, in terms or effect, to the Repeal—simple Repeal, and nothing but or besides Repeal—I would thereby be excluded. For, in the first place, I will never contribute one shilling, or give my name, heart, or hand, for such an object as the simple Repeal by the British Parliament of the Act of Union.

I shall state my reasons hereafter, not having time now. Don't define the object, nor give it such a name as would define it. Call it by some general name—independence, if you will—and secondly, I will never act with, nor aid any organisation limiting itself strictly to the sole object of dissolving the present connection with Britain and rigidly excluding every other. I will not be fettered and handcuffed.

A mightier question is in the land—one beside which Repeal dwarfs down into a petty parish question; one on which Ireland may not alone try her own right, but try the right of the world; on which you would be, not merely an asserter of old principles, often asserted, and better asserted before her, an humble and feeble imitator and follower of other countries—but an original inventor, propounder, and propagandist, in the van of the earth, and heading the nations;

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on which her success or her failure alike, would never be forgotten by man, but would make her, for ever, the lodestar of history; on which Ulster would be not 'on her flank,' but at her side, and on which, better and best of all, she need not plead in humble petitions her beggarly wrongs and how beggarly she bore them, nor plead any right save the right of her might.

And if the magnitude and magnificence of that other question be not apparent and recognised—any more than the fact on its settlement now depends the existence of an old and not utterly worthless people—it is partly, indeed, because the mass of mankind see all such questions, at first, through a diminishing glass, and every question is little until some one man makes it great; but partly, also, because the agitation of the Repeal question has been made to act as a proscription of every other.

Repeal may perish with all who support it soon than I will consent to be fettered on this question, or to connect myself with any organised body that would ban or merge in favour of Repeal or any other measure, that greatest of all our rights on this side of heaven, God's grant to Adam and his poor children for ever, when He sent them from Eden in His wrath and bid them go work for their bread. Why should I name it?

National independence, then, in what form of words you please; but denounce nothing—proscribe nothing—surrender nothing, more especially of your own freedom of action. Leave yourselves free individually and collectively.

2nd. As to the means:—If any resolution or pledge be adopted to seek legislative independence by moral force and legal proceedings alone, with a denunciation or renunciation of all or any other means or proceedings, you may have millions of better and stronger men than I have to join you; but you won't have me.

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Such pledge, I am convinced, is not necessary to legalise any association. To illegalise there must, I conceive, be positive evidence of act or intention—deeds done or words spoken. Omitting to do anything can surely form no foundation for a legal charge. What! Is silence a proof of criminal intention? I speak, of course, in ignorance, being no lawyer, thank God!

But whether I be correct or not, I will never subscribe or assent to any such pledge or resolution. As regards the use of none but legal means, any means and all means might be made illegal by Act of Parliament; and such pledge, therefore is passive obedience. As to the pledge of abstaining from the use of any but moral force, I am quite willing to take such pledge if, and provided, the English Government agree to take it also; but ‘if not, not.’

Let England pledge not to argue the question by the prison, the convict-ship, or the halter; and I will readily pledge not to argue it in any form of physical logic. But dogs tied and stones loose is no bargain. Let the stones be given up; or unmuzzle the wolf-dog.

There is one at this moment in every cabin throughout the land, nearly fit already to be untied—and he will be savager by-and-by. For Repeal, indeed, he will never bite, but only bay; but there is *another* matter to settle between us and England. There has already, I think, been too much giving in on this question of means and force.

Merely to save or assert the abstract right for the use of other nations or other times, won't do for me. We must save it for our own use, and assert it too, if need be, and occasion offer. You will receive, and, I hope, read this on tomorrow morning, before the Committee meet.

My petition to you is that you will use your influence from being adopted, which would cut me off from co-operating with the new Association, should one be founded. Don't mention my name. It is not one worth half a farthing; but such as it is I don't choose to give

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it to the Seceders until I have some better guarantee than I possess as yet, that their new organisation will be anything better, stronger, or nobler than a decently conducted Conciliation Hall, free from its open and brazen profession of meanness, falsehood, cowardice, and corruption, but essentially just as feeble, inefficient and ridiculous.

Is there any apology required for addressing you in this manner? I don't know. Perhaps I have no right—though I have been a seceder since I ceased to be a child. I owe to you some gratitude. *You have given me a country.* Before your time I was an alien and an exile, though living in my own land. I hope you won't make me one again.

This letter has been hastily written; and I have not acquired the faculty of expressing what I wish with clearness or facility. Still I hope you will understand, or at least that you will not misunderstand me. The *Nation* of last Saturday might possibly give me information which would render my writing plainly unnecessary, but I don't receive it until Wednesday, being in partnership with another person—I remain, your obedient servant,

JAMES F. LALOR.