

LETTER TO JOHN BLAKE DILLON.

By John Mitchel.

From *Life of John Mitchel*, Vol. 2, by William Dillon. The letter is from 24th October 1860.

MY DEAR JOHN DILLON AND MRS. DILLON,

One can hardly hope to be pardoned who receives a letter dated 9th of September, and only sits down to acknowledge it on the 24th of October, especially a very good, gracious, and double letter from two of his best friends. Especially his chance of forgiveness must be small when he has no excuse to offer, except a vile, procrastinating, lazy habit. I hate a desk, I loathe a pen, and anathematize an ink-bottle. It seems like an effort to drag my heart out, if I draw over to me those hated utensils, even to write what people pay me for by the line. Then I wish that I were working with any other sort of tool—a spade, an axe, a shoebrush, a sword, a currycomb, trowel, or harpoon. Yet I can't do anything except with a pen, and it's the old story, as stated in Horace's rattling line—

“Optat ephippia bos piger, optat arare caballus.”¹

John O'Hagan was here and Father Kenyon. They both welcomed us very hospitably to their hemisphere. J. O'Hagan is very little changed indeed; Father Kenyon not at all... I note what you tell me about the state of political feeling in Ireland. It accords pretty well with what I have gathered from other sources. If the case were even worse, if the people—upper, middle, and lower—were even in a more hopeless state, it would not alter *my* conduct in any respect. What I know is that I will not stay patiently exiled and banned from my own country by the British, and shall steadily work and labour to set that

¹ “The lazy ox covets the horse-blankets, the pack-horse would rather plow.”

matter right by any means that may occur to me, provided I deem those means just. And the best thing I can think of now is to help and stimulate the quarrel between France and England, with a view to having the chance of joining, before I die, in an invasion of Ireland, and so endeavouring to set you all free whether you like it or not. It is useless telling me all this will never come to anything—I think that quite probable—but it does not affect me in the least.

There now, you have the whole of my theory and principle. It may be resumed in this formula.

I (John Mitchel) have an absolute right to live in Ireland, which is my own country.

If there be no other way of asserting that right but destroying the British Government, then I have a right to do that too—by means of the French or any other allies.

If there be any persons in Ireland who maintain that I have *not* the right to live in that country, and who will set themselves to oppose it, why I have a right to cut (or procure to be cut) all those persons' throats.

So look out. I like this formula so well, that I will try to elaborate it a little, and make it more categorical, and stick it somehow into the *Irishman*.

Paris is a hateful place. So is every place, when you are once in it. Sometimes I wish I were back in the “land of the free and the home,” etc; but then I should immediately wish myself back here again. After all, you know, Dublin is my real place of abode. All the world can't alter that.