

# ON CONSTITUTIONALISM.

By Arthur Griffith.

From *The United Irishman*, October 14, 1905.

Our printer owes, and we tender on his behalf, an apology to the *Nationist*. We wrote that our contemporary requested the favour of a review—he set it down in cold lead a *favourable* review, thus telling so much with the thoughtless, to use our contemporary's phrase, that it has needed half-a-column of its space to set itself right with its admirers. The *Nationist* in its first number declared itself in favour of constitutional agitation, and we asked it therefore by which constitution it intended to regulate its agitation. It further avowed itself a supporter of Parliamentaryism. We pointed out that as no Irish constitution permitted the sending of Irish representatives to Westminster, their attendance was a violation of the Irish Constitution. The *Nationist* replies like Mr. Pickwick.

'We used the words,' it writes, 'in the sense in which everybody understands them, agitation by ballot, as contrasted with agitation by bullet.'

Why should the *Nationist* believe the lexicographers in a hostile conspiracy against Everybody? There was an historic agitation carried on in Hungary between the years 1849-67, esteemed by the Hungarians and the outside world constitutional; but it was *not* agitation by ballot. There is an agitation at the present time in being in Poland. On Thursday last it brought the Russian Government to its knees, and compelled it to sanction the teaching of the Polish language and Polish history in the schools of Poland. It is not 'agitation by ballot,' and yet the Russian Government failed to detect its unconstitutional character. How will everybody explain these facts?

The walls of Jericho fell at the blast of a prophet's trumpet—the walls of Dublin Castle will fall when the Irish people learn to think straight. At the present time 75 per cent of our people think in circles,

and of the remainder a moiety dare not think at all. Easier it is to look in the face of the sun at noonday than to look in the face of Truth in Ireland—if we wish to get on in the world. We asked the *Nationist* what it meant by constitutional agitation; it circles and replies, Something which is not to be found in the dictionary. We asked it under what constitution Ireland is to agitate—it puts its tail in its mouth and mutters ‘Postage stamps.’ We asked it why ‘Sinn Féin’ is an unfair designation for our policy. It describes the circle and answers. It is unjust to say the Parliamentary policy is one of reliance on the English Parliament. What, then, are eighty-three men doing there? ‘They have a right to exist,’ says the *Nationist*. Decidedly, as we all have—by our individual exertions, *not* on the nation.

We exhort our contemporary to think. Here are a few truths for it to ponder to that end—first, a nation cannot be governed constitutionally against its will; second, a nation cannot at once accept a constitution and deny it obedience; third, enforced submission and voluntary acquiescence are different things. When the *Nationist* has thought these truths over, we shall be glad to hear how it proposes to square them with the policy of Parliamentaryism. The *Nationist* concludes by misrepresenting us—not intentionally, but through confusion of thought. It writes:

‘The UNITED IRISHMAN recognises the tremendous obstacles, internal and external, that beset Ireland in so far as it abandons the traditional policy of its party, armed resistance, in favour of a new kind of constitutional agitation.’

The UNITED IRISHMAN recognises as the most tremendous obstacle which besets this country in its fight for national existence, the Irish Parliamentary Party—distracting it by intestine feuds, denationalising and demoralising it by exalting London as its capital and the British Parliament as its Providence, betraying it by lending the sanction of Constitutionalism to foreign tyranny in Ireland, and degrading it by representing it to the world as a province pleading for concession, instead of a nation demanding its right. But the UNITED

IRISHMAN belongs to no party, and has abandoned no policy. It has never *advocated* armed resistance, because—and only because—it knows that Ireland is unable at the present time to wage physical war with England. But it has been maintained and always shall maintain the *right* of the Irish nation to assert and defend its independence by force of arms—a right which no human being to whom God has given the ordinary complements of intelligence and honesty can venture to deny.