

THE
S P E E C H
OF

EDWARD SWEETMAN,
CAPTAIN OF A LATE INDEPENDENT COMPANY,

AT A

MEETING OF THE FREEHOLDERS

OF THE

COUNTY OF WEXFORD,

CONVENED BY THE SHERIFF,

ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1792,

TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

MR. EDWARD BYRNE'S LETTER, RECOMMENDING A PLAN
"OF DELEGATION TO THE CATHOLICS OF IRELAND, IN
"ORDER TO PREPARE AN HUMBLE PETITION TO THE LE-
"GISLATURE."

MR. SHERIFF,

I RISE with a diffidence proceeding from the magnitude and awfulness of the subject, not from respect to the resolutions I have heard, which I deem exceptionable in every part; a circumstance which the silence of those who bring them forward would seem to acknowledge. I implore your attention whilst I deliver some thoughts which are the fruit of my best researches, my honestest feelings, and the unextinguishable love I bear this ill-fated country. I shall not consider the language or grammar of Mr. Byrne's letter—it is beneath the dignity of this meeting, and this great question, to descend to an altercation with inquisitors of words and dissectors of syllables: I shall enter into the subject at large, and speak to the scope and object of the letter, as it affects Ireland, and as it is the expression of Catholic hopes and desires. You will not expect brilliant remarks and exquisite deductions of reasoning from a man born a victim to the Popery laws, and driven at an early period into foreign climes for prohibited, imperfect education and scanty bread. I shall speak like a soldier, with candour and with frankness, yet with respect and a fear of offending, unmoved by slander, uninfluenced by any thing but truth. Truth is libel, faction, sedition, and treason in the eyes of those who live by its opposite, but it is the only criterion of honesty, the only basis of lasting settlement to your country, and every lover of it should utter it with courage, and hear it with patience. I belong to no party; I am an Irishman; I care as little for those who are in as for those who are out: I am the humble, but the sincere and unbought advocate of a woe-worn people. I therefore conjure you to hear me, and forgive me
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my inaccuracies and inexperience in speaking. I know that honored names, illustrious patriots, characters which Ireland must ever revere and love, men who led her to freedom and to fame (one * of whom I behold in this assembly with many mixed sensations) and who won the principle of prosperity from our common tyrants, a principle which remains a dead letter without the union of your people; I know, I say, that some of these differ in opinion with the persons whom I take to be the best and most enlightened friends of Ireland: I know this, and I lament it, and in it I lament the deplorable inconsistency of human nature, with the same poignancy that I lament the unaccountable but most certain fact, that the wise, the virtuous, the philosophic, the magnanimous Julian was a persecutor. In the face of those men whom I revere, as I hope I should in the face of death, I venture to stand forward the advocate of this woe worn people, because I think it is for the honor of the Irish Crown, for the credit and consistency of Protestantism, for the prosperity and fame of your country, that British privileges should be restored to all, who are the supporters of British and Irish freedom. I wish for equal fate and equal freedom to every loyal subject in his Majesty's dominions. Upon no other terms do I wish Ireland connected with any country. Upon those conditions I wish it for ever confederated with England. Those objects cannot be attained, till Catholics are emancipated, and Catholics cannot be emancipated till they obtain the elective franchise, and an equal participation of the benefits of trial by jury. Whilst their liberties, their properties, and their lives are at the mercy of those over whom they have no controul, nor can acquire a controul, it will not be contended the Catholics are free. Taxed without being represented, bound without their consent, and tried by their *superiors* the Protestants, and not by their peers, their situation is the very definition of slavery, unmitigated, unqualified by any thing, but a fleeting liberality which may perish with the fashion of the hour.

I have said it was for the honor of the Irish Crown, that Catholics should be emancipated, because I conceive that honor to be deeply interested in, and inseparably interwoven with the question. The honor of the Irish Crown has been perpetually violated by a perpetual breach of faith with the Irish, ever since our English ancestors first landed in this island. They were induced to come hither by a tyrant and a ravisher, and their political conduct and your's, (for we have been all guilty alike) has never once belied the principles of their introducer. Henry the Second, granted the Irish the command of it. They in justice, became entitled to the benefit of that law.—Instead of this, every means which fraud could invent, avarice suggest, or violence enforce, were employed to plunder and destroy the brave and simple aborigines of the isle, whilst the duty of their Kings, whom they had sworn to obey, and who from that instant were bound to protect them, slumbered or rather presided over these cruel outrages upon human nature. Sir John Davis says, the old Irish were out of the protection of the law, so that any Englishman might oppress, spoil, or murder them with impunity. Sir John was certainly possessed of a better understanding, and had more honesty than most Englishmen, who have ever blessed us with their presence in this island: yet he was an *Englishman*, that is a foe to Irish freedom, and wished to throw the whole blame of those horrible and absurd oppressions, as Hume phrases them, upon the English settlers. Those settlers were guilty of innumerable villainies to the ancient Irish; yet they wished not that their enmities should be immortal, like modern settlers, but sought at last to bury all animosity in the mutual peace and harmony of a final coalition and incorporation. What did the English-Irish King of the day? Alarmed at this incipient incorporation, and prospect of happiness held out to the people, he dispatches his grandson, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, to counteract it, and to revive the dying embers of civil discord. This Prince passed the famous statutes of Kilkenny, so much extolled by England, and the slaves of England, that once more sowed the seeds of that everlasting hostility, which divided the sons of Ireland from each other, and has subsisted in one horrid shape or other to this very day. The English settlers inflamed by those diabolical laws, became the executioners of English vengeance and hatred, and the base procurers to English passions. The proscribed natives were driven into rebellion,

and then dispossessed of their property for the unavoidable effects of the crimes of their oppressors. You see I feel little propensity to canonize the vices and follies of my ancestors, like some noble Lords, * who might justify the massacre of St. Bartholomew's day and the fires of Smithfield upon the same silly principle of mistaken pride. Near four hundred years passed away, during this dreadful scene of misery, rapine, and blood, in all which period, every virtue was invoked, whilst every crime was perpetrated. The sword of war was at length sheathed and the sword of justice commenced the work of extermination. The English now availed themselves of every chicanery of law to oust the natives from their remaining lands. They did this without danger, for they did it with fraud, by the safe and bloodless methods of statutable plunder. In these iniquitous proceedings they were sanctioned by their King, the King of Ireland! This Royal miscreant confiscated six entire counties without having found or looked for an evidence of guilt, whilst he boasted his descent from the ancient inhabitants whom he spoiled. Subsequent kings, have not been less faithless to Ireland. The insincerity and tyranny of the blessed martyr—the profligacy and ingratitude of Charles the Second—the holy impositions—the cowardice and bigotry of James have been all equally fatal to—all equally levelled against Ireland. Your glorious Deliverer's open and avowed suppression of our native and favourite manufacture will be no recommendation to any body who is a lover of Ireland. That he confirmed you in your estates, is partly true: but it is much more true, that you dearly bought that advantage by the sacrifice of the independence, trade, commerce, manufactures, prosperity, and name of your country. He drove a DUTCH BARGAIN with you, and YOU bartered your freedom for a paltry consideration. You and the Catholics since have been set at variance, in order to govern you with a more easy iniquity, contrary to the duty and honor of your Kings—the solemn faith of treaties has been violated by the House of Hanover, in the 1st of George the Second, by which the Catholics were deprived of the elective franchise, their unalienable right—the price of their blood—the honorable condition of their capitulation at Limerick:—I therefore say, it is for the honor of the Irish Crown, that King George the Third should repair the wrongs of his predecessors to a loyal and unfortunate race: for though he is not the original author of these wrongs, yet as the King never dies, he is in some degree chargeable with the wrongs continued under his government, and stands accountable in his reputation for the evil he is at no pains to prevent. The recommendation of this late act of justice from the Throne, will become him full as well as the recommendation of Charter Schools: he should at last remember, that allegiance and protection are reciprocal: he should bear in mind, that he no longer deserves to be a King, who systematically ceases to be just to millions of his subjects.

The credit of Protestantism and its consistency is equally involved in this great question of Catholic Emancipation. The Protestants abandoned the Roman Catholic Religion for one fundamental reason amongst others: because they pronounced its followers to be persecutors upon principle, and to want charity, that grand desideratum in Ireland, without which religion itself is rather a curse than a blessing. They should now abandon the Protestant religion for the same reason, if they are true to their original principles: for the Protestants of Ireland have been persecutors—unrelenting, inquisitorial persecutors, for upwards of 200 years. But the spirit of neither religion is persecution—bad priests, bad ministers, bad parliaments and bad kings have perverted the principles of both, for the purpose of fixing a lawless yoke on the necks of their fellow-creatures. *Sanctis nominibus rapere imperium*, has been their maxim.—Good Protestants and good Catholics have ever reprobated these sanctified iniquities. The worthy Cardinal Pole, in the reign of the sanguinary Queen Mary, though a Catholic upon principle, recommended Toleration; Bishop Gardiner, though ready to conform to any religion for interest, taught that persecution was lawful. The history of the Jewish and the Christian Religions, incontrovertibly proves the truth of that axiom in the schools; that what is best, when corrupted, becomes worst.—The purer the worship the more abominable has been the persecution it gave rise to, and the more corrupt the morality practised in its name. The name of God has been the watch-word for the abominations of man.—The religion of the Jews was pure and sublime—their manners and disposition detestable:—the religion of the ancient Egyptians was absurd and impious—their manners and

* Lords Enniskillen and Aldborough.

government were the glory of humanity and model of nations. The same moral mischief I have described amongst the Jews must unquestionably be produced again, when more trust is reposed in faith than in charity; in profession, than good works. The knave professes any thing—the honest man practices without profession—a poet, who knew man and woman well, writes:

Whoever's faith is than his neighbour's more,
If man, believe him rogue.—

Your popery laws engender and propagate this evil with a foul increase.—They punish a belief in Catholics, which being harmless, should be allowed without the infliction of disabilities, and they condemn principles which Catholics have abjured in words, and ever proved to be false charges by their actions. You give the reward of honesty, loyalty, and patriotism—I mean the right of citizenship—to oaths, to nugatory declarations and abjurations. For a bare recantation of the faith of his fathers, and hard Anti-christian swearing, puts your Catholic neighbour instantly upon a footing with yourself, whilst all the virtues which Christ or Socrates ever taught or practised, would leave him a slave without it. Do you not daily see the effect of these laws? Does it not require great fortitude in an honest man to become a convert, and expose himself to the obloquy and suspicion of both parties? Are not the generality of those who apostatize to your religion the basest of mankind? Do they not slanderously abuse, and rancorously persecute the wretches they have forsaken? And yet, those creatures are caressed and courted, whilst honest Catholics are despised and trampled on! Thus your laws become a premium to vice—a penalty upon virtue. Judge then, if the continuation of this vile system can do credit to the Protestant religion. No!—it takes from you at once all pretensions to Protestantism and Christianity.

It is equally fatal to the prosperity and fame of your country in every particular. It has been truly said, that oppression is a smothered warfare: it annihilates the peace and comfort of society. Can the Protestant esteem the Catholic he dooms to slavery? Can the Catholic love his oppressor? They are both hypocrites if they pretend to it. They must in the present state of things most inevitably hate and fear one another. It is the law of nature, which laughs to scorn the unnatural institutions of man, and what can you expect from such a situation? Does not the tranquillity of your country hang by a thread, and are you still determined to leave it in this feverish tremulous existence? You have been bred in a contempt for Catholics, a contempt originally instilled by your oppressors, the English, and which they are by no means sparing of to yourselves. And indeed none of us have been totally wronged by our kind and affectionate sister; for we have not respected ourselves. America has respected herself, and therefore she is respected. She has performed a very arduous task: she has taught Englishmen manners. But the English have grossly deceived you in their description of your countrymen. They have refused them credit for every good quality, and fixed the stigma of every bad one upon them. They have denied them courage and understanding, that they might persuade them and the world that they had neither sense to perceive, nor spirit to assert their rights. But I tell you again, they have grossly deceived you. There is not in Europe a nobler peasantry than the peasantry of Ireland, the great body of the people you have enslaved. The English began their system of calumny against the Irish, not before they began to despoil them. Had they reported them as an innocent people, they would have wanted a pretext for their undoing. You will find the proof of this in the venerable Bede, who loads them with the highest praise, and the lying Giraldus Cambrensis, who covers them with foul reproach. Sir John Davis acknowledges this race of men to be endued with extraordinary abilities of mind and body; and that there is no people under Heaven who love equal and indifferent justice better than the Irish. The enlightened Doctors Young and Campbell do them the same justice. The immortal Swift, in a posthumous work which has lately appeared, declares that the common Irish who understand English, have a much better taste for reason and raillery, than the English of the same description. Lord Chesterfield and Adam Smith call them the most able-bodied and handsome men in Europe. Camden testifies, that they are incredibly active, ingenious and warlike. British adjutants inform you that they are made soldiers sooner than any subjects in the three kingdoms; and America, Hindostan and Europe bear witness to the ardor and firmness of their courage. See then the gallant race of men you have

have to govern, and reflect how you have governed them! You have endeavoured to unman them, and reduce them to the level of the beasts that perish. Bereft by law of almost every stimulus to industry, precluded from education, foreign and domestic, from conjugal connection with their favored brethren, from every blessing civil and political, it is a miracle that they have retained any thing human but the shape. The prototype of your policy, Machiavel, in the eighth chapter of his Prince, lays it down as a maxim, that cruelty may be necessary in a recent settlement acquired by war and crimes, but if prolonged beyond that necessity, that it ultimately proves the ruin of its upholders. You have outstripped your model: take care how you verify his prophetic observation. When the city of Sparta was overthrown by an earthquake, the Helots surveyed the visitation with rapture, and redoubled the horrors of the calamity. Your Protestant settlement is secure beyond the probability, nay the possibility of dangers, if you do not continue the temptation, and the language of the constitution might add THE DUTY to uproot it, in the hearts of those whom you mean to destroy. You have nothing to fear from those miserable beings whose ancestors eliates the chance of war delivered into your hands one hundred and thirty-eight years since. Most of them have perished in exile and in want. Some of them are fighting the battles of foreign kings, being incapacitated even from DYING for their own. Their sad remains are the porters of your towns, the clowns of your country, and beggars of your streets. They do not look for power; they ask but leave to live. The Catholics have given you every security which the most solemn declarations can give: you have a much better security in their uniform demeanor, and still a better in their interest, that interest

Which like the swords of kings
Is the last reason of all things.

It is the interest of every honest and independent mind in Ireland, that the smothered warfare of oppression should cease, that the feelings, the prejudices, the passions, the faculties of all should be collected into one common focus to cheer, reanimate and illumine this aggrieved, palsied, and long benighted country. Have you not had enough of vengeance and petty despicable monopoly, and are you still resolved to persist in it even at the expence of your own well-being and honor? Is not your country a prey to foreigners through the imbecility entailed upon it, by emasculating four-fifths of your people? Were the provisos, indulgencies, and mortmaines of Popery in any degree so pernicious as the ruin and ignominy of English influence? Impostors delude you, whilst they are practising ancient villainies under new names. Does not this influence yearly drain you of two-thirds of your whole revenue? Does it not send undeserving viceroys to rule over you to the degradation of your own nobility, many of whom were known in Europe long before the great majority of the present English nobility had crawled from their original obscurity? Does it not quarter the insignificant followers of those insignificant viceroys, the buffoons, panders, and parasites of a corrupted court, the trash and refuse of another land upon the most productive spots of your island? Does it not exalt the most unprincipled and shameless politicians to the very highest stations, and for what? for reviling your country and denying its independence.*—Has it not made you a bye-word amongst nations, and the very sound of your name a subject of laughter? Are not your mines unexplored, your fisheries neglected, your trade and commerce restricted, your manufactures unprotected, your lands unimproved, your country denuded of its wood and shorn of its beauty and means of naval strength, nay, your very character debased through this influence? Whence the want of employment in Ireland, whence the rack-rents of absentees, whence the squalid appearances and concomitants of poverty? Whence the wanderings of your people to every corner of the earth, the alarming emigrations of northern industry to America, of southern hardihood to England, France and Spain, to the East and to the West? Whence, I say, does all this proceed, but from the wide wasting pestilential influence of England? Even now it is clandestinely aiming at the extinction of your parliament and your lately recovered name. I myself heard the Marquis

* If such a man as I have here portrayed, had not carried the audacious impurities of the senate to the judgment seat, but administered law in justice and in mercy as became his great abilities, the circumstance should be a drawback on the detestation of his countrymen, it should take but little from the distrust of the character. *Nemo unquam imperium flagitio quasitum bonis artibus exerceuit.*

of Downshire expresses his ardent wish for a union in the House of Lords of England! Ireland appears loosened from its foundations by this influence, and floats at the breath of every bold and flagitious English undertaker, who is sent to defame and to devour it. She might most happily maintain more than double her population, were she not inhibited from availing herself of the bounties of Heaven. But your Draconian laws against Popery, the loathsome but unacknowledged offspring of the influence I have been describing, have worn her native down to a degree of wretchedness not to be equalled by the wretchedness of slave or freeman in any quarter of the globe: they have given your country the melancholy pre-eminence amongst nations of being supreme in misery. But she has borne her adversities with fortitude. You may thank your stars, that the suicide principle of those laws has not utterly eradicated the spirit of your people. If it had, you would have looked in vain for freedom. Had they stood aloof in the day of trial, or joined with your enemies, had they not listened to the dictates of their own virtues, but followed your example in wounding themselves through the heart of their country, you had been still in bondage. They disdained the inglorious example, they pledged their lives and their fortunes for your freedom, and YOU PLEDGE YOURS to hold them in chains! They are a conquered people, you say: Be it so. But when they resigned their power in 1691, after their glorious defence of Limerick, they stipulated for freedom with arms in their hands. What did you? When you got them in your power, you stripped them of their arms, and robbed them of their freedom—YOU KEPT NO FAITH WITH CATHOLICS! They ask for restitution therefore, and they would be unworthy of it if they did not. They ask for the liberty their ancestors planted and preserved in this island: for nine tenths of them are descendants of those English who first won the country by fraud and by force from the ancient Irish. They and their forefathers are your benefactors, and you are still bent upon remaining their destroyers; for slavery is the destruction of the people. Such being their conduct and yours, is it decorous to talk of their ingratitude? would it not be more decorous to retrieve the honor you have lost by your own?—You say they want to intimidate you into a compliance with their humble supplications. The assertion is falsified by the fact. They presented a petition to parliament praying for a share of that freedom they contribute to support. They did not make the compliance of parliament the condition of their allegiance: they have evinced the contrary by the unvaried tenor of their conduct. for though refused in no very flattering manner, amidst scoffs, and scorn, and indignity, their enemies have not gained their point: they have not driven them into violence: they have remained unaltered in their loyalty, their love of order, and obedience to the law.—A brave General in your House of Commons invites these defenceless citizens to draw their swords and make their appeal to Heaven. These oppressed men have no swords, and if they had, they would only draw them in defence of their King and country. They and their fathers have to demeaned themselves in every vicissitude of fortune. I wish this great officer may be as well disposed. Shame on the man, who can thus mock at the unfortunate, and pour new misery into the agonizing bosom of a tortured generation!

That the Catholics are not prepared for freedom, is a proposition unfounded in reason and contradicted by the experience of every age and the feelings of every heart. Liberty which is equal justice to all, is taught by nature to all—the savage and the barbarian feels its sacred impulses as completely as the philosopher. The liberty of England originated in the woods of Germany. We know that the Germans were not a lettered race—they had no property but what was in common: yet these sturdy barbarians were at least as free, and as zealous assertors of their independence, as their descendants the English. Many of the mighty barons, who extorted Magna Charta from John, were unable to read or to write; yet the rude feelings of their untutored breasts fitted them admirably to wrest that palladium of happiness from a tyrant. I hope we shall hear no more of this insidious and hypocritical cant, invented by the designing to mislead the unwary. To be fit for freedom, it is sufficient to be born, and it affords an additional aptitude to be bred a Christian—for I hope it is unnecessary to inform you, that the service of the Catholic God and yours is perfect freedom. I should imagine the requisite knowledge for choosing a representative does not lie far beneath the surface: Surely a Catholic has as good an opportunity of learning the

the acts of wisdom, justice, humanity and fortitude which distinguish a neighbouring gentleman, and recommend him to notice at an election, as a Protestant : or do the magic syllables of Protestantism bestow sense and sensibility, whilst the execrated name of Papist bereaves its unhappy owner of every organ of feeling and understanding ? Away with such fooleries ! Were their absurdity not lost in the immensity of their mischief, they would be as contemptible as the dreams of dotards. If your execrable laws had unfitted the Catholic for freedom, freedom only could recreate that moral and political fitness your laws had done away. Slavery is the worst of all possible schools to teach the principles of liberty : you would not manacle the limbs of the man you would enable to start in the race ! Be not afraid of overpowering the tender optics of your brethren with the new light of liberty : the eagle-eye of nature looks steadily at the sun of liberty in every stage and every condition of this many coloured and wearied life.

It is also said the Catholic committee * is an unlawful meeting. Those who say so, do not understand the law, or misinterpret it with an evil intent. No meeting is unlawful which is peaceably met for a lawful purpose, whether the mode of meeting be borrowed from Constantinople or Paris, whether from the empire of Slavery or the seat of Democracy. The Catholic committee is not acknowledged by the law, *totidem verbis*, but every thing is allowed by the law, which is a quiet assertion of right, and hurts no man. Now the object of this meeting is not as has been foolishly or maliciously said, to consolidate the power of the Catholics, but to ascertain their utter impotence to protect themselves, to concentrate their miseries and their tears, to lay them at the foot of the throne, to supplicate parliament to give freedom, consequence, and union to Ireland. They hope it is no offence to wish to add dignity, strength, and stability to their country, and they are sure petitioning is lawful.—The Catholics labour under grievances and there are two ways of removing them. The one is by war ; the other by peace. They seek not relief through the calamities of war : they adore their country. They desire that peace may be the harbinger of their freedom. That peace can be preserved by no better means, than by quietly assembling and humbly proposing their grievances to the consideration of the legislature. The legislature may refuse granting the prayer of their petition, but they have no right to spurn the begging, prostrate, and obedient subject from their door.—You are angry with these miserable people for stating their numbers at three millions : You are then angry, that they were born ! You are then angry that they tread the earth, breathe the air, or survey the Heaven. By that Heaven I conjure you to dismiss those deadly sentiments of shocking uncharitableness from your otherwise generous hearts, and dare to have the magnanimity to forgive those you have so deeply and so cruelly injured. Be united, be Irishmen, be free.

I hear a great deal of the favours already conferred upon Catholics, and that their emancipation should be gradual.—The Catholics are a grateful people, but the fashion of the day and your own exigencies gave them most of what they have got, and your liberality wears too much the appearance of selfishness to entitle you to much gratitude. Recollect that you only lately set your hand to a very partial restoration of their rights, and that those acts of grace were accompanied with no small share of reluctance, no small portion of contempt. By giving the Catholics the power of purchasing land, you converted a flux, monied property, which might be employed against you, into an immoveable pledge for their abiding by your fate, and binding their own chains the faster ; and by withholding the elective franchise from them, you refuse them the shield by which they might protect their new acquisition. So that the privilege you rate so high, makes them but the

* Posterity will honour the memories of those prudent and undaunted citizens of Dublin, who, unshaken by the secession of their deceived fellow-sufferers, brought those very men back to their opinion by the irresistible force of truth, and cast the foundation of Catholic emancipation amidst the intrigues, and lies, and calumnies, and menaces of their enemies. Their names will live when court prostitutes and hirelings and slaves will be forgotten.

more dependent upon your good-will and caprice. As to gradual emancipation, if you mean to treat your brethren as the English parliament has the negroes, you should mark a period for their emancipation, as that parliament has done for the more fortunate Africans. But you do not wish it: you are withholding their rights from your fellow-creatures, and indulging them now and then with a few fragments from your table, fondly hoping that an opportunity may arise to dash their hopes for ever, and plunge them back into that unfathomable abyss of misery from whence they have but just raised their heads. But the opportunity will not arise: the imperishable spirit of freedom has gone abroad and cheers the heart of the meanest peasant. He trusts in the justice and virtues of his King, and the tardy humanity of his brethren. His King longs already to burst his chains: FOR HE CAN DO NO WRONG: and many of the FATHERS, RESTORERS, AND PRESERVERS OF POLITICAL PROTESTANT FREEDOM IN THE NORTH, are working seriously, honestly, nobly, and independently in their cause. YOUR REALLY AND TRULY GLORIOUS DELIVERER, Mr. Grattan, and many of the most exalted natures in Ireland are at the same Godlike work of redemption. The Catholics will deserve it: for I know them, and of course they will be free. They have nothing to dread: They walk in the fearlessness of virtue.

But what shall become of the Protestant ascendancy? I revere the Protestant ascendancy, if, like the prerogative of Kings, it is limited by justice and the safety of the people. I cannot revere it if it is nothing but an uncontrollable sway. Such a sway I could never respect, though seated on the throne of Great Britain or the chair of St. Peter. If by Protestant ascendancy you mean, that the great power of the country should remain in the hands of the present possessors, more than three hundred years would not transfer the power (for property is the power) into the hands of Catholics, even if the whole penal code was swept away at this moment; and I believe it requires no inspiration to foretell, that the folly and wickedness of religious animosity will have died with those who harbour it long, long before that period. But if you define the Protestant ascendancy, a Protestant King, a Protestant Peerage, a Protestant House of Commons, a Protestant Constituency, and make no account of your Catholic brethren, but wish, with the representative of the whole Irish nation, as he was pleased to denominate himself*, that their liberties should be for ever extinguished, whilst you but half retain your own, I abhor the inhuman idea, as I do the author of evil, and exactly upon the same principle; because it is the enemy of mankind.

I have now done: and I implore mercy for your brethren, and justice for your country. If you refuse that mercy, and withhold this justice, you should prepare for a union: Things cannot remain in their present situation; you must either give freedom to the Catholic or abdicate it for yourself. Your ancient oppressors are on the watch to inflame your passions and reinsnare you into worse than your former bondage. A union would be advantageous to the Catholic. By it the Protestant would lose his all, if freedom be all to the noble minded and the brave. The Catholic would not be raised to the Protestant, but the Protestant would be levelled down to the Catholic, and sunk into a slavish acquiescence in the will of a country accustomed to despise him. The Catholic would be more happy: for that liberty, he is never doomed to taste, would be removed far from his wounded ear, his aching sight. The Protestant would have no consolation for glories past and present shame. He would experience a servitude more grievous than death.

* Richard Sheridan, Esq;

F I N I S.