

SKETCH  
OF  
A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

JOHN KEOGH, *Esq.*

AT A

MEETING OF THE CATHOLICS OF DUBLIN,

HELD AT THE STAR AND GARTER, ESSEX-STREET,  
JANUARY 24TH, 1807.

AND

PUBLISHED AT THE DESIRE OF A SUBSEQUENT  
MEETING, HELD AT THE SAME PLACE,  
THE 7TH OF FEBRUARY, INST.

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REPORTED BY EDWARD HAY, ESQ.  
SECRETARY TO THE MEETING.

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1807.



Houses of the Oireachtas



# SKETCH,

&c. &c.

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BEFORE I enter into the business of the day, it may be well to satisfy this Meeting and the Public, that there is no manner of foundation for a report so industriously circulated, that the Deputation appointed by the Catholics of Dublin, to wait upon the Irish Government, had been treated with insult.

Your Deputies had three interviews with the Secretary, Mr. Elliott, at two of which the Chancellor was present. I do not know any man in society whose manners are more remote from insult or disrespect than those of Mr. Elliott—that Gentleman was remarkably polite and attentive to your Deputies.

Of the Chancellor it must be unnecessary to speak, born and spending his whole life in the midst of us; he is personally known to many of the gentlemen present—his character is known to



all ; he is incapable of any action unbecoming his high birth, polished manners, and his superior and elevated mind. Whether the Catholics are relieved, or their shackles continued, I am persuaded neither the Chancellor nor Mr. Elliott will ever treat with insult or disrespect any Deputation from the Catholics of Dublin.

It is true they held out no comfort—no assurance, that the British Minister intended to bring forward any Bill for our relief ; yet I am persuaded those Gentlemen sincerely wish the repeal of these laws which disqualify the Catholics—because they know the state of this Country, and that such repeal, beyond all other measures, is essential to the Empire and to the Throne.—But the Irish Government must be, in a certain degree, the organ of the British Cabinet.

We are now to consider whether the Catholics of Dublin ought to petition Parliament for relief. Your determination may decide the fate of the Catholics of this day, and that of their posterity ; but whatever you resolve upon will be liable to censure.—If you petition, you will be arraigned as rash ; if you decline it, you will be deemed pusillanimous. Strong objections, I own, may be urged against either decision. In a choice of difficulties, I thought it would be unworthy to shrink from this question ; and therefore, ill as I am in health,



health, I have come among you to take my full share of the responsibility or odium of it—if odium shall hereafter be attached to your decision.

Should I be so unfortunate this day as to propose a resolution which may prove injurious to the Catholics, I trust I may expect some indulgence from my fellow-sufferers, for whose interests I have taken an active part for the last twenty years ; when they reflect, in that period I never supported one measure which the Catholics had cause to regret, nor one which had not finally a considerable degree of success.

I have given this question all the consideration I am capable of, and before I sit down, I will propose a Resolution, “ that a Petition to the Imperial Parliament, on behalf of the Catholics of Dublin, be prepared, and submitted to our next Meeting, on this day fortnight.”

To enable us to judge dispassionately of this measure, I will state fairly the strong objections urged against our Petition, and by those who affect to be friends to the present Government.

They assert, that the majority of the Cabinet are avowed friends to our question ; but that it will embarrass them if now brought before Parliament—that they expect our silence, and to leave them to choose the time when they can accomplish our object. They add, that if Ministers oppose us,  
they



they will forfeit character, and if they support us, they may lose their places; and our late persecutors come into power.

Others—deeper politicians, assert that they will give us their individual votes, but not their influence; and of course we shall be defeated; and then, it is said, they will retain their power. It is insinuated, that Ministers may, in resentment, indulge the Opposition with another specimen of martial law, free-quarters, and the torture; and that Catholics may avoid those evils, and keep the friendship of Ministers, by postponing their Petition.

I will now submit my reasons why Ministers should not be suspected to descend to this line of conduct:—They are allowed to be men of high honor, and of great abilities; in 1805, they proved in Parliament and to the Empire, the folly and wickedness of continuing Laws which must discontent or disaffect four or five millions of brave and faithful Subjects;—they urged the repeal as essential to the strength of the Empire and the security of the Throne; that all Subjects should have an equal interest to perpetuate both, or to die in their defence—they proved that the Empire was menaced by a powerful Enemy, and therefore, the moment of uniting all Subjects, should not be delayed. Their own arguments



arguments have now ten-fold strength—by the unprecedented success of the enemy from that period to the present day.

I can never believe that such men as compose the present Ministry, will give up all claim to character and public confidence, by deserting their own principles, solemnly and publicly pledged;—still less can I believe they will descend to the greater meanness or duplicity of defeating us, by an evasive or hollow support, such as Mr. Pitt gave the African Slaves;—an open opposition would be more manly, and less disgraceful. Those of the Opposition, who are enemies to our relief, yet even they, would ever keep the people of England reminded of such a breach of faith and of consistency. They might charge them with having agitated Great-Britain and Ireland in 1805, at the moment of a threatened invasion, and that only, for the purposes of party; to harrass or remove Mr. Pitt, or obtain power for themselves; for if they were sincere in what they then asserted, why not support the question now, with all the influence of Government, when the power of the Enemy is much more formidable than in 1805? But the Ministers themselves, on discovering the want of truth and consistency in their own colleagues, must suspect each other in every future



future engagement, and each must dread that he may be deceived in turn. Principles of deception, once detected, can never have the confidence of any party, or of the Nation; such a Ministry could not stand—should Ministers be dismissed for consistency, they will retire with honor, and will be reinstated—but by tergiversation, places and honor will be forfeited, never to be recovered.

These are my reasons for not believing those pretended friends to Ministers are justified, by imputing to Ministers an intention of an open opposition to our claims, or an insidious and dishonorable, hollow support;—on the contrary, I rely upon their character and on their good sense, for supporting us with their whole influence; they avow themselves our friends—the late administration are spoken of as our enemies—yet let us not conceal nor forget, that a long and dreadful list of penalties and disqualifications were removed under the Administration of Mr. Pitt and Lord Melville; not a single disqualification is as yet removed by our friends, the present Ministers—They indeed volunteer to defend the Liberties of Germany, and the Blacks of Africa but as yet they are silent as to our suffering millions!

An unnatural system of Government, unprecedented in any part of Europe, has been persisted



persisted in, in this unhappy country—the vast majority of our population proscribed or degraded—feuds and parties encouraged—a set of petty tyrants have been generated, to whose relentless fury the people were exposed.—This faction were reprobated by many of those who are now in power, in consequence, they dread that their tyranny will be put down and suppressed for ever—and they are eager to join any factious outcry to overthrow the Ministers;—it is their boast that even the Ministers are afraid to put them down. I hope they may find Government more firm and consistent than they expect, for half measures are the ruin of all who adopt them.

Our history for the last forty years exhibits a series of cruelty and persecution on one side, and of illegal attempts to obtain redress on the other—hence, Whiteboys, Hearts of Steel, Defenders, Orangemen, United Irishmen, and lately the Threshers.—Do not these demonstrate that the people think themselves oppressed, that they have been in a political fever, they feel their pain, and turn from side to side in hope of relief, but in vain, no relief has yet been found—whilst the Laws themselves produce the tyranny; and if the Law is the oppressor, there cannot be a greater.

In



In every walk of life we are reminded of our want of protection, and of our degradation—Our opulent Merchants shut out from the Bank—our Traders from Corporations—Our persecutors not unfrequently Sub-sheriffs, selecting Juries of their own principles to decide on our properties, and even on our lives ;—’tis from this deplorable state we apply for relief.—Would any of the great religious sects in England be content, were they in a similar state of oppression?—Would those of the Established Church? or the Methodists? or Evangelists? Would the Presbyterians of Scotland be content if a handful of men seized their lands, burned their houses, banished multitudes by mere force, without pretended crime, or trial, or form of law, and be told that all this was loyalty. If their country was attacked, would the gallant men of Scotland risque their lives in defence of such a system of petty tyranny. We do not complain of the prerogative or power of the Crown ; an absolute Government would mend our condition. Our grievance is, that many men, beneath us in birth, education, morals and fortune, are allowed to trample upon us.

Yet the Catholics have submitted, do submit, and will submit ; and confide for relief on our humble and constitutional Petition to Parliament.



It has been confidently asserted in England, that the Irish Catholics enjoy protection equally with every other class of subjects, in their characters, properties, and lives. Whether civil rights were ever secure to the people of any country who were divested of political power, would, I believe, be difficult to prove—but our destructive parties have put it beyond all question—for so long as we shall be excluded from every share of political power, we cannot be secured in our civil rights.

Your Deputies represented to the Secretary, that men, such as those who compose this Meeting, who have their homes, fortunes, servants, carriages, comforts, and luxuries of life, were not in any country, the promoters of disturbance. The men of property Government may depend on; but they are the few,—their physical strength is as nothing, unless followed by the population. Our object is to attach that population, by interest and by affection, to the Throne and the Empire; and we are bold to say, THAT SINGLE MEASURE WILL RENDER THE EMPIRE INVINCIBLE.

Is the Throne benefited by our being oppressed by an Irish Junto? Certainly not. Does any one individual in Great-Britain derive  
a benefit?



a benefit? No; not one.—Both the Throne and People of England are materially injured.

What then is our crime!—Let the world listen with astonishment to British philosophy and liberality;—Our forefathers embraced Christianity in the 5th century;—the Creed which they received, we adhere to;—that is our crime! Yet this is the same creed which the Great Alfred held; the best and greatest Prince that ever adorned the Throne of England.—It was the creed of the Edwards and Henrys, who humbled and conquered France; and it is the creed we profess.

The Catholics seek no diminution of taxes; they cheerfully contribute their full quota to the exigencies of the State; they do not solicit for any peculiar privilege.—The extent of our supplication is to be governed, punished, or protected, by the same laws with every other class of his Majesty's subjects.

We entreat that privileges may hereafter be granted to loyalty and heroism,—not to creeds; that all may have equal interest to perpetuate the Constitution, or to die in its defence.

Shameful falsehoods to our disadvantage, are propagated; witness Sir Richard Musgrave's fabrications and reveries, imposed on England as Gospel truths.

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Our services are passed unnoticed or smothered; no Minister or ministerial print proclaims how greatly we encrease the armies; how our numbers crowd all his Majesty's fleets;—that under our gallant and beloved countryman, Lord Hutchinson, our brethren had a distinguished share in the conquest of Egypt;—that we furnished our full proportion of the heroes of Trafalgar and Calabria;—and we now offer to shed our last drop of blood in defence of the Throne and Empire.

And do these services merit degradation? Are the heroes of Egypt, Calabria, Trafalgar, and their posterity yet unborn, to be proscribed? It cannot be.

If Mr. Pitt were now in power, how justly would the present Ministers reprobate this dangerous infatuation, as hazarding the ruin of the Empire entrusted to his care. They might call on Parliament to turn their thoughts to the Continent, and to reflect, that when Bonaparte returned from Egypt, he found France torn piecemeal by factions. La Vendee was then exposed to martial law, free quarters, and the torture; ready to join the Invader, and shake off their tyrants. He suppressed the factions—protected the rights of conscience to all sects—put an end to persecution; and the insurgents of la Vendee are become attached to the Government that protects them. From thence to Geneva, from Holland



to Saxony,—through all the confederated Kingdoms and States of Germany, persecution and disqualification on account of creeds, are abolished. The sect which was oppressed under the old system, whether Lutheran, Catholic, or Calvinist, is now every where raised to equal privileges with their fellow-subjects; no sect is proscribed, or shut out from his Councils, Senates, or Armies. Thus this meteor flies over Europe, and by reseuing men from the effects of antient bigotry and intolerance, as much as by his arms, he promotes or secures his astonishing and alarming conquests.

If there were no law now in force to disqualify Catholics on account of their religious creed,—if all sects were now equally eligible to the privileges of the Constitution, and that loyalty, not modes of faith, were the criterion of merit; and that it were now proposed in Parliament to enact laws to disqualify four millions of Catholics, and their posterity for ever; how would such a proposal be reprobated in Parliament? Would it not be said, that a law to disqualify, was a law to discontent, or to disaffect the party disgraced? that the united zeal and valour of every subject, would be necessary to repel the mighty force of our formidable enemy; but to give substantial cause for discontent to four millions of brave and hardy subjects,



subjects, was worse than frenzy ;—that it bespoke venality, and if any wretch was base enough to wish to see these United Countries become provinces to France—such must be his plan to accomplish it—such a measure must be the utmost wish of Talleyrand and of Bonaparte, who dread that Catholic Emancipation should unite the Empire, and render it invincible ; but to make or to continue a law, to expel four millions and their posterity from the Constitution, will gratify every traitor to his King, to his illustrious Heir, and to the Empire.

I return my grateful acknowledgements to this Meeting, for the patience with which they have heard me ; and shall not further trespass, but move, “ That a Petition to the Imperial Parliament, on behalf of the Catholics of Dublin, be prepared and submitted to our next Meeting, on the 7th of February next.”

Which Resolution passed nem. con. and persons were appointed to prepare the Petition.





