

An Address to the Irish People

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The lowest possible price is set on this publication, because it is the intention of the Author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state, and suggesting rational means of remedy.—Catholic Emancipation, and a Repeal of the Union Act, (the latter, the most successful engine that England ever wielded over the misery of fallen Ireland,) being treated of in the following address, as grievances which unanimity and resolution may remove, and associations conducted with peaceable firmness, being earnestly recommended, as means for embodying that unanimity and firmness, which must finally be successful. Dublin: 1812. Price—5d.

ADDRESS.

Fellow Men,

I am not an Irishman, yet I can feel for you. I hope there are none among you who will read this address with prejudice or levity, because it is made by an Englishman, indeed, I believe there are not. The Irish are a brave nation. They have a heart of liberty in their breasts, but they are much mistaken if they fancy that a stranger cannot have as warm a one. Those are my brothers and my countrymen, who are unfortunate. I should like to know what there is in a man being an Englishman, a Spaniard, or a Frenchman, that makes him worse or better than he really is. He was born in one town, you in another, but that is no reason why he should not feel for you, desire your benefit, or be willing to give you some advice, which may make you more capable of knowing your own interest, or acting so as to secure it.—There are many Englishmen who cry down the Irish, and think it answers their ends to revile all that belongs to Ireland; but it is not because these men are Englishmen that they maintain such opinions, but because they wish to get money, and titles, and power. They would act in this manner to whatever country they might belong, until mankind is much altered for the better, which reform, I hope, will one day be effected.—I address you then, as my brothers and my fellow-men, for I should wish to see the Irishman who, if England was persecuted as Ireland is, who, if France was persecuted as Ireland is, who, if any set of men that helped to do a public service were prevented from enjoying its benefits as Irishmen are—I should like to see the man, I say, who would see these misfortunes, and not attempt to succour the sufferers when he could, just that I might tell him that he was no Irishman, but some bastard mongrel bred up in a court, or some coward fool who was a democrat to all above him, and an aristocrat to all below him. I think there are few true Irishmen who would not be ashamed of such a character, still fewer who possess it. I know that there are some, not among you my friends, but among your enemies, who seeing the title of this piece, will take it up with a sort of hope that it may recommend violent measures, and thereby disgrace the cause of freedom, that the warmth of an heart desirous that liberty should be possessed equally by all, will vent itself in abuse on the enemies of liberty, bad men who deserve the contempt of the good, and ought not to excite their indignation to the harm of their cause. But these men will be disappointed—I know the warm feelings of an Irishman sometimes carries¹ him beyond the point of prudence. I do not desire to root out, but to moderate this honorable warmth. This will disappoint the pioneers of oppression and they will be sorry, that through this address nothing

¹ Sic.

will occur which can be twisted into any other meaning but what is calculated to fill you with that moderation which they have not, and make you give them that toleration which they refuse to grant to you.—You profess the Roman Catholic religion which your fathers professed before you. Whether it is the best religion or not, I will not here inquire: all religions are good which make men good; and the way that a person ought to prove that his method of worshipping God is best, is for himself to be better than all other men. But we will consider what your religion was in old times and what it is now: you may say it is not a fair way for me to proceed as a Protestant, but I am not a Protestant, nor am I a Catholic, and therefore not being a follower of either of these religions, I am better able to judge between them. A Protestant is my brother, and a Catholic is my brother, I am happy when I can do either of them a service, and no pleasure is so great to me than that which I should feel if my advice could make men of any professions of faith, wiser, better and happier.

The Roman Catholics once persecuted the Protestants, the Protestants now persecute the Roman Catholics—should we think that one is as bad as the other? No, you are not answerable for the faults of your fathers any more than the Protestants are good for the goodness of their fathers. I must judge of people as I see them; the Irish Catholics are badly used. I will not endeavour to hide from them their wretchedness; they would think that I mocked at them if I should make the attempt. The Irish Catholics now demand for themselves, and profess² for others unlimited toleration, and the sensible part among them, which I am willing to think constitutes a very large portion of their body, know that the gates of Heaven are open to people of every religion, provided they are good. But the Protestants, although they may think so in their hearts, which certainly if they think at all they must seem to act as if they thought that God was better pleased with them than with you, they trust the reins of earthly government only to the hands of their own sect; in spite of this, I never found one of them impudent³ enough to say that a Roman Catholic, or a Quaker, or a Jew, or a Mahometan, if he was a virtuous man, and did all the good in his power, would go to Heaven a bit the slower for not subscribing to the thirty-nine articles—and if he should say so, how ridiculous in a foppish courtier not six feet high to direct the spirit of universal harmony, in what manner to conduct the affairs of the universe!

The Protestants say that there was a time when the Roman Catholics burnt and murdered people of different sentiments, and that their religious tenets are now as they were then. This is all very true. You certainly worship God in the same way that you did when those barbarities took place, but is that any reason that you should now be barbarous. There is as much reason to suppose it, as to suppose that because a man's great grandfather, who was a Jew, had been hung for sheep-stealing, that I, by believing the same religion as he did, must certainly commit the same crime. Let us then see what the Roman Catholic religion has been.—No one knows much of the early times of the Christian religion, until about three hundred years after its beginning, two great churches called the Roman and the Greek churches divided the opinions of men. They fought for a very long time, a great many words were wasted and a great deal of blood shed. This as you may suppose did no good. Each party however, thought they were doing God a service, and that he would reward them. If they had looked an inch before their noses they might have found that fighting and killing men, and cursing them and hating them, was the very worst way for getting into favour with a Being who is allowed by all to be best pleased with deeds of love and

² In the original *profers*,—doubtless a misprint for *profess*, not for *proffer*.

³ In the original, *impudently*.

charity. At last, however, these two Religions entirely separated, and the Popes reigned like Kings and Bishops at Rome, in Italy. The inquisition was set up, and in the course of one year thirty thousand people were burnt in Italy and Spain, for entertaining different opinions from those of the Pope and the Priests. There was an instance of shocking barbarity which the Roman Catholic Clergy committed in France by order of the Pope. The bigotted Monks of that country, in cold blood, in one night massacred 80,000 Protestants; this was done under the authority of the Pope, and there was only one Roman Catholic Bishop who had virtue enough to refuse to help. The vices of Monks and Nuns in their Convents were in those times shameful, people thought that they might commit any sin, however monstrous, if they had money enough to prevail upon the Priests to absolve them; in truth, at that time the Priests shamefully imposed upon the people, they got all the power into their own hands, they persuaded them that a man could not be entrusted with the care of his own soul, and by cunningly obtaining possession of their secrets, they became more powerful than Kings, Princes, Dukes, Lords, or Ministers: this power made them bad men; for although rational people are very good in their natural state, there are now, and ever have been very few whose good dispositions despotic power does not destroy. I have now given a fair description of what your religion was; and Irishmen my brothers! will you make your friend appear a liar, when he takes upon himself to say for you, that you are not now what the professors of the same faith were in times of yore. Do I speak false when I say that the inquisition is the object of your hatred? Am I a liar if I assert that an Irishman prizes liberty dearly, that he will preserve that right, and if he be wrong, does not dream that money given to a Priest, or the talking of another man erring like himself, can in the least influence the judgement of the eternal God?—I am not a liar if I affirm in your name, that you believe a Protestant equally with yourself to be worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven, if he be equally virtuous, that you will treat men as brethren wherever you may find them, and that difference of opinion in religious matters, shall not, does not in the least on your part, obstruct the most perfect harmony on every other subject.—Ah! no, Irishmen, I am not a liar. I seek your confidence, not that I may betray it, but that I may teach you to be happy, and wise, and good. If you will not repose any trust in me I shall lament, but I will do every thing in my power that is honorable, fair, and open, to gain it. Some teach you that others are heretics, that you alone are right; some teach that rectitude consists in religious opinions, without which no morality is good, some will tell you that you ought to divulge your secrets to one particular set of men; beware my friends how you trust those who speak in this way. They will, I doubt not, attempt to rescue you from your present miserable state, but they will prepare a worse. It will be out of the frying-pan into the fire. Your present oppressors it is true, will then oppress you no longer, but you will feel the lash of a master a thousand times more blood-thirsty and cruel. Evil designing men will spring up who will prevent your thinking as you please, will burn you if you do not think as they do. There are always bad men who take advantage of hard times. The Monks and the Priests of old were very bad men; take care no such abuse your confidence again. You are not blind to your present situation, you are villainously treated, you are badly used. That this slavery shall cease, I will venture to prophesy. Your enemies dare not to persecute you longer, the spirit of Ireland is bent, but it is not broken, and that they very well know. But I wish your views to embrace a wider scene, I wish you to think for your children and your children's children; to take great care (for it all rests with you) that whilst one tyranny is destroyed another more fierce and terrible does not spring up. Take care then of smooth-faced impostors, who talk indeed of freedom, but who will cheat you into slavery. Can there be worse slavery than the depending for the safety of your soul on the will of another man? Is one man

more favored than another by God. No, certainly, they are all favored according to the good they do, and not according to the rank and profession they hold. God values a poor man as much as a Priest, and has given him a soul as much to himself; the worship that a kind Being must love, is that of a simple affectionate heart, that shews its piety in good works, and not in ceremonies, or confessions, or burials, or processions, or wonders. Take care then, that you are not led away. Doubt every thing that leads you not to charity, and think of the word "heretic" as a word which some selfish knave invented for the ruin and misery of the world, to answer his own paltry and narrow ambition. Do not inquire if a man be a heretic, if he be a Quaker, or a Jew, or a Heathen; but if he be a virtuous man, if he loves liberty and truth, if he wish the happiness and peace of human kind. If a man be ever so much a believer and love not these things, he is a heartless hypocrite, a rascal, and a knave. Despise and hate him, as ye despise a tyrant and a villain. Oh! Ireland, thou emerald of the ocean, whose sons are generous and brave, whose daughters are honorable, and frank, and fair; thou art the isle on whose green shores I have desired to see the standard of liberty erected, a flag of fire, a beacon at which the world shall light the torch of Freedom!

We will now examine the Protestant Religion. Its origin is called the Reformation. It was undertaken by some bigotted men, who showed how little they understood the spirit of Reform, by burning each other. You will observe that these men burnt each other, indeed they universally betrayed a taste for destroying, and vied with the chiefs of the Roman Catholic Religion, in not only hating their enemies, but those men, who least of all were their enemies, or any body's enemies. Now, do the Protestants, or do they not hold the same tenets as they did when Calvin burnt Servetus, they swear that they do. We can have no better proof. Then with what face can the Protestants object to Catholic Emancipation, on the plea that Catholics once were barbarous; when their own establishment is liable to the very same objections, on the very same grounds? I think this is a specimen of barefaced intolerance, which I had hoped would not have disgraced this age; this age, which is called the age of reason, of thought diffused, of virtue acknowledged, and its principles fixed.—Oh! that it may be so.—I have mentioned the Catholic and Protestant Religions more to shew that any objection to the toleration of the one forcibly applies to the non-permission of the other, or rather to shew that there is no reason why both might not be tolerated, why every Religion, every form of thinking might not be tolerated.—But why do I speak of *toleration*? This word seems to mean that there is some merit in the person who tolerates, he has this merit if it be one, of refraining to do an evil act, but he will share the merit with every other peaceable person who pursues his own business, and does not hinder another of his rights. It is not a merit to tolerate, but it is a crime to be intolerant: it is not a merit in⁴ me that I sat quietly at home without murdering any one, but it is a crime if I do so. Besides no act of a National representation can make any thing wrong, which was not wrong before; it cannot change virtue and truth, and for a very plain reason; because they are unchangeable. An act passed in the British Parliament to take away the rights of Catholics to act in that assembly, does not really take them away. It prevents them from doing it by force. This is in such cases, the last and only efficacious way. But force is not the test of truth; they will never have recourse to violence who acknowledge no other rule of behaviour but virtue and justice.

The folly of persecuting men for their religion will appear if we examine it. Why do we persecute them? to make them believe as we do. Can any thing be more barbarous or foolish.—For

⁴ In the original, *on*.

although we may make them say they believe as we do, they will not in their hearts do any such thing, indeed they cannot, this devilish method can only make them false hypocrites. For what is belief? We cannot believe just what we like, but only what we think to be true; for you cannot alter a man's opinion by beating or burning, but by persuading him that what you think is right, and this can only be done by fair words and reason. It is ridiculous to call a man a heretic, because he thinks differently from you, he might as well call you one. In the same sense, the word orthodox is used, it signifies "to think rightly" and what can be more vain and presumptuous in any man or any set of men, to put themselves so out of the ordinary course of things as to say—"What we think is right, no other people throughout the world have opinions any thing like equal to ours." Any thing short of unlimited toleration, and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect that Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong, and for this reason—what makes a man to be a good man? not his religion, or else there could be no good men in any religion but one, when yet we⁵ find that all ages, countries, and opinions have produced them. Virtue and wisdom always so far as they went produced liberty or happiness long before any of the religions now in the world were⁶ ever heard of. The only use of a religion that ever I could see, is to make men wiser or better, so far as it does this, it is a good one. Now if people are good, and yet have sentiments differing from you, then all the purposes are answered, which any reasonable man could want, and whether he thinks like you or not, is of too little consequence to employ means which must be disgusting and hateful to candid minds, nay they cannot approve of such means. For as I have before said you cannot believe or disbelieve what you like—perhaps some of you may doubt this, but just try—I will take a common and familiar instance. Suppose you have a friend of whom you wish to think well, he commits a crime, which proves to you that he is a bad man. It is very painful to you to think ill of him, and you would still think well of him if you could. But mark the word, you *cannot* think well of him, not even to secure your own peace of mind can you do so. You try, but your attempts are vain. This shews how little power a man has over his belief, or rather, that he cannot believe what he does not think true. And what shall we think now? What fools and tyrants must not those men be, who set up a particular religion, say that this religion alone is right, and that every one who disbelieves it, ought to be deprived of certain rights which are really his, and which would be allowed him if he believed. Certainly, if you cannot help disbelief, it is not any fault in you.—To take away a man's rights and privileges, to call him a heretic or to think worse of him, when at the same time you cannot help owning that he has committed no fault, is the grossest tyranny and intolerance. From what has been said I think we may be justified in concluding, that people of all religions ought to have an equal share in the state, that the words heretic and orthodox were invented by a vain villain, and have done a great deal of harm in the world, and that no person is answerable for his belief whose actions are virtuous and moral, that the religion is best whose members are the best men, and that no person can help either his belief or disbelief.—Be in charity with all men. It does not therefore, signify what your Religion *was*, or what the Protestant Religion *was*, we must consider them as we find them. What are they *now*? Yours is not intolerant, indeed my friends I have ventured to pledge myself for you that it is not. You merely desire to go to Heaven, in your own way, nor will you interrupt fellow travellers, although the road which you take, may not be that which they take. Believe me, that goodness of heart and purity of life are things of more value in the

⁵ In the original, *when we yet we &c.*

⁶ In the original, *have*, doubtless a misprint for *were*.

eye of the Spirit of Goodness, than idle earthly ceremonies, and things which have any thing but charity for their object. And is it for the first or the last of these things that you or the Protestants contend. It is for the last. Prejudiced people indeed, are they who grudge to the happiness and comfort of your souls, things which can do harm to no one. They are not compelled to share in these rites. Irishmen; knowledge is more extended than in the early period of your religion, people have learned to think, and the more thought there is in the world, the more happiness and liberty will there be:—men begin now to think less of idle ceremonies, and more of realities. From a long night have they risen, and they can perceive its darkness. I know no men of thought and learning who do not consider the Catholic idea of purgatory, much nearer the truth than the Protestant one of eternal damnation. Can you think that the Mahometans and the Indians, who have done good deeds in this life, will not be rewarded in the next. The Protestants believe that they will be eternally damned, at least they swear that they do.—I think they appear in a better light as perjurers, than believers in a falsehood so hateful and uncharitable as this.—I propose unlimited toleration, or rather the destruction, both of toleration and intolerance. The act permits certain people to worship God after such a manner, which, in fact, if not done, would as far as in it lay prevent God from hearing their address. Can we conceive any thing more presumptuous, and at the same time more ridiculous, than a set of men granting a licence to God to receive the prayers of certain of his creatures. Oh Irishmen! I am interested in your cause; and it is not because you are Irishmen or Roman Catholics, that I feel with you and feel for you; but because you are men and sufferers. Were Ireland at this moment, peopled with Brahmins, this very same address would have been suggested by the same state of mind. You have suffered not merely for your religion, but some other causes which I am equally desirous of remedying. The Union of England with Ireland has withdrawn the Protestant aristocracy, and gentry from their native country, and with these their friends and connections. Their resources are taken from this country, although they are dissipated in another; the very poor people are most infamously oppressed by the weight of burden which the superior ranks lay upon their shoulders. I am no less desirous of the reform of these evils (with many others) than for the Catholic Emancipation.

Perhaps you all agree with me on both these subjects, we now come to the method of doing these things. I agree with the Quakers so far as they disclaim violence, and trust their cause wholly and solely to its own truth.—If you are convinced of the truth of your cause, trust wholly to its truth; if you are not convinced, give it up. In no case employ violence, the way to liberty and happiness is never to transgress the rules of virtue and justice. Liberty and happiness are founded upon virtue and justice, if you destroy the one, you destroy the other. However ill others may act, this will be no excuse for you if you follow their example; it ought rather to warn you from pursuing so bad a method. Depend upon it, Irishmen, your cause shall not be neglected. I will fondly hope, that the schemes for your happiness and liberty, as well as those for the happiness and liberty of the world, will not be wholly fruitless. One secure method of defeating them is violence on the side of the injured party. If you can descend to use the same weapons as your enemy, you put yourself on a level with him on this score, you must be convinced that he is on these grounds your superior. But appeal to the sacred principles of virtue and justice, then how is he awed into nothing? how does truth show him in his real colours, and place the cause of toleration and reform in the clearest light. I extend my view not only to you as Irishmen, but to all of every persuasion, of every country. Be calm, mild, deliberate, patient; recollect that you can in no measure more effectually forward the cause of reform than by employing your leisure time in reasoning, or the cultivation of your minds. Think and talk, and discuss. The only subjects you

ought to propose, are those of happiness and liberty. Be free and be happy, but first be wise and good. For you are not all wise or good.⁷ You are a great and a brave nation, but you cannot yet be all wise or good. You may be at some time, and then Ireland will be an earthly Paradise. You know what is meant by a mob, it is an assembly of people who without foresight or thought, collect themselves to disapprove of by force any measure which they dislike. An assembly like this can never do any thing but harm, tumultuous proceedings must retard the period when thought and coolness will produce freedom and happiness, and that to the very people who make the mob, but if a number of human beings, after thinking of their own interests, meet together for any conversation on them, and employ resistance of the mind, not resistance of the body, these people are going the right way to work. But let no fiery passions carry them beyond this point, let them consider that in some sense, the whole welfare of their countrymen depends on their prudence, and that it becomes them to guard the welfare of others as their own. Associations for purposes of violence, are entitled to the strongest disapprobation of the real reformist. Always suspect that some knavish rascal is at the bottom of things of this kind, waiting to profit by the confusion. All secret associations are also bad. Are you men of deep designs, whose deeds love darkness better than light; dare you not say what you think before any man, can you not meet in the open face of day in conscious innocence? Oh, Irishmen ye can. Hidden arms, secret meetings and designs, violently to separate England from Ireland, are all very bad. I do not mean to say the very end of them is bad, the object you have in view may be just enough, whilst the way you go about it is wrong, may be calculated to produce an opposite effect. Never do evil that good may come, always think of others as well as yourself, and cautiously look how your conduct may do good or evil, when you yourself shall be mouldering in the grave. Be fair, open, and you will be terrible to your enemies. A friend cannot defend you, much as he may feel for your sufferings, if you have recourse to methods of which virtue and justice disapprove. No cause is in itself so dear to liberty as yours. Much depends on you, far may your efforts spread, either hope or despair; do not then cover in darkness wrongs at which the face of day, and the tyrants who bask in its warmth ought to blush.⁸ Wherever has violence succeeded. The French Revolution, although undertaken with the best intentions, ended ill for the people; because violence was employed, the cause which they vindicated was that of truth, but they gave it the appearance of a lie, by using methods which will suit the purposes of liars as well as their own. Speak boldly and daringly what you think; an Irishman was never accused of cowardice, do not let it be thought possible that he is a coward. Let him say what he thinks, a lie is the basest and meanest employment of men, leave lies and secrets to courtiers and lordlings; be open, sincere, and single hearted. Let it be seen that the Irish votaries of Freedom dare to speak what they think, let them resist oppression, not by force of arms, but by power of mind, and reliance on truth and justice. Will any be arraigned for libel—will imprisonment or death be the consequences of this mode of proceeding: probably not—but if it were so? Is danger frightful to an Irishman who speaks for his own liberty, and the liberty of his wife and children:—No, he will steadily persevere, and sooner shall pensioners cease to vote with their benefactors, than an Irishman swerve from the path of duty. But steadily persevere in the system above laid down, its benefits will speedily be manifested. Persecution may destroy some, but cannot destroy all, or nearly all; let it do its will, ye have appealed to truth and justice—show the goodness of your religion by persisting in a reliance on these things, which

⁷ In the original there is a comma here instead of a period, notwithstanding the capital letter for the next word.

⁸ Period dropped in the original.

must be the rules even of the Almighty's conduct. But before this can be done with any effect, habits of SOBRIETY, REGULARITY, and THOUGHT, must be entered into, and firmly resolved upon.

My warm-hearted friends, who meet together to talk of the distresses of your countrymen, until social chat induces you to drink rather freely; as ye have felt passionately, so reason coolly. Nothing hasty can be lasting; lay up the money with which you usually purchase drunkenness and ill-health, to relieve the pains of your fellow-sufferers. Let your children lisp of Freedom in the cradle—let your death-bed be the school for fresh exertions—let every street of the city, and field of the country, be connected with thoughts, which liberty has made holy. Be warm in your cause, yet rational, and charitable, and tolerant—never let the oppressor grind you into justifying his conduct by imitating his meanness.

Many circumstances, I will own, may excuse what is called rebellion, but no circumstances can ever make it good for your cause, and however honourable to your feelings, it will reflect no credit on your judgments. It will bind you more closely to the block of the oppressor, and your children's children, whilst they talk of your exploits, will feel that you have done them injury, instead of benefit.

A crisis is now arriving, which shall decide your fate. The king of Great Britain has arrived at the evening of his days.⁹ He has objected to your emancipation; he has been inimical to you; but he will in a certain time be no more. The present Prince of Wales will then be king. It is said that he has promised to restore you to freedom: your real and natural right will, in that case, be no longer kept from you. I hope he has pledged himself to this act of justice, because there will then exist some obligation to bind him to do right. Kings are but too apt to think little as they should do: they think every thing in the world is made for them; when the truth is, that it is only the vices of men that make such people necessary, and they have no other right of being kings, but in virtue of the good they do. The benefit of the governed is the origin and meaning of government. The Prince of Wales has had every opportunity of knowing how he ought to act about Ireland and liberty. That great and good man, Charles Fox, who was your friend, and the friend of freedom, was the friend of the Prince of Wales. He never flattered or disguised his sentiments, but spoke them *openly* on every occasion, and the Prince was the better for his instructive conversation. He saw the truth, and he believed it. Now I know not what to say; his staff is gone, and he leans upon a broken reed; his present advisers are not like Charles Fox, they do not plan for Liberty and safety, not for the happiness but for the glory of their country; and what, Irishmen, is the glory of a country divided from their happiness? it is a false light hung out by the enemies of freedom to lure the unthinking into their net. Men like these surround the Prince, and whether or no he has really promised to emancipate you, whether or no he will consider the promise of a Prince of Wales binding to a King of England, is yet a matter of doubt. We cannot at least be quite certain of it: on this you cannot certainly rely. But there are men who, wherever they find a tendency to freedom, go there to increase, support, and regulate that tendency. These men who join to a rational disdain of danger, a practice of speaking the truth, and defending the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor; these men see what is right and will pursue it. On such as these you may safely rely: they love you as they love their brothers; they feel for the unfortunate, and never ask whether a man is an Englishman or an Irishman, a catholic, a heretic, a christian, or a heathen, before their hearts and their purses are opened to feel with their misfortunes and

⁹ In the original there is here, again, a comma, although the next word is spelt with a capital letter.

relieve their necessities: such are the men who will stand by you for ever. Depend then, not upon the promises of Princes, but upon those of virtuous and disinterested men: depend not upon force of arms or violence, but upon the force of the truth of the rights which you have to share equally with others, the benefits and the evils of Government.

The crisis to which I allude as the period of your emancipation, is not the death of the present king, or any circumstance that has to do with kings, but something that is much more likely to do you good: it is the increase of virtue and wisdom which will lead people to find out that force and oppression are wrong and false: and this opinion, when it once gains ground, will prevent government from severity. It will restore those rights which government has taken away. Have nothing to do with force or violence, and things will safely and surely make their way to the right point. The Ministers have now in Parliament a very great majority, and the Ministers are against you. They maintain the falsehood that, were you in power you would prosecute¹⁰ and burn, on the plea that you once did so. They maintain many other things of the same nature.—They command the majority of the House of Commons, or rather the part of that assembly, who receive pensions from Government, or whose relatives receive them. These men of course, are against you, because their employers are. But the sense of the country is not against you, the people of England are not against you—they feel warmly for you—in some respects they feel with you. The sense of the English and of their Governors is opposite—there must be an end of this, the goodness of a Government consists in the happiness of the Governed, if the Governed are wretched and dissatisfied, the Government has failed in its end. It wants altering and mending. It will be mended, and a reform of English Government will produce good to the Irish—good to all human kind, excepting those whose happiness consists in others'¹¹ sorrows, and it will be a fit punishment for these to be deprived of their devilish joy. This I consider as an event which is approaching, and which will make the beginning of our hopes for that period which may spread wisdom and virtue so wide, as to leave no hole in which folly or villainy may hide themselves. I wish you, O Irishmen, to be as careful and thoughtful of your interests as are your real friends. Do not drink, do not play, do not spend any idle time, do not take every thing that other people say for granted—there are numbers who will tell you lies to make their own fortunes, you cannot more certainly do good to your own cause, than by defeating the intentions of these men. Think, read and talk; let your own condition and that of your wives and children, fill your minds; disclaim all manner of alliance with violence, meet together if ye will, but do not meet in a mob. If you think and read and talk with a real wish of benefiting the cause of truth and liberty, it will soon be seen how true a service you are rendering, and how sincere you are in your professions; but mobs and violence must be discarded. The certain degree of civil and religious liberty which the usage of the English Constitution allows, is such as the worst of men are entitled to, although you have it not; but that liberty which we may one day hope for, wisdom and virtue can alone give you a right to enjoy. This wisdom and this virtue I recommend on every account that you should *instantly begin* to practice. Lose not a day, not an hour, not a moment.—Temperance, sobriety, charity and independence will give you virtue; and reading, talking, thinking and searching, will give you wisdom; when you have those things you may defy the tyrant. It is not going often to chapel, crossing yourselves, or confessing, that will make you virtuous; many a rascal has attended regularly at Mass, and many a good man has never gone at all. It is not paying Priests,

¹⁰ Probably a misprint for *persecute*.

¹¹ In the pamphlet *others*, without the apostrophe.

or believing in what they say that makes a good man, but it is doing good actions, or benefiting other people; this is the true way to be good, and the prayers, and confessions, and masses of him who does not these things, are good for nothing at all. Do your work regularly and quickly, when you have done, think, read and talk; do not spend your money in idleness and drinking, which so far from doing good to your cause, will do it harm. If you have any thing to spare from your wife and children, let it do some good to other people, and put them in a way of getting wisdom and virtue, as the pleasure that will come from these good acts, will be much better than the headache that comes from a drinking bout. And never quarrel between each other, be all of one mind as nearly as you can; do these things, and I will promise you liberty and happiness. But if, on the contrary of these things, you neglect to improve yourselves, continue to use the word heretic, and demand from others the toleration which you are unwilling to give; your friends and the friends of liberty will have reason to lament the death-blow of their hopes. I expect better things from you; it is for yourselves that I fear and hope. Many Englishmen are prejudiced against you, they sit by their own fire-sides and certain rumours artfully spread¹² are ever on the wing against you. But these people who think ill of you and of your nation, are often the very men who, if they had better information, would feel for you most keenly; where-fore are these reports spread, how do¹³ they begin? they originate from the warmth of the Irish character, which the friends of the Irish nation have hitherto encouraged rather than repressed; this leads them in those moments when their wrongs appear so clearly, to commit acts which justly excite displeasure. They begin therefore, from yourselves, although falsehood and tyranny artfully magnify and multiply the causes of offence.—Give no offence.

I will for the present dismiss the subject of the Catholic Emancipation; a little reflection will convince you that my remarks are just. Be true to yourselves, and your enemies shall not triumph. I fear nothing, if charity and sobriety mark your proceedings. Every thing is to be dreaded, you yourselves will be unworthy of even a restoration to your rights, if you disgrace the cause, which I hope is that of truth and liberty, by violence, if you refuse to others the toleration which you claim for yourselves.—But this you will not do. I rely upon it Irishmen, that the warmth of your characters will be shewn as much in union with Englishmen and what are called heretics, who feel for you, and love you as in avenging your wrongs, or forwarding their annihilation.—It is the heart that glows and not the cheek. The firmness, sobriety, and consistence of your outward behaviour will not at all shew any hardness of heart, but will prove that you are determined in your cause, and are going the right way to work.—I will repeat that virtue and wisdom are necessary to true happiness and liberty.—The Catholic Emancipation I consider, is certain. I do not see that any thing but violence and intolerance among yourselves can leave an excuse to your enemies for continuing your slavery. The other wrongs under which you labor, will probably also soon be done away. You will be rendered equal to the people of England in their rights and privileges, and will be in all respects, so far as concerns the state, as happy. And now Irishmen another, and a more wide prospect opens to my view. I cannot avoid, little as it may appear to have any thing to do with your present situation, to talk to you on the subject. It intimately concerns the well-being of your children, and your children's children, and will perhaps more than any thing prove to you the advantage and necessity of being thoughtful, sober, and regular; of avoiding foolish and idle talk, and thinking of yourselves, as of men who are able to be much

¹² There is a note of interrogation here in the original.

¹³ In the original *so* for *do*.

wiser and happier than you now are; for habits like these, will not only conduce to the successful putting aside your present and immediate grievances, but will contain a seed, which in future times will spring up into the tree of liberty, and bear the fruit of happiness.

There is no doubt but the world is going wrong, or rather that it is very capable of being much improved. What I mean by this improvement is, the inducement of a more equal and general diffusion of happiness and liberty.—Many people are very rich and many are very poor. Which do you think are happiest?—I can tell you that neither are happy, so far as their station is concerned. Nature never intended that there should be such a thing as a poor man or a rich one. Being put in an unnatural situation, they can neither of them be happy, so far as their situation is concerned. The poor man is born to obey the rich man, though they both come into the world equally helpless, and equally naked. But the poor man does the rich no service by obeying him—the rich man does the poor no good by commanding him. It would be much better if they could be prevailed upon to live equally like brothers—they would ultimately both be happier. But this can be done neither to-day nor to-morrow, much as such a change is to be desired, it is quite impossible. Violence and folly in this, as in the other case, would only put off the period of its event. Mildness, sobriety, and reason, are the effectual methods of forwarding the ends of liberty and happiness.

Although we may see many things put in train, during our life-time, we cannot hope to see the work of virtue and reason finished now; we can only lay the foundation for our posterity. Government is an evil, it is only the thoughtlessness and vices of men that make it a necessary evil. When all men are good and wise, Government will of itself decay, so long as men continue foolish and vicious, so long will Government, even such a Government as that of England, continue necessary in order to prevent the crimes of bad men. Society is produced by the wants, Government by the wickedness, and a state of just and happy equality by the improvement and reason of man. It is in vain to hope for any liberty and happiness, without reason and virtue—for where there is no virtue there will be crime, and where there is crime there must be Government. Before the restraints of Government are lessened, it is fit that we should lessen the necessity for them. Before Government is done away with, we must reform ourselves. It is this work which I would earnestly recommend to you, O Irishmen, REFORM YOURSELVES—and I do not recommend it to you particularly because I think that you most need it, but because I think that your hearts are warm and your feelings high, and you will perceive the necessity of doing it more than those of a colder and more distant nature.

I look with an eye of hope and pleasure on the present state of things, gloomy and incapable of improvement as they may appear to others. It delights me to see that men begin to think and to act for the good of others. Extensively as folly and selfishness has predominated in this age, it gives me hope and pleasure, at least, to see that many know what is right. Ignorance and vice commonly go together: he that would do good must be wise—a man cannot be truly wise who is not truly virtuous. Prudence and wisdom are very different things. The prudent man is he, who carefully consults for his own good: the wise man is he, who carefully consults for the good of others.

I look upon Catholic Emancipation, and the restoration of the liberties and happiness of Ireland, so far as they are compatible with the English Constitution, as great and important events. I hope to see them soon. But if all ended here, it would give me little pleasure—I should still see thousands miserable and wicked, things would still be wrong. I regard then, the accomplishment of these things as the road to a greater reform—that reform after which virtue and wisdom shall have conquered pain and vice. When no government will be wanted, but that of your neighbour's

opinion.—I look to these things with hope and pleasure, because I consider that they will certainly happen, and because men will not then be wicked and miserable. But I do not consider that they will or can immediately happen; their arrival will be gradual, and it all depends upon yourselves how soon or how late these great changes will happen. If all of you, to-morrow were virtuous and wise, Government which to-day is a safe-guard, would then become a tyranny. But I cannot expect a rapid change. Many are obstinate and determined in their vice, whose selfishness makes them think only of their own good, when in fact, the best way even to bring that about, is to make others happy. I do not wish to see things changed now, because it cannot be done without violence, and we may assure ourselves that none of us are fit for any change however good, if we condescend to employ force in a cause which we think right. Force makes the side that employs it directly wrong, and as much as we may pity we cannot approve the headstrong and intolerant zeal of its adherents.

Can you conceive, O Irishmen! a happy state of society—conceive men of every way of thinking living together like brothers. The descendant of the greatest Prince would there, be entitled to no more respect than the son of a peasant. There would be no pomp and no parade, but that which the rich now keep to themselves, would then be distributed among the people. None would be in magnificence, but the superfluities then taken from the rich would be sufficient when spread abroad, to make every one comfortable.—No lover would then be false to his mistress, no mistress would desert her lover. No friend would play false, no rents, no debts, no taxes, no frauds of any kind would disturb the general happiness: good as they would be, wise as they would be, they would be daily getting better and wiser. No beggars would exist, nor any of those wretched women, who are now reduced to a state of the most horrible misery and vice, by men whose wealth makes them villainous and hardened. No thieves or murderers, because poverty would never drive men to take away comforts from another, when he had enough for himself. Vice and misery, pomp and poverty, power and obedience, would then be banished altogether.—It is for such a state as this, Irishmen, that I exhort you to prepare.—"A camel shall as soon pass through the eye of a needle, as a rich man enter the Kingdom of Heaven." This is not to be understood literally, Jesus Christ appears to me only to have meant that riches, have generally the effect of hardening and vitiating the heart, so has poverty. I think those people then are very silly, and cannot see one inch beyond their noses, who say that human nature is depraved; when at the same time wealth and poverty, those two great sources of crime, fall to the lot of a great majority of people; and when they see that people in moderate circumstances are always most wise and good.—People say that poverty is no evil—they have never felt it, or they would not think so. That wealth is necessary to encourage the arts— but are not the arts very inferior things to virtue and happiness—the man would be very dead to all generous feelings who would rather see pretty pictures and statues, than a million free and happy men.

It will be said, that my design is to make you dissatisfied with your present condition, and that I wish to raise a Rebellion. But how stupid and sottish must those men be, who think that violence and uneasiness of mind have any thing to do with forwarding the views of peace, harmony and happiness. They should know that nothing was so well-fitted to produce slavery, tyranny, and vice, as the violence which is attributed to the friends of liberty, and which the real friends of liberty are the only persons who disdain.—As to your being dissatisfied with your present condition, any thing that I may say is certainly not likely to increase that dissatisfaction. I have advanced nothing concerning your situation, but its real case, but what may be proved to be true. I defy any one to point out a falsehood that I have uttered in the course of this address. It is

impossible but the blindest among you must see that every thing is not right. This sight has often pressed some of the poorest among you to take something from the rich man's store by violence, to relieve his own necessities. I cannot justify, but I can pity him. I cannot pity the fruits of the rich man's intemperance, I suppose some are to be found who will justify him. This sight has often brought home to a day-labourer the truth which I wish to impress upon you, that all is not right. But I do not merely wish, to convince you that our present state is bad, but that its alteration for the better, depends on your own exertions and resolutions.

But he has never found out the method of mending it, who does not first mend his own conduct, and then prevail upon others to refrain from any vicious habits which they may have contracted—much less does the poor man suppose that wisdom as well as virtue is necessary, and that the employing his little time in reading and thinking, is really doing all that he has in his power to do towards the state, when pain and vice shall perish altogether.

I wish to impress upon your minds, that without virtue or wisdom, there can be no liberty or happiness; and that temperance, sobriety, charity, and independence of soul, will give you virtue—as thinking, enquiring, reading, and talking, will give you wisdom. Without the first, the last is of little use, and without the last, the first is a dreadful curse to yourselves and others.

I have told you what I think upon this subject, because I wish to produce in your minds an awe and caution necessary, before the happy state of which I have spoken can be introduced. This cautious awe, is very different from the prudential fear, which leads you to consider yourself as the first object, as on the contrary, it is full of that warm and ardent love for others that burns in your hearts, O Irishmen! and from which I have fondly hoped to light a flame that may illumine and invigorate the world!

I have said that the rich command, and the poor obey, and that money is only a kind of sign, which shews, that according to government the rich man has a right to command the poor man, or rather that the poor man being urged by having no money to get bread, is forced to work for the rich man, which amounts to the same thing. I have said that I think all this very wrong, and that I wish the whole business was altered. I have also said that we can expect little amendment in our own time, and that we must be contented to lay the foundation of liberty and happiness, by virtue and wisdom.—This then, shall be my work: let this be yours, Irishmen. Never shall that glory fail, which I am anxious that you should deserve. The glory of teaching to a world the first lessons of virtue and wisdom.

Let poor men still continue to work. I do not wish to hide from them a knowledge of their relative condition in society, I esteem it next impossible to do so. Let the work of the labourer, of the artificer—let the work of every one, however employed, still be exerted in its accustomed way. The public communication of this truth, ought in no manner, to impede the established usages of society; however, it is fitted in the end to do them away. For this reason it ought not to impede them, because if it did, a violent and unaccustomed, and sudden sensation would take place in all ranks of men, which would bring on violence, and destroy the possibility of the event of that, which in its own nature must be gradual, however rapid, and rational, however warm. It is founded on the reform of private men, and without individual amendment it is vain and foolish to expect the amendment of a state or government. I would advise them therefore, whose feelings this address may have succeeded in affecting, (and surely those feelings which charitable and temperate remarks excite, can never be violent and intolerant,) if they be, as I hope those whom poverty has compelled to class themselves in the lower orders of society, that they will as usual attend to their business and the discharge of those public or private duties, which custom

has ordained. Nothing can be more rash and thoughtless, than to shew in ourselves singular instances of any particular doctrine, before the general mass of the people are so convinced by the reasons of the doctrine, that it will be no longer singular. That reasons as well as feelings, may help the establishment of happiness and liberty, on the basis of wisdom and virtue, in¹⁴ our aim and intention.—Let us not be led into any means which are unworthy of this end, nor, as so much depends upon yourselves, let us cease carefully to watch over our conduct, that when we talk of reform it be not objected to us; that reform ought to begin at home. In the interval, that public or private duties and necessary labors allow, husband your time so, that you may do to others and yourselves the most real good. To improve your own minds is to join these two views: conversation and reading are the principal and chief methods of awakening the mind to knowledge and goodness. Reading or thought, will principally bestow the former of these—the benevolent exercise of the powers of the mind in communicating useful knowledge, will bestow an habit, of the latter, both united, will contribute so far as lays in your individual power to that great reform, which will be perfect and finished, the moment every one is virtuous and wise. Every folly refuted, every bad habit conquered, every good one confirmed, as¹⁵ so much gained in this great and excellent cause.

To begin to reform the Government, is immediately necessary, however good or bad individuals may be; it is the more necessary if they are eminently the latter, in some degree to palliate or do away the cause; as political institution has even¹⁶ the greatest influence on the human character, and is that alone which differences the Turk from the Irishman.

I write now not only with a view for Catholic Emancipation, but for universal emancipation; and this emancipation complete and unconditional, that shall comprehend every individual of whatever nation or principles,¹⁷ that shall fold in its embrace all that think and all that feel, the Catholic cause is subordinate, and its success preparatory to this great cause, which adheres to no sect but society, to no cause but that of universal happiness, to no party but the people. I desire Catholic Emancipation, but I desire not to stop here, and I hope there are few who having perused the preceding arguments who¹⁸ will not concur with me in desiring a complete, a lasting and a happy amendment. That all steps however good and salutary which may be taken, all reforms consistent with the English constitution that may be effectuated, can only be subordinate and preparatory to the great and lasting one which shall bring about the peace, the harmony, and the happiness of Ireland, England, Europe,¹⁹ the World. I offer merely an outline of that picture which your own hopes may gift with the colors of reality.

Government will not allow a peaceable and reasonable discussion of its principles by any association of men, who assemble for that express purpose. But have not human beings a right to assemble to talk upon what subject they please; can anything be more evident than that as government is only of use as it conduces to the happiness of the governed; those who are governed have a right to talk on the efficacy of the safe guard employed for their benefit. Can any topic be more interesting or useful, than on²⁰ discussing how far the means of government, is or could be

¹⁴ Probably a misprint for *is*.

¹⁵ Probably a misprint for *is*, or, it may be, for *are*.

¹⁶ Perhaps we should read *ever* in the place of *even*.

¹⁷ There is no comma here in the pamphlet.

¹⁸ *Sic*.

¹⁹ This comma is wanting in the pamphlet.

²⁰ *Sic*.

made in a higher degree effectual to producing the end. Although I deprecate violence, and the cause which depends for its influence on²¹ force, yet I can by no means think that assembling together merely to talk of how things go on, I can by no means think that societies formed for talking on any subject however government may dislike them, come in any way under the head of force or violence. I think that associations conducted in the spirit of sobriety, regularity, and thought, are one of the best and most efficient of those means which I would recommend for the production of happiness, liberty, and virtue.

Are you slaves, or are you men? if slaves, then crouch to the rod, and lick the feet of your oppressors, glory in your shame, it will become you if brutes to act according to your nature. But you are men, a real man is free, so far as circumstances will permit him. Then firmly, yet quietly resist. When one cheek is struck, turn²² the other to the insulting coward. You will be truly brave; you will resist and conquer. The discussion of any subject, is a right that you have brought into the world with your heart and tongue. Resign your heart's-blood, before you part with this inestimable privilege of man. For it is fit that the governed should enquire into the proceedings of Government, which is of no use the moment it is conducted on any other principle but that of safety. You have much to think of.—Is war necessary to your happiness and safety. The interests of the poor gain nothing from the wealth or extension of a nation's boundaries, they gain nothing from glory, a word that has often served as a cloak to the ambition or avarice of Statesmen. The barren victories of Spain, gained in behalf of a bigotted and tyrannical Government, are nothing to them. The conquests in India, by which England has gained glory indeed, but a glory which is not more honourable than that of Buonaparte, are nothing to them. The poor purchase this glory and this wealth, at the expence of their blood, and labor, and happiness, and virtue. They die in battle for this infernal cause. Their labor supplies money and food for carrying it into effect, their happiness is destroyed by the oppression they undergo, their virtue is rooted out by the depravity and vice that prevails throughout the army, and which under the present system, is perfectly unavoidable. Who does not know that the quartering of a regiment on any town, will soon destroy the innocence and happiness of its inhabitants. The advocates for the happiness and liberty of the great mass of the people, who pay for war with their lives and labor, ought never to cease writing and speaking until nations see as they must feel, the folly of fighting and killing each other in uniform, for nothing at all. Ye have much to think of. The state of your representation in the house, which is called the collective representation of the country demands your attention.

It is horrible that the lower classes must waste their lives and liberty to furnish means for their oppressors to oppress them yet more terribly. It is horrible that the poor must give in taxes what would save them and their families from hunger and cold; it is still more horrible that they should do this to furnish further means of their own abjectness and misery; but what words can express the enormity of the abuse that prevents them from choosing representatives with authority to enquire into the manner in which their lives and labor, their happiness and innocence is expended, and what advantages result from their expenditure which may counterbalance so horrible and monstrous an evil. There is an outcry raised against amendment; it is called innovation and condemned by many unthinking people who have a good fire and plenty to eat and drink;

²¹ In the original *a* for *on*.

²² In the original edition we read here *turn in the other*. The word *in* has been transferred to its proper place a few lines above,—*glory in your shame*,—whence it is missing in the original. Probably it was inserted as a correction in the margin of a proof, and was put in by the printer in the wrong place.

hard hearted or thoughtless beings how many are famishing whilst you deliberate, how many perish to contribute to your pleasures. I hope that there²³ are none such as these native Irishmen, indeed I scarcely believe that there are.

Let the object of your associations (for I conceal not my approval of assemblies conducted with regularity, *peaceableness* and thought for any purpose,) be the amendment of these abuses, it will have for its object universal Emancipation, liberty, happiness, and virtue. There is yet another subject, "the Liberty of the Press." The liberty of the press consists in a right to publish any opinion on any subject which the writer may entertain. The Attorney General in 1793 on the trial of Mr. Perry, said, "I never will dispute the right of any man fully to discuss topics respecting government, and honestly to point out what he may consider a proper remedy of grievances."—The Liberty of the Press, is placed as a sentinel to alarm us when any attempt is made on our liberties.—It is this centinel, O Irishmen, whom I now awaken! I create to myself a freedom which exists not. There is no liberty of the press, for the subjects of British government.

It is really ridiculous to hear people yet boasting of this inestimable blessing, when they daily see it successfully muzzled and outraged by the lawyers of the crown, and by virtue of what are called *ex-officio* informations. Blackstone says, that "if a person publishes what is improper, mischievous, or illegal, he must take the consequences of his own temerity;" and Lord Chief Baron Comyns defines libel as "a contumely, or reproach, published to the defamation of the Government, of a magistrate, or of a private person."—Now, I beseech you to consider the words, mischievous, improper, illegal, contumely, reproach, or defamation. May they not make that mischievous, or improper, which they please? Is not law with them, as clay in the potter's hand? Do not the words, contumely, reproach, or defamation, express all degrees and forces of disapprobation? It is impossible to express yourself displeas'd at certain proceedings of Government, or the individuals who conduct it, without uttering a reproach. We cannot honestly point out a proper remedy of grievances with safety, because the very mention of these grievances will be reproachful to the personages who countenance them; and therefore will come under a definition of libel. For the persons who thus directly or indirectly undergo reproach, will say for their own sakes, that the exposure of their corruption is mischievous and improper; therefore, the utterer of the reproach is a fit subject for three years imprisonment. Is there any thing like the Liberty of the Press, in restrictions so positive, yet pliant, as these. The little freedom which we enjoy in this most important point, comes from the clemency of our rulers, or their fear, lest public opinion alarmed at the discovery of its enslaved state, should violently assert a right to extension and diffusion. Yet public opinion may not always be so formidable, rulers may not always be so merciful or so timid: at any rate evils, and great evils do result from the present system of intellectual slavery, and you have enough to think of, if this grievance alone remained in the constitution of society. I will give but one instance of the present state of our Press.

A countryman of yours is now confined in an English gaol. His health, his fortune, his spirits, suffer from close confinement. The air which comes through the bars of a prison-grate, does not invigorate the frame nor cheer the spirits. But Mr. Finnerty, much as he has lost, yet retains the fair name of truth and honor. He was imprisoned for persisting in the truth. His judge told him on his trial, that truth and falsehood were indifferent to the law, and that if he owned the publication any consideration, whether the facts that it related were well or ill-founded, was totally irrelevant. Such is the libel law. Such the Liberty of the Press—there is enough to think

²³ In the original *their*, here and in the next line.

of. The right of withholding your individual assent to war, the right of choosing delegates to represent you in the assembly of the nation, and that of freely opposing intellectual power, to any measures of Government of which you may disapprove, are in addition to the indifference with which the legislative and the executive power ought to rule their conduct towards professors of every religion enough to think of.

I earnestly desire peace and harmony:—peace, that whatever wrongs you may have suffered, benevolence and a spirit of forgiveness should mark your conduct towards those who have persecuted you. Harmony, that among yourselves may be no divisions, that Protestants and Catholics unite in a common interest, and that whatever be the belief and principles of your countryman and fellow-sufferer, you desire to benefit his cause, at the same time that you vindicate your own, be strong and unbiassed by selfishness or prejudice—for Catholics, your religion has not been spotless, crimes in past ages have sullied it with a stain, which let it be your glory to remove. Nor Protestants, hath your religion always been characterized by the mildness of benevolence, which Jesus Christ recommended. Had it anything to do with the present subject I could account for the spirit of intolerance, which marked both religions; I will, however, only adduce the fact, and earnestly exhort you to root out from your own minds every thing which may lead to uncharitableness, and to reflect that yourselves, as well as your brethren, may be deceived. Nothing on earth is infallible. The Priests that pretend to it, are wicked and mischievous impostors; but it is an imposture which every one, more or less, assumes, who encourages prejudice in his breast against those who differ from him in opinion, or who sets up his own religion as the only right and true one, when no one is so blind as to see²⁴ that every religion is right and true, which makes men beneficent and sincere. I therefore, earnestly exhort both Protestants and Catholics to act in brotherhood and harmony, never forgetting, because the Catholics alone are heinously deprived of religious rights, that the Protestants and a certain rank of people, of every persuasion, share with them all else that is terrible galling and intolerable in the mass of political grievance.

In no case employ violence or falsehood, I cannot too often or too vividly endeavour to impress upon your minds, that these methods will produce nothing but wretchedness and slavery—that they will at the same time rivet the fetters, with which ignorance and oppression bind you to abjectness, and deliver you over to a tyranny, which shall render you incapable of renewed efforts. Violence will immediately render your cause a bad one. If you believe in a Providential God, you must also believe that he is a good one; and it is not likely, a merciful God would befriend a bad cause. Insincerity is no less hurtful than violence: those who are in the habits of either, would do well to reform themselves. A lying bravo will never promote the good of his country—he cannot be a good man. The courageous and sincere may, at the same time, successfully oppose corruption, by uniting their voice with that of others, or individually raise up intellectual opposition to counteract the abuses of Government and society. In order to benefit yourselves and your country to any extent, habits of sobriety, regularity, and thought, are previously so necessary, that without these preliminaries, all that you have done falls to the ground. You have built on sand. Secure a good foundation, and you may erect a fabric to stand for ever—the glory and the envy of the world!

I have purposely avoided any lengthened discussion on those grievances to which your hearts are from custom, and the immediate interest of the circumstances, probably most alive at present. I have not however wholly neglected them. Most of all have I insisted on their instant palliation

²⁴ *Sic*, but probably we should read *so blind as not to see*.

and ultimate removal; nor have I omitted a consideration of the means which I deem most effectual for the accomplishment of this great end. How far you will consider the former worthy of your adoption, so far shall I deem the latter probable and interesting to the lovers of human kind. And I have opened to your view a new scene—does not your heart bound at the bare possibility of your posterity possessing that liberty and happiness of which during our lives powerful exertions and habitual abstinence may give us a foretaste. Oh! if your hearts do not vibrate²⁵ at such as this; then ye are dead and cold—ye are not men.

I now come to the application of my principles, the conclusion of my address; and O Irishmen, whatever conduct ye may feel yourselves bound to pursue, the path which duty points to, lies before me clear and unobscured. Dangers may lurk around it, but they are not the dangers which lie beneath the footsteps of the hypocrite or temporizer.

For I have not presented to you the picture of happiness on which my fancy doats as an uncertain meteor to mislead honorable enthusiasm, or blindfold the judgment which makes virtue useful. I have not proposed crude schemes, which I should be incompetent to mature, or desired to excite in you any virulence against the abuses of political institution; where I have had occasion to point them out I have recommended moderation whilst yet I have earnestly insisted upon energy and perseverance; I have spoken of peace, yet declared that resistance is laudable; but the intellectual resistance which I recommend, I deem essential to the introduction of the millennium²⁶ of virtue, whose period every one can, so far as he is concerned, forward by his own proper power. I have not attempted to shew, that the Catholic claims or the claims of the people, to a full representation in Parliament, or any of those claims to real rights, which I have insisted upon as introductory to the ultimate claim of *all*, to universal happiness, freedom, and equality; I have not attempted, I say, to shew that these can be granted consistently with the spirit of the English Constitution: this is a point which I do not feel myself inclined to discuss, and which I consider foreign to my object. But I have shewn that these claims have for their basis, truth and justice, which are immutable, and which in the ruin of Governments shall rise like a Phoenix from their ashes.²⁷

Is any one inclined to dispute the possibility of a happy change in society? Do they say that the nature of man is corrupt, and that he was made for misery and wickedness? Be it so. Certain as are opposite conclusions, I will concede the truth of his, for a moment.—What are the means which I take for melioration? Violence, corruption, rapine, crime? Do I do evil, that good may come? I have recommended peace, philanthropy,²⁸ wisdom.—So far as my arguments influence, they will influence to these—and if there is any one now inclined to say, that "private vices are public benefits," and that peace, philanthropy, and wisdom, will, if once they gain ground, ruin the human race; he may revel in his happy dreams; though were *I* this man, I should envy Satan's Hell. The wisdom and charity of which I speak, are the *only* means which I will countenance, for the redress of your grievances, and the grievances of the world. So far as they operate, I am willing to stand responsible for their *evil* effects. I expect to be accused of a desire for renewing in Ireland the scenes of revolutionary horror, which marked the struggles of France twenty years

²⁵ In the original, *vitate*.

²⁶ In the original, *inroduction of the millenium*.

²⁷ Note. The excellence of the Constitution of Great Britain, appears to me, to be its indefiniteness and versatility, whereby it may be unresistingly accommodated to the progression of wisdom and virtue. Such accommodation I desire: but I wish for the cause before the effect. [Shelley's Note.]

²⁸ Mis-spelt *phiiianthrophy* here and in the two subsequent instances, in which the word occurs in this pamphlet.

ago. But it is the renewal of that unfortunate æra, which I strongly deprecate, and which the tendency of this address is calculated to obviate. For can burthens be borne for ever, and the slave crouch and cringe the while. Is misery and vice so consonant to man's nature, that he will hug it to his heart?—but when the wretched one in bondage, beholds the emancipator near, will he not endure his misery awhile with hope and patience, then, spring to his preserver's arms, and start into a man.

It is my intention to observe the effect on your minds, O Irishmen! which this address dictated by the fervency of my love, and hope will produce. I have come to this country to spare no pains where expenditure²⁹ may purchase your real benefit. The present is a crisis, which of all others, is the most valuable for fixing the fluctuation of public feeling; as far as my poor efforts may have succeeded in fixing it to virtue, Irishmen, so far shall I esteem myself happy. I intend this address as introductory to another. The organization of a society, whose institution shall serve as a bond to its members, for the purposes of virtue, happiness, liberty, and wisdom, by the means of intellectual opposition to grievances, would probably be useful. For the formation of such a society, I avow myself anxious.

Adieu, my friends! May every Sun that shines on your green Island see the annihilation of an abuse, and the birth of an Embryon of melioration! Your own hearts—may they become the shrines of purity and freedom, and never may smoke to the Mammon of unrighteousness, ascend from the unpolluted altar of their devotion!

POSTSCRIPT.

I have now been a week in Dublin, during which time I have endeavoured to make myself more accurately acquainted with the state of the public mind, on those great topics of grievances which induced me to select Ireland as a theatre, the widest and fairest, for the operations of the determined friend of religious and political freedom.

The result of my observations has determined me to propose, an association for the purposes of restoring Ireland to the prosperity which she possessed before the Union Act; and the religious freedom, which the involuntariness of faith, ought to have taught all monopolists of Heaven, long, long ago, that every one had a right to possess.

For the purpose of obtaining the Emancipation of the Catholics, from the penal laws that aggrieve them, and a Repeal of the Legislative Union act: and grounding upon the remission of the church-craft and oppression, which caused these grievances; *a plan of amendment and regeneration in the moral and political state of society, on a comprehensive and systematic philanthropy, which shall be sure, though slow in its projects; and as it is without the rapidity and danger of revolution, so will it be devoid of the time servingness of temporizing reform*—which in its deliberative capacity, having investigated the state of the government of England, shall oppose those parts of it, by intellectual force, which will not bear the touch-stone of reason.

For information respecting the principles which I possess, and the nature and spirit of the association which I propose, I refer the reader to a small pamphlet, which I shall publish on the subject, in the course of a few days.

I have published the above address (written in England) in the cheapest possible form, and have taken pains that the remarks which it contains, should be intelligible to the most unedu-

²⁹ In a letter to Godwin on the subject of this pamphlet (Hogg's Life, Vol. II, p. 95), Shelley explains that the word

cated minds. Men are not slaves and brutes, because they are poor: it has been the policy of the thoughtless, or wicked of the higher ranks, (as a proof of the decay, of which policy, I am happy to see the rapid success of a comparatively enlightened system of education,) to conceal from the poor the truths which I have endeavoured to teach them. In doing so, I have but translated my thoughts into another language; and as language is only useful as it communicates ideas, I shall think my style so far good, as it is successful as a means to³⁰ bring about the end which I desire, on any occasion, to accomplish.

A Limerick Paper, which I suppose, professes to support certain *loyal* and *John Bullish* principles of freedom—has, in an essay for advocating the Liberty of the Press, the following clause: "For lawless license of discussion never did we advocate, nor do we now."—What is lawless license of discussion? Is it not as indefinite as the words, *contumely*, *reproach*, *defamation*, that allow at present, such latitude to the outrages that are committed on the free expression of individual sentiment. Can they not see that what is rational will stand by its reason, and what is true stand by its truth, as all that is foolish will fall by its folly, and all that is false be controverted by its own falsehood.—Liberty gains nothing by the reform of politicians of this stamp, any more than it gains from a change of Ministers in London. What at present, is contumely and defamation, would at the period of this Limerick amendment, be "lawless license of discussion;" and such would be the mighty advantage which this doughty champion of liberty proposes to effect.

I conclude with the words of Lafayette—a name endeared, by its peerless bearer, to every lover of the human race. "For a nation to love Liberty it is sufficient that she knows it, to be free it is sufficient that she wills it."³¹

FINIS.

expenditure is used "in a moral sense."

³⁰ The word *to* is repeated in the original.

³¹ The final quotation marks are wanting in the pamphlet.

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Percy Bysshe Shelley
An Address to the Irish People
1812

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