
Home Rule in Ireland

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We can readily imagine that some one of our readers will ask, why write of home rule in Ireland? We hope to answer the question as we proceed.

The estimate is current that of the 60 million inhabitants of the United States, at least 10 million are Irish born and the immediate descendants of Irish born citizens. As a consequence, there are more Irishmen (we refer to blood rather than birth) in the United States than in Ireland. This fact of itself might be urged as a sufficient reason for writing of home rule in Ireland.

American statesmen and orators have vied with each other in pleading the claims of Greece to independence. To write and speak of home rule in Greece, to champion the cause of Grecian liberty, at one time challenged the brightest intellects of America. The theme stirred the great American heart to its profoundest depths. Said one,

Confident that I never appeared as the advocate of a more worthy cause than that of the afflicted Greeks, I shall address you on this occasion, with earnestness, and as my object is not to gratify the feelings of the ambitious, the appetites of the voluptuous, or the cravings of the avaricious; but to raise up the bowed down, to alleviate the sufferings of a whole people, to exalt in the estimation of mankind the character of our country, and, above all, to please God, I entertain no apprehension of disappointment.¹

If more than half a century ago, an American could thus discourse upon unhappy Greece, and plead for home rule for that Turk-cursed country, why should it be regarded singular for Americans in these

¹ William Brittingham Lacey, Discourse at St. Peter's Church, Albany, New York, April 20, 1828. Published in Lacey, *An Illustration of the Principles of Elocution: Designed for the Use of Schools*. Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1828; pg. 179. Lacey's work was frequently reprinted in 19th Century elocution textbooks.

later days to plead for home rule in Ireland? We quote still further from the oration of the American in the cause of Greece, and we ask the reader to substitute Ireland where “Greece” occurs, and note how eloquently the orator pleads for Ireland:

The calamities of unhappy Greece (Ireland) are not only great but without a parallel. The history of the world, from that awful moment in which God cursed this guilty globe, down to the present time, does not exhibit a more wretched people than the inhabitants of Greece (Ireland). Agitated by hope and apprehension; by momentary triumphs and numerous discomfitures; by the cheering prospects of foreign aid, and the mockery of their hopes; by internal enemies and outward foes, they present an assemblage of disasters unequalled in the annals of time.²

We submit that every word uttered by the orator more than fifty years ago in the interest of home rule in Greece, is today, and a thousand fold more emphatic, a plea for home rule in Ireland, and the American native born, regardless of ancestry, glorifies American institutions and the American character when he pleads for home rule in Ireland.

We have no desire to unduly eulogize the Irish nation, nor the Irish character, but if the one trait, that of love of liberty, be selected, then in the face of authentic history, we do not hesitate to declare, that Irishmen occupy a proud eminence above the Greeks. Unlike Greece, Ireland was never the home of art. In Ireland, the “rugged rock may not have taken on the forms of beauty under the hand of Irish genius.”³ Ireland was a wilderness when Greece was in the zenith of her glory. When Grecian philosophers, poets, statesmen, and warriors were educating, enrapturing and conquering the world, Ireland, the emerald gem of the sea, was in the grasp of savagery; but from the dawn of her redemption to the present, Irishmen have loved liberty, and amidst disasters and defeat, subjected to woes unutterable — exile, prisons, poverty, and famine, the fires of liberty were never quenched, nor were the days ever so dark, or the crushing curse of foreign invasion and domination ever so heavy, that Irishmen were not ready to make another effort for liberty, independence and home rule.

² *Ibid.*

³ The source of this quotation has not been identified.

If it were our purpose to write of Ireland's woes we could "a tale unfold," which would add tremendous force to the argument, why Ireland should have home rule, and awaken every slumbering energy of civilization, and make it cry out for justice to Ireland. Robbed of her land, robbed of her independence and nationality, her temples and shrines desecrated, and her people's devotion to their baptismal vows treated as a crime, the world stands aghast as it contemplates the worse than vandal ruin to be seen on all sides, and yet, amidst this unspeakable desolation, which defies hyperbole, to see a people still contending for independence and home rule, presents a picture of courage that sends a thrill of joy throughout all Christendom, and which must challenge the approval of heaven.

A writer says "Ireland is a part of the united kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The other part is Great Britain." And it should be added that Great Britain holds Ireland in subjection, and denies to the people home rule, that is the right to regulate their domestic affairs. As a result, Ireland is governed by foreigners. Home rule in Ireland does not mean the separation of Ireland from the British empire any more than home rule in any of the American states means a withdrawal from the Republic. It does not mean the disruption of the kingdom; it simply means that Irishmen shall have a parliament the same as Canada, and that all laws made for the regulation of Irish domestic affairs, shall be made by Irishmen in Ireland, rather than by Englishmen in England.

There are those who write for the American eye and ear in the interest of English rule in Ireland, who declare that when Irishmen take upon themselves the obligations of American citizenship, it is their duty to "discard the national sentiments in which they were nurtured." The proposition is preposterous on its face. An Irishman nurtured in the sentiment of liberty, independence, and home rule, emigrating to America, instead of discarding the "national sentiment," finds it indefinitely strengthened, because the sentiment is preeminently American. He becomes a good American, but retains, naturally, his abhorrence of despotism in Ireland, and just here, we introduce again an allusion to America's sympathy for Turk-cursed Greece. If it were wise and patriotic for Americans to exhibit a profound sympathy for the Greeks and contribute aid for their emancipation, why should it be thought improper for Americans, and especially Irish-Americans, to urge the emancipation of Ireland from British domination to the extent of introducing home rule in Ireland? Greek and

Turk were never more unlike and antagonistic than Irishmen and Englishmen. Nor did Greece ever suffer more from the invasion of the Turk than Irishmen from the invasion of the English.

Nothing is more frequent than to hear it said, that Irishmen are incapable of self-government. Fortunately, Americans do not have to go to Ireland to learn the Irish character. From the foundation of the government, Irishmen, native-born, and the descendants of Irishmen, have participated in American affairs. They have been in school, college, university, and on the battlefields, and everywhere have demonstrated their capabilities for self-government, for home rule, and in England, as well as America, history bears irrefragable proof of the towering talents of Irishmen, of their ability to stand in the van of the armies of progress and high civilization. Ireland's orators, statesmen, poets and warriors have commanded the admiration of the world, and the intimation that such qualifications of head and heart can flourish and benefit the world only under foreign banners, and cannot be utilized for the elevation of Irishmen at home, is to assert that which no honest man believes, and stands refuted by truth as luminous as the sun and as resistless as a tidal wave.

Americans can well afford to plead for home rule in Ireland, because it is a fundamental idea in American government. It means justice to all. An American, we care not who he is, nor how lowly his condition, who stands forth with the ballot in his hand, becomes a figure of surpassing grandeur. Starting from the least important of all the law-making bodies to the august Senate, he has a voice, and participates in home rule — and this divine right, if cloven down, reduces him to a vassal. It is a right which the poor man should hold as sacred, because it creates an equality of conditions which nothing else can bestow. To demand this for Irishmen in Ireland, for Poles in Poland, and Greeks in Greece is worthy of Americans, and when Americans no longer feel an interest in the struggles of the oppressed for freedom, from that day will date the decline of the American idea, a calamity more direful than pestilence or war.

It were supreme folly as well as base injustice to oppose home rule in Ireland, because Englishmen contend that the conferring of such a right would be antagonistic to England's interests. To enthrone the right can only antagonize the wrong, and such is the view of Gladstone, than whom England has produced no greater statesman, and the fact that Gladstone has joined his mighty power with Parnell's, to secure for Ireland the inalienable right of home rule, should carry

conviction to every wavering mind, that home rule in Ireland means the strengthening of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

It would not be difficult to strengthen our advocacy of home rule in Ireland by particular reference to the land laws of Ireland by virtue of which the tenant farmers of that unhappy country, are often reduced to the verge of famine, and to depict, as the result of such legislation, the horrors of eviction, but any discussion of such topics would extend this article beyond prudent length; our purpose is accomplished if we have demonstrated that it is patriotic for Americans to feel a profound sympathy for Irishmen in their struggle for home rule, a right which Americans regard as sacred, and which would be surrendered only amidst such convulsions as would demonstrate to the world that the last hope of freedom had perished.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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