

# The Sovereign People

By P.H. Pearse

**POBLACHT NA hÉIREANN.**

**THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT  
OF THE**

**IRISH REPUBLIC  
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.**

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations  
from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland through us summons her

# **‘The Sovereign People’**

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## **PREFACE**

This pamphlet concludes the examination of the Irish definition of freedom which I promised in *Ghosts*. For my part, I have no more to say.

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National independence involves national sovereignty. National sovereignty is twofold in its nature. It is both internal and external. It implies the sovereignty of the nation over all its parts, over all men and things within the nation; and it implies the sovereignty of the nation as against all other nations. Nationality is a spiritual fact; but nationhood includes physical freedom, and physical power in order to the maintenance of physical freedom, as well as the spiritual fact of nationality. This physical freedom is necessary to the healthy life, and may even be necessary to the continued existence of the nation. Without it the nation droops, withers, ultimately perhaps dies; only a very steadfast nation, a nation of great spiritual and intellectual strength like Ireland, can live for more than a few generations in its absence, and without it even so stubborn a nation as Ireland would doubtless ultimately perish. Physical freedom, in brief, is necessary to sane and vigorous life; for physical freedom means precisely control of the conditions that are necessary to sane and vigorous life. It is obvious that these things are partly material, and that therefore national freedom involves control of the material things which are essential to the continued physical life and freedom of the nation. So that the nation's sovereignty extends not only to all the material possessions of the nation, the nation's soil and all its resources, all wealth and all wealth-producing processes within the nation. In other words, no private right to property is good as against the public right of the nation. But the nation is under a moral obligation so to exercise its public right as to secure strictly equal rights and liberties to every man and woman within the nation. The whole is entitled to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole, but this is to be pursued exactly for the end that each of the individuals composing the whole may enjoy happiness and prosperity, the maximum amount of happiness and prosperity consistent with the happiness and prosperity of all the rest.

One may reduce all this to a few simple propositions:

1. The end of freedom is human happiness.
2. The end of national freedom is individual freedom; therefore, individual happiness.
3. National freedom implies national sovereignty.

4. National sovereignty implies control of all the moral and material resources of the nation.

I have insisted upon the spiritual fact of nationality; I have insisted upon the necessity of physical freedom in order to the continued preservation of that spiritual fact in a living people; I now insist upon the necessity of complete control of the material resources of the nation in order to the completeness of that physical freedom. And here I think I give what has been called '*the material basis of freedom*' its proper place and importance. A nation's material resources are not the nation, any more than a man's food is the man; but the material resources are as necessary to the nation's life as the man's food to the man's life.

And I claim that the nation's sovereignty over the nation's material resources is absolute; but that obviously such sovereignty must be exercised for the good of the nation and without prejudice to the rights of other nations, since national sovereignty, like everything else on earth, is subject to the laws of morality.

Now, the good of the nation means ultimately the good of the individual men and women who compose the nation. Physically considered, what does a nation consist of? It consists of its men and women; of all its men and women, without any exceptions. Every man and every woman within the nation has normally equal rights, but a man or a woman may forfeit his or her rights by turning recreant to the nation. No class in the nation has rights superior to those of any other class. No class in the nation is entitled to privileges beyond any other class except with the consent of the nation. The right and privilege to make laws or to administer laws does not reside in any class within the nation; it resides in the whole nation, that is, in the whole people, and can be lawfully exercised only by those to whom it is delegated by the whole people. The right to the control of the material resources of a nation does not reside in any individual or in any class of individuals; it resides in the whole people and can be lawfully exercised only by those to whom it is delegated by the whole people, and in the manner in which the whole people ordains. Once more, no individual right is good as against the right of the whole people; but the people, in exercising its sovereign rights, is morally bound to consider individual rights, to do equity between itself and each of the individuals that compose it as well as to see that equity is done between individual and individual.

To insist upon the sovereign control of the nation over all the property within the nation is not to disallow the right to private property. It is for the nation to determine to what extent private property may be held by its members, and in what items of the nation's material resources private property shall be allowed. A nation may, for instance, determine, as the free Irish nation determined and enforced for many centuries, that private ownership shall not exist in land; that the whole of a nation's soil is the public property of the nation. A nation may determine, as many modern nations have determined, that all the means of transport within a nation, all its railways and waterways, are the public property of the nation to be administered by the nation for the general benefit. A nation may go further and determine that all sources of wealth whatsoever are the property of the nation, that each individual shall give his service for the nation's good, and shall be adequately provided for by



the nation, and that all surplus wealth shall go to the national treasury to be expended on national purposes, rather than be accumulated by private persons. There is nothing divine or sacrosanct in any of these arrangements; they are matters of purely human concern, matters for discussion and adjustment between the members of a nation, matters to be decided upon finally by the nation as a whole; and matters in which the nation as a whole can revise or reverse its decision whenever it seems good in the common interests to do so. I do not disallow the right to private property; but I insist that all property is held subject to the national sanction.

And I come back again to this: that the people are the nation; the whole people, all its men and women; and that laws made or acts done by anybody purporting to represent the people but not really authorised by the people, either expressly or impliedly, to represent them and to act for them do not bind the people; are a usurpation, an impertinence, a nullity. For instance, a Government of capitalists, or a Government of clerics, or a Government of lawyers, or a Government of tinkers, or a Government of red-headed men, or a Government of men born on a Tuesday, does not represent the people, and cannot bind the people, unless it is expressly or impliedly chosen and accepted by the people to represent and act for them; and in that case it becomes the lawful government of the people, and continues such until the people withdraw their mandate. Now, the people, if wise, will not choose the makers and administrators of their laws on such arbitrary and fantastic grounds as the possession of capital, or the possession of red heads, or the having been born on a Tuesday; a Government chosen in such a manner, or preponderatingly representing (even if not so deliberately chosen) capitalists, red headed men, or men born on a Tuesday will inevitably legislate and govern in the interests of capitalists, red-headed men, or men born on a Tuesday, as the case may be. The people, if wise, will choose as the makers and administrators of their laws men and women actually and fully representative of all the men and women of the nation, the men and women of no property equally with the men and women of property; they will regard such an accident as the possession of '*property*', '*capital*', '*wealth*' in any shape, the possession of what is called '*a stake in the country*', as conferring no more right to represent the people than would the accident of possessing a red head or the accident of having been born on a Tuesday. And in order that the people may be able to choose as a legislation and as a government men and women really and fully representative of themselves, they will keep the choice actually or virtually in the hands of the whole people; in other words, while, in the exercise of their sovereign rights they may, if they will, delegate the actual choice to somebody among them, i.e., adopt a '*restricted franchise*', they will, if wise, adopt the widest possible franchise – give a vote to every adult man and woman of sound mind. To restrict the franchise in any respect is to prepare the way for some future usurpation of the rights of the sovereign people. The people, that is, the whole people, must remain sovereign not only in theory, but in fact.

I assert, then, the divine right of the people, '*God's grant to Adam and his poor children for ever*', to have and to hold this good green earth. And I assert the sovereignty and the sanctity of the nations, which are the people embodied and organised. The nation is a natural division, as natural as the family, and as inevitable. That is one reason why a nation is holy and why an empire is not holy. A

nation is knit together by natural ties, ties mystic and spiritual, and ties human and kindly; an empire is at best held together by ties of mutual interest, and at worst by brute force. The nation is the family in large; an empire is a commercial corporation in large. The nation is of God; the empire is of man – if it be not of the devil.

The democratic truths that I have just stated are implicit in Tone and in Davis, though there was this difference between the two men, that Tone had a manly contempt for *'the gentry (as they affect to call themselves)'*, while Davis had a little sentimental regard for them. But Davis loved the people, as every Nationalist must love the people, seeing that the people are the nation; his nationalism was not mere devotion to an abstract idea, it was a devotion to the actual men and women who make up this nation of Ireland, a belief in their rights, and a resolve to establish them as the owners of Ireland and the masters of all her destinies. There is no other sort of nationalism than this, the nationalism which believes in and seeks to enthrone the sovereign people. Tone had appealed to *'that numerous and respectable class, the men of no property'*, and in that gallant and characteristic phrase he had revealed his perception of a great historic truth, namely, that in Ireland *'the gentry (as they affect to call themselves)'* have uniformly been corrupted by England, and the merchants and middle-class capitalists have, when not corrupted, been uniformly intimidated, whereas the common people have for the most part remained unbought and unterrified. It is, in fact, true that the repositories of the Irish tradition, as well the spiritual tradition of nationality as the kindred tradition of stubborn physical resistance to England, have been the great, splendid, faithful, common people – that dumb multitudinous throng which sorrowed during the penal night, which bled in '98, which starved in the Famine; and which is here still – what is left of it – unbought and unterrified. Let no man be mistaken as to who will be lord in Ireland when Ireland is free. The people will be lord and master. The people who wept in Gethsemane, who trod the sorrowful way, who died naked on a cross, who went down into hell, will rise again glorious and immortal, will sit on the right hand of God, and will come in the end to give judgment, a judge just and terrible.

Tone sounded the gallant reveillé of democracy in Ireland. The man who gave it its battle-cries was James Fintan Lalor.

Lalor was a fiery spirit, as of some angelic missionary, imprisoned for a few years in a very frail tenement, drawing his earthly breath in pain; but strong with a great spiritual strength and gifted with a mind which had the trenchant beauty of steel. What he had to say for his people (and for all mankind) was said in a very few words. This gospel of the Sovereign People that Fintan Lalor delivered is the shortest of the gospels; but so precious is it, so pregnant with meaning in its every word, that to express its sense one would have to quote it almost as it stands; which indeed one could do in a tract a very little longer than this. No one who wrote as little as Lalor has ever written so well. In his first letter he laments that he has never learned the art of literary expression; in *The Faith of a Felon* he says that he has all his life been destitute of books. Commonly, it is by reading and writing that a man learns to write greatly. Lalor, who had read little and written nothing, wrote greatly from the moment he began to write. The Lord God must have inspired the poor crippled recluse, for no mortal man could of himself have uttered the things he uttered.

James Fintan Lalor, in Duffy's phrase '*announced himself*' in Irish politics in 1847, and he announced himself '*with a voice of assured confidence and authority.*' In a letter to Duffy, which startled all the Young Irelanders and which set Mitchel's heart on fire, he declared himself one of the people, one who therefore knew the people: and he told the young men that there was neither strength nor even a disposition among the people to carry on O'Connell's Repeal, but that there was strength in the people to carry national independence if national independence were associated with something else.

*A mightier question is in the land – one beside which Repeal dwarfs down to a petty parish question; one on which Ireland may not alone try her own right but try the right of the world; on which she would be not merely an asserter of old principles, often asserted, and better asserted before her, an humble and feeble imitator and follower of other countries – but an original inventor, propounder, and propagandist, in the van of the earth, and heading the nations; on which her success or her failure alike would never be forgotten by man, but would make her for ever a lodestar of history; on which Ulster would be not 'on her flank' but at her side, and on which, better and best of all, she need not plead in humble petitions her beggarly wrongs and how beggarly she bore them, nor plead any right save the right of her MIGHT. . .*

*Repeal may perish with all who support it sooner than I will consent to be fettered on this question, or to connect myself with any organised body that would ban or merge, in favour of Repeal or any other measure, that greatest of all our rights on this side of heaven – God's grant to Adam and his poor children for ever, when He sent them from Eden in His wrath and bid them go work for their bread. Why should I name it?*

His proposals as to means thrilled the young orators and debaters as the ringing voice of an angel might thrill them:

*As regards the use of none but legal means, any means and all means might be made illegal by Act of Parliament, and such pledge, therefore, is passive obedience. As to the pledge of abstaining from the use of any but moral force, I am quite willing to take such pledge, if, and provided, the English Government agree to take it also; but 'if not, not.' Let England pledge not to argue the question by the prison, the convict-ship, or the halter; and I will readily pledge not to argue it in any form of physical logic. But dogs tied and stones loose are no bargain. Let the stones be given up; or unmuzzle the wolf-dog. . .*

At Duffy's invitation Lalor developed his doctrines in two letters to *The Nation*, one addressed to the landlords and one to the people. To the landlords he spoke this ominous warning:

*Refuse it to be Irishmen, and you commit yourself to the position of paupers, to the mercy of English Ministers and English members; you throw your very existence on English support, which England soon may find too costly to afford; you lie at the feet of events; you lie in the way of a people and the movement of events and the march of a people shall be over you.*

The essence of Lalor's teaching is that the right to the material ownership of a nation's soil co-exists with the right to make laws for the nation and that both are inherent in the same authority, the Sovereign People. He held in substance that Separation from England would be valueless unless it put the people – the actual people and not merely certain rich men – of Ireland in effectual ownership and possession of the soil of Ireland; as for a return to the status quo before 1800, it was to him impossible and unthinkable. When Mitchel's United Irishman was suppressed in 1848, Martin's Irish Felon, with Lalor as its standard-bearer and spokesman, stepped into the breach; and in an article entitled The Rights of Ireland in the first issue of that paper (June 24, 1848) Lalor delivered the new gospel. A long passage must be quoted in full; but it can be quoted without any comment, for it is self-luminous:

*Without agreement as to our objects we cannot agree on the course we should follow. It is requisite the paper should have but one purpose; and the public should understand what that purpose is. Mine is not to repeal the Union, or restore Eighty-two. This is not the year '82, this is the year '48. For repeal I never went into 'Agitation', and will not go into insurrection. On that question, I refuse to arm, or to act in any mode; and the country refuses. O'Connell made no mistake when he pronounced it not worth the price of one drop of blood; and for myself, I regret it was not left in the hands of Conciliation Hall, whose lawful property it was, and is. Moral force and repeal, the means and the purpose, were just fitted to each other – Arcades ambo, balmy Arcadians both. When the means were limited, it was only proper and necessary to limit the purpose. When the means were enlarged, that purpose ought to have been enlarged also. Repeal, in its vulgar meaning, I look on as utterly impracticable by any mode of action whatever; and the constitution of '82 was absurd, worthless, and worse than worthless. The English Government will never concede or surrender to any species of moral force whatsoever; and the country peasantry will never arm and fight for it – neither will I. If I am to stake life and fame, it must assuredly be for something better and greater, more likely to last, more likely to succeed, and better worth success. And a stronger passion, a higher purpose, a nobler and more needful enterprise is fermenting in the hearts of the people. A mightier question moves Ireland to-day than that of merely repealing the Act of Union. Not the constitution that Wolfe Tone died to abolish, but the constitution that Tone died to obtain – independence; full and absolute independence for this island, and for every man within this island. Into no movement that would leave an enemy's garrison in possession of all our lands, masters of our liberties, our lives, and all our means of life and happiness – into no such movement will a single man of the greycoats enter with an armed hand,*

*whatever the town population may do. On a wider fighting field, with stronger positions and greater resources than are afforded by the paltry question of Repeal, must we close for our final struggle with England, or sink and surrender.*

*Ireland her own – Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky. The soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland, to have and hold from God alone who gave it – to have and to hold to them and their heirs forever, without suit or service, faith or fealty, rent or render, to any power under Heaven. . . . When a greater and more ennobling enterprise is on foot, every inferior and feebleness project or proceeding will soon be left in the hands of old women, of dastards, imposters, swindlers, and imbeciles. All the strength and manhood of the island – all the courage, energies, and ambition – all the passion, heroism, and chivalry – all the strong men and strong minds – all those that make revolutions will quickly desert it, and throw themselves into the greater movement, throng into the larger and loftier undertaking, and flock round the banner that flies nearest the sky. There go the young, the gallant, the gifted, the daring; and there, too, go the wise. For wisdom knows that in national action littleness is more fatal than the wildest rashness; that greatness of object is essential to greatness of effort, strength, and success; that a revolution ought never to take its stand on low or narrow ground, but seize on the broadest and highest ground it can lay hands on; and that a petty enterprise seldom succeeds. Had America aimed or declared for less than independence, she would, probably, have failed, and been a fettered slave to-day.*

*Not to repeal the Union, then, but the conquest – not to disturb or dismantle the empire, but to abolish it utterly for ever – not to fall back on '82, but act up to '48 – not to resume or restore an old constitution, but found a new nation and raise up a free people, and strong as well as free, and secure as well as strong, based on a peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land – this is my object, as I hope it is yours; and this, you may rest assured, is the easier, as it is the nobler and more pressing enterprise.*

Lalor proceeds to develop his teaching as to the ownership of the soil of Ireland by its people:

*The principle I state, and mean to stand upon, is this: that the entire ownership of Ireland, moral and material, up to the sun and down to the centre, is vested of right in the people of Ireland; that they, and none but they, are the land-owners and law-makers of this island; that all laws are null and void not made by them, and all titles to land invalid not conferred or confirmed by them, and that this full right of ownership may and ought to be asserted by any and all means which God has put in the power of man. In other, if not plainer words, I hold and maintain that the entire soil of a country belongs of right to the entire people of that country, and is the rightful property, not of any one class, but of*



*the nation at large, in full effective possession, to let to whom they will, on whatever tenures, terms, rents, services, and conditions they will; one condition, however, being unavoidable and essential, the condition that the tenant shall bear full, true, and undivided fealty and allegiance to the nation, and the laws of the nation whose lands he holds, and own no allegiance whatsoever to any other prince, power, or people, or any obligation of obedience or respect to their will, orders, or laws. I hold, further, and firmly believe, that the enjoyment by the people of this right of first ownership of the soil is essential to the vigour and vitality of all other rights, to their validity, efficacy, and value; to their secure possession and safe exercise. For let no people deceive themselves, or be deceived by the words, and colours, and phrases, and forms of a mock freedom, by constitutions, and charters, and articles, and franchise. These things are paper and parchment, waste and worthless. Let laws and institutions say what they will, this fact will be stronger than all laws, and prevail against them – the fact that those who own your lands will make your laws, and command your liberties and your lives. But this is tyranny and slavery; tyranny in its widest scope and worst shape; slavery of body and soul, from the cradle to the coffin – slavery with all its horrors, and with none of its physical comforts and security; even as it is in Ireland, where the whole community is made up of tyrants, slaves, and slave-drivers. . .*

As to the question of dealing with land-owners, Lalor re-echoes Tone and Davis:

*There are, however, many landlords, perhaps, and certainly a few, not fairly chargeable with the crimes of their order; and you may think it hard they should lose their lands. But recollect the principle I assert would make Ireland, in fact, as she is of right, mistress and queen of all those lands; that she, poor lady, had ever a soft heart and grateful disposition; and that she may, if she please, in reward of allegiance, confer new titles or confirm the old. Let us crown her a queen; and then – let her do with her lands as a queen may do.*

*In case of any existing interest, of what nature soever, I feel assured that no question but one would need to be answered. Does the owner of that interest assent to swear allegiance to the people of Ireland, and to hold in fee from the Irish nation? If he assent he may be assured he will suffer no loss. No eventual or permanent loss I mean; for some temporary loss he must assuredly suffer. But such loss would be incidental and inevitable to any armed insurrection whatever, no matter on what principle the right of resistance should be resorted to. If he refuses, then I say – away with him – out of this land with him – himself and all his robber rights and all the things himself and his rights have brought into our island – blood and tears, and famine, and the fever that goes with famine.*

In the issue of the *Irish Felon* for July 8, Lalor, expecting suppression and arrest, wrote *The Faith of a Felon* – a statement which, ill-framed and ill-connected though he knew it to be, he firmly believed to ‘*carry the fortunes of Ireland*’, and sent ‘*forth to its fate, to conquer or be conquered.*’ It was conquered for the time, but, like such

immortal things, it was destined to rise again. In it Lalor re-affirmed his principles and re-stated his programme. The idea of the ownership of the soil by the whole people, which is his essential contribution to modern political thought, was in this statement put more clearly even than before:

*What forms the right of property in land? I have never read in the direction of that question. I have all my life been destitute of books. But from the first chapter of Blackstone's second book, the only page I ever read on the subject, I know that jurists are unanimously agreed in considering 'first occupancy' to be the only true original foundation on the right of property and possession of land.*

*Now, I am prepared to prove that 'occupancy' wants every character and quality that could give it moral efficacy as a foundation of right. I am prepared to prove this, when 'occupancy' has first been defined. If no definition can be given, I am relieved from the necessity of showing any claim founded on occupancy to be weak and worthless.*

*To any plain understanding the right of private property is very simple. It is the right of man to possess, enjoy, and transfer the substance and use of whatever HE HAS HIMSELF CREATED. This title is good against the world; and it is the sole and only title by which a valid right of absolute private property can possibly vest.*

*But no man can plead any such title to a right of property in the substance of the soil.*

*The earth, together with all it spontaneously produces, is the free and common property of all mankind, of natural right, and by the grant of God – and all men being equal, no man, therefore, has a right, to appropriate exclusively to himself any part or portion thereof, except with and by the common consent and agreement of all other men.*

*The sole original right of property in land which I acknowledge to be morally valid, is this right of common consent and agreement. Every other I hold to be fabricated and fictitious, null, void, and of no effect.*

As for Lalor's programme of action, it was in brief:

1. To refuse all rent and arrears beyond the value of the overplus of harvest remaining after due provision for the tenants' subsistence for twelve months.
2. To resist eviction under the English law of ejection.
3. To refuse all rent to the usurping proprietors, until the people, the true proprietors, had decided in national congress what rents were to be paid, and to whom.

4. That the people should decide that rents should 'be paid to themselves, the people, for public purposes, and for behoof and benefit of them, the entire general people.'

Lalor saw clearly that this programme might, and almost certainly would, lead to armed revolution. If so –

*Welcome be the will of God. We must only try to keep our harvest, to offer a peaceful, passive resistance, to barricade the island, to break up the roads, to break down the bridges – and, should need be, and favourable occasions offer, surely we may venture to try the steel...*

*It has been said to me that such a war, on the principles I propose, would be looked on with detestation by Europe. I assert the contrary. I say such a war would propagate itself throughout Europe. Mark the words of this prophecy: – The principle I propound goes to the foundations of Europe, and, sooner or later, will cause Europe to outrise. Mankind will yet be masters of the earth. The rights of the people to make the laws – this produced the first great modern earth-quake, whose latest shocks, even now, are heaving in the heart of the world. The right of the people to own the land – this will produce the next. Train your hands, and your son's hands, gentlemen of earth, for you and they will yet have to use them. I want to put Ireland foremost, in the van of the world, at the head of the nations – to set her aloft in the blaze of the sun, and to make her for ages the lodestar of history. Will she take the path I point out – the path to be free, and famed, and feared, and followed – the path that goes sunward? . . .*

A fortnight later, in the *Irish Felon* for July 22, Lalor wrote the article *Clearing the Decks*, which was intended to declare the revolution. It was worthy of a braver response than it received:

*If Ireland be conquered now – or what would be worse – if she fails to fight, it will certainly not be the fault of the people at large, of those who form the rank and file of the nation. The failure and fault will be that of those who have assumed to take the office of commanding and conducting the march of a people for liberty without, perhaps, having any commission from nature to do so, or natural right, or acquired requisite. The general population of this island are ready to find and furnish everything which can be demanded from the mass of a people – the members, the physical strength, the animal daring, the health, hardihood, and endurance. No population on earth of equal amount would furnish a more effective military conscription. We want only competent leaders – men of courage and capacity – men whom nature meant and made for leaders. . . These leaders are yet to be found. Can Ireland furnish them? It would be a sheer and absurd blasphemy against nature to doubt it. The first blow will bring them out. . .*

*In the case of Ireland now there is but one fact to deal with, and one question to be considered. The fact is this – that there are at present in occupation of our country some 40,000 armed men, in the livery and service of England; and the question is – how best and soonest to kill and capture these 40,000? . . .*

*Meanwhile, however, remember this – that somewhere, and somehow, and by somebody, a beginning must be made. Who strikes the first blow for Ireland? Who wins a wreath that will be green forever?*

That was Lalor's last word. The issue containing the article was seized, the *Irish Felon* suppressed, and Martin and Lalor arrested. In a few months Lalor was released from prison a dying man. From his sick bed he tried to rally the beaten forces; he actually went down into North Munster and endeavoured to lead the people. This effort – the almost forgotten rising of 1849 – failed. Lalor died in Dublin a few weeks after. But his word has marched on, conquering.

The doctrine and proposals of Fintan Lalor stirred John Mitchel profoundly. Mitchel was not a democrat by instinct, as Tone and Lalor were; he was not a revolutionary by process of thought, as Tone and Lalor were; he was not from the beginning of his public life a believer in the possibility and desirability of physical force, as Tone and Lalor were. He became all these things; and he became all these things suddenly. It was as if revolutionary Ireland, speaking through Lalor, had said to Mitchel, '*Follow me*', and Mitchel, leaving all things, followed. Duffy and others were amazed that the most conservative of the **Young Irelanders** should become the most revolutionary. They ought not to have been amazed. That deep and passionate man could not have been anything by halves. As well expect a Paul or a Teresa or an Ignatius Loyola to be a '*moderate*' Christian as John Mitchel, once that '*Follow me*' had been spoken, to be a '*moderate*' Nationalist. Mitchel was of the stuff of which the great prophets and ecstasies have been made. He did really hold converse with God; he did really deliver God's word to man, delivered it fiery-tongued.

Mitchel's is the last of the four gospels of the new testament of Irish nationality, the last and the fieriest and the most sublime. It flames with apocalyptic wrath, such wrath as there is nowhere else in literature. And it is because the man loved so well that his wrath was so terrible. It is foolish to say of Mitchel, as it has been said, that his is a gospel of hate, that hate is barren, that a nation cannot feed itself on hate without peril to its soul, or at least to the sanity and sweetness of its mind, that Davis, who preached love, is a truer leader and guide for Ireland than Mitchel, who preached hate.

The answer to this is – first, that love and hate are not mutually antagonistic but mutually complementary; that love connotes hate, hate of the thing that denies or destroys or threatens the thing beloved: that love of good connotes hate of evil, love of truth hate of falsehood, love of freedom hate of oppression; that hate may be as pure and good a thing as love, just as love may be as impure and evil a thing as hate; that hate is no more ineffective and barren than love, both being as necessary to moral sanity and growth as sun and storm are to physical life and growth. And, secondly, that Mitchel, the least apologetic of men, was at pains to explain that his

hate was not of English men and women, but of the English thing which called itself a government in Ireland, of the English Empire, of English commercialism supported by English militarism, a thing wholly evil, perhaps the most evil thing that there has ever been in the world. To talk of such hate as unholy, unchristian, barren, is to talk folly or hypocrisy. Such hate is not only a good thing, but is a duty.

When Mitchel's critics (or his own Doppelgänger, who was his severest critic) objected that his glorious wrath was merely destructive, a thing splendid in slaying, but without any fecundity or life-giving principle within it, Mitchel's answer was adequate and conclusive:

*. . . Can you dare to pronounce that the winds, and the lightnings, which tear down, degrade, destroy, execute a more ignoble office than the volcanoes and subterranean deeps that upheave, renew, recreate? Are the nether fires holier than the upper fires? The waters that are above the firmament, do they hold of Ahriman, and the waters that are below the firmament, of Ormuzd? Do you take up a reproach against the lightnings for that they only shatter and shiver, but never construct? Or have you a quarrel with the winds because they fight against the churches, and build them not? In all nature, spiritual and physical, do you not see that some powers and agents have it for their function to abolish and demolish and derange – other some to construct and set in order? But is not the destruction, then, as natural, as needful, as the construction? – Rather tell me, I pray you, which is construction – which destruction? This destruction is creation: Death is Birth and*

*'The quick spring like weeds out of the dead.'*

*Go to – the revolutionary Leveller is your only architect. Therefore, take courage, all you that Jacobins be, and stand upon your rights, and do your appointed work with all your strength, let the canting fed classes rave and shriek as they will – where you see a respectable, fair-spoken Lie sitting in high places, feeding itself fat on human sacrifices – down with it, strip it naked, and pitch it to the demons; whenever you see a greedy tyranny (constitutional or other) grinding the faces of the poor, join battle with it on the spot – conspire, confederate, and combine against it, resting never till the huge mischief come down, though the whole 'structure of society' come down along with it. Never you mind funds and stocks; if the price of the things called Consols depend on lies and fraud, down with them, too. Take no heed of 'social disorganisation'; you cannot bring back chaos – never fear; no disorganisation in the world can be so complete but there will be a germ of new order in it; sans-culottism, when she hath conceived, will bring forth venerable institutions. Never spare; work joyfully, according to your nature and function; and when your work is effectually done, and it is time for the counter operations to begin, why, then, you can fall a-constructing, if you have a gift that way; if not, let others do their work, and take your rest, having discharged your duty. Courage, Jacobins! for ye, too, are ministers of heaven. . .*



*I do believe myself incapable of desiring private vengeance; at least, I have never yet suffered any private wrong atrocious enough to stir up that sleeping passion. The vengeance I seek is the righting of my country's wrong, which includes my own. Ireland, indeed, needs vengeance; but this is public vengeance – public justice. Herein England is truly a great public criminal. England! all England, operating through her Government; through all her organised and effectual public opinion, press, platform, pulpit, Parliament, has done, is doing, and means to do, grievous wrong to Ireland. She must be punished; that punishment will, as I believe, come upon her by and through Ireland; and so will Ireland be avenged.*

This denunciation of woe against the enemy of Irish freedom is as necessary a part of the religion of Irish nationality as are Davis's pleas for love and concord between brother Irishmen. The Church that preaches peace and goodwill launches her anathemas against the enemies of peace and goodwill. Mitchel's gospel is part of the testament, even as Davis's is; it but reveals a different facet of the truth. A man must accept the whole testament; but a man may prefer Davis to Mitchel, just as a man may prefer the gospel according to St. Luke, the kindest and most human of the gospels, to the gospel of St. John.

Mitchel's teaching contains nothing that is definitely new and his. He accepted Tone; he accepted Davis; he accepted in particular Lalor; and he summed up and expressed all their teaching in a language transfigured by wrath and vision. Tone is the intellectual ancestor of the whole modern movement of Irish nationalism, of Davis, and Lalor, and Mitchel, and all their followers; Davis is the immediate ancestor of the spiritual and imaginative part of that movement, embodied in our day in the Gaelic League; Lalor is the immediate ancestor of the specifically democratic part of that movement, embodied to-day in the more virile labour organisations; Mitchel is the immediate ancestor of Fenianism, the noblest and most terrible manifestation of this unconquered nation.

And just as all the four have reached, in different terms, the same gospel, making plain in turn different facets of the same truth, so the movements I have indicated are but facets of a whole, different expressions, and each one a necessary expression, of the august, though denied, truth of Irish Nationhood; nationhood in virtue of an old spiritual tradition of nationality, nationhood involving Separation and Sovereignty, nationhood resting on and guaranteeing the freedom of all the men and women of the nation and placing them in effective possession of the physical conditions necessary to the reality and to the perpetuation of their freedom, nationhood declaring and establishing and defending itself by the good smiting sword. I who have been in and of each of these movements make here the necessary synthesis, and in the name of all of them I assert the forgotten truth, and ask all who accept it to testify to it with me, here in our day and, if need be, with our blood.

At the end of a former essay I set that prophecy of Mitchel's as to the coming of a time when the kindred and tongues and nations of the earth should give their banners to the wind; and his prayer that he, John Mitchel, might live to see it, and that on that great day of the Lord he might have breath and strength enough to stand

under Ireland's immortal Green. John Mitchel did not live to see it. He died, an old man, forty-years before its dawning. But the day of the Lord is here, and you and I have lived to see it.

And we are young. And God has given us strength and courage and counsel. May He give us victory.