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IRISH 1798 COLLECTION

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ADDRESS

FROM

MR. O'CONNOR

TO THE

FREE ELECTORS

OF THE

COUNTY OF ANTRIM.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED FOR THE BOOKSELLERS.

1797.

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FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE post-office is so immediately dependant on the government, that any production issuing thence, must be looked on as coming from the administration itself; in this light I have viewed the anonymous paper which has been so industriously distributed through the post-offices of the North, avowedly to deprive me of whatever share of your confidence I might have gained; and in this light I have given it an answer. Had I treated it with silent contempt, I should have hoped that its coming from an administration which had so deservedly forfeited the confidence of every Irishman, who values the liberties of his country, would have insured me from suffering, in your estimation, by the falsehood and calumny with which it abounds; but my respect for those invaluable censors, the press and the public opinion, the conscious integrity of my own heart, and the most perfect reliance on the virtue of the cause I espouse, prompts me to seize any occasion which affords an opportunity of vindicating it or myself from the aspersions of an administration, whose heaviest charge in their wretched production is, that at any time of my life I had been the advocate of them or their measures.

As the whole of the work is one continued tissue of misrepresentation and falsehood, a plain recital of facts will be the best means of giving it a full refutation.

After the question of regency, that memorable display of the infamy and principles of the factions of Ireland, some of the most considerable of them were forced into Irish parliamentary patriotism, by being stripped of the wages of their prostitution. I accepted a seat from my uncle Lord Longueville, in the chimerical hope that this crash between the factions and the government might be improved to the advantage of Ireland; but experience soon convinced me that nothing short of the establishment of a national government, a total annihilation of the factions, and their usurpations, and an entire abolition of religious distinctions, could restore to my country those rights and that liberty which had been so long a subject of traffic, under a regularly organized system of treason; and acting up to this conviction, from the day I accepted the seat from Lord L. to the day I resigned it, I earnestly intreated him to declare for a reform of parliament, and for the freedom of my catholic countrymen. The thanks which were given me by the Delegates of the catholics of Ireland, for the defence of them and their cause, so early as 1791, and the vote which I gave for their total emancipation against Lord Longueville and the government, in the beginning of 1793, gives the lie to the assertion of administration, that I was not the advocate of catholic freedom, until my having spoken on that subject in 1795; and so wholly is it unfounded in truth, that I have exerted myself in defence of the liberties of my country, because the government refused me a commissioner's place, that although Lord L. repeatedly pressed me to let him procure me a commissioner's place, I as often refused it, assuring him that it was contrary to my principles to accept the money of my impoverished countrymen, for the detestable treason of

betraying their rights, their industry, their manufactures and commerce; that for the bribe of a British pandar I should basely contribute to aggrandize his country, at the expence of every thing dear to my own; whilst so far from bartering my principles to better my fortune, though Lord L. pressed me to accept large sums of his own money, I declined them; and it is notorious he has disinherited me, for the open avowal of my political sentiments on the catholic question.

Being forced, in my own vindication, to speak of myself, I will leave you, my fellow-citizens, to judge of an administration, who by falsehood and calumny have attempted to widen a breach between me and connexions that was but too widely extended before; yet whilst they have given me an opportunity of proving to you that no consideration could induce me to abandon my principles, they shall never succeed in making me utter one unkind expression of a man whose wishes to promote me in life have left a grateful remembrance their malice shall never efface. Abandoned administration! who have trampled on the liberties of my country, do you presume to accuse me of dissuading my countrymen from arming to oppose an invasion, which yours and your accomplices' crimes have provoked? Is it that the inalienable rights of free-born men, to make their laws by delegates of their choice, should be bartered and sold by usurpers and traitors, that should persuade them to arm? Is it that our markets manufactures and commerce should be sold to that nation which appoints our government, and distributes our patronage, that I should persuade them to arm? Is it to support the Gunpowder Bill, which deprives them of arms, or the Convention Bill, which aims at

perpetuating the usurpation of rights, by proscribing the only obvious and orderly means to regain them, that I should persuade them to arm? Is it to support the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Bill, which has destroyed the bulwark of liberty by withholding the trial by jury, that I should persuade them to arm? Is it to rivet the bolts, or to guard the dungeons of their fellow-citizens, who, torn from their homes and their families by administration, vainly demand that trial by jury, which by proving their innocence, must establish its guilt, that I should persuade them to arm? Is it that a vile pandar of national honor and legislative duty should be invested with uncontrolled power over the opinion and persons of an injured, a gallant and generous people, that I should persuade them to arm? Or to crown all, is it under the auspices of the indemnified Carhampton, that I should persuade them to arm? Go impotents, to the Catholics, whose elevated hopes of all-glorious freedom you have been appointed to tauntingly blast, and if they should charge you with the crimes of your mission, although you cannot plead the having raised them to equal rights with their fellow-citizens, you can at least boast that you have levelled those rights to the standard, of Catholic thralldom. Hence, then, contemptible administration, from those you have insulted and levelled, to those whom you have raised, go to the monopolists of the representation of Ireland, and ask them to arm; go to those whom the continuance of the ~~the~~ stem of corruption enables to live in affluence, at the expence of that poverty and misery their treason has caused, ~~per~~ ask them to arm; go to those hussars of fees and exactions in the revenue, whose regular pay bears no proportion to their pillage and plunder, and command them to arm; go to those attornies and lawyers, who live by vil-

lainy, chicane, and fraud, under a system of complexity, finesse, and fiction, at the expence and ruin of those who are forced to employ them, and tell them they ought to arm. Go to those swarms of petty tyrants, perjured grand-jury-jobbers, army-contractors, tithe-proctors, and land-sharks, and tell them how necessary it is for them to be armed; go to the established clergy, who pocket those monstrous funds for instructing one-tenth of the nation, which should provide decent establishments for three such countries as Ireland, and tell them to preach to the nine-tenths who are excluded from this glorious constitution, to arm in its defence, or ask them to blow the expiring embers of religious dissention, and I will leave it to the inhabitants of Armagh, at length recovering from delusion, to judge of their zeal in this christian-like duty.

These, factious administration, are your natural allies: these are your strength; on these you may reckon, and although as devoted to systems which should be abolished, as apostates to national rights and national honour they count but too high; thank Heaven! they are as insignificant in numbers as in strength to those that are sound. Although the old volunteers have been discouraged, because they boldly threw off the open avowed dominion of Britain, and that these yeoman corps have been raised to support the concealed deadly influence she has gained by corruption and treason; although the old volunteers have been rejected because they extended the rights and liberties of their country, and that these corps have been set up to support laws subversive to both; yet when the systematic scheme of the British Minister, and of those vermin that have nested about the throne, to frame some new-modelled despotism on the

ruins of freedom, by the erecting of barracks, when those bills that have been passed year after year, when the late contempt of that only privilege of the commons which was left them, the granting of money, and the correspondent conduct of their creatures in this country, shall have been developed to that degree which would make resistance an indispensable duty; from my soul I believe that they would find themselves widely mistaken in the support they will meet from many of these corps they have raised. Are the people of Ireland so weak as to convert a threatened invasion from France into an expiation of the injustice, the crimes and oppression by which the temptation to make it was caused? or shall an invasion from France act like magic in changing the present affection of the people of Ireland for liberty, into an unbounded display of loyalty to a system of corruption and treason, by which the most happily gifted nation on earth has been made to contain more misery than any country in the creation? Away with delusion! Are the people of Ireland sure that the factions and administration who so earnestly press them to arise to repel the invasion of France, are not invaders themselves? Are we sure that their master and maker, the minister of Britain, has not invested them with enormous funds of corruption, to which our wretchedness has been made to contribute? Are we sure that these funds have not been distributed among traitors, in the heart of our island, for betraying the industry, manufactures, and commerce of the people of Ireland, to aggrandize those of Great Britain? Nay, are we not certain that every market in Great Britain is shut against every species of Irish industry, with the solitary exception of linen, whilst every manufacture of England has free access to every market in Ireland, without any

exemption whatever? With these facts in our view, what Irishman can doubt that to support the worst of invasions, the invasion of rights and of commerce, 15,000 English and Scotch have not been sent to invade us already? or can we be certain that the shambles of Germany have not been resorted to, to invade us with more? Compare the few troops they left us in the war against American freedom, when they had all Europe their foe, with the numbers they have sent us in this war against the freedom of France, when they had all Europe their ally; compare the weakness of Ireland, divided by religious dissension, when troops were so few, with the strength that union has given, when troops are so many. We cannot but see with whom they seek to contend. Could French invaders do worse than establish a system of pillage and treason within, that they may pillage and plunder without? Could they do worse than reject laws an unanimous people had fought, or than pass those they detested? Could they do worse than commit the personal liberty of the people of Ireland to two men without connexion or interest in the country, without responsibility or control? Could they do worse than withhold trials from Irish citizens cast into dungeons, to the destruction of their health, and the ruin of their property? Could they do worse than establish military magistrates throughout the nation, and indemnify those whose unfeeling souls had torn hundreds of Irish citizens from every endearing connexion in life, after depriving their habitations of every privilege due to the residence of free-born men, consigned them to the flames, turning their wives and their children to beggary and famine, exiling their husbands to fight against that freedom of which they had robbed them, on an element they disliked and in a cause they abhorred? Or could any thing be more alarming to a people who valued their liberties, than the

appointment of a man that could require such an indemnification, to be commander in chief of the army? Or to crown all, could any invaders do worse, that with powers to legislate for a limited time, under the form of constitutional order, destroy the constitution itself?

In vain shall the accomplices of the author of carnage inveigh against French fraternity, as long as Ireland exhibits so melancholy a picture of the fraternity they have adopted themselves. I will not compare the systems of fraternity in the East or West Indies, adopted by England and France; but I will compare the alliance which England had formed with France, she calls the natural enemy, with that she dictates to Ireland, she calls her brother and friend. In her alliance with France, she gave what she got, and reciprocity was the equitable basis on which it was made; whilst in her alliance with Ireland, she has taken all she could have asked or demanded, and she has given us exclusion in grateful return. On the scale of British fraternity, let her hirelings boast of British connexion. Too long a tyrant, she forgets her dominion has ceased. Too long her slaves, we must shew her we are resolved to be free. Had she ceased to maintain power by the accursed means of fomenting religious dissension; had she ceased to support factions, usurpers, and traitors; had she abandoned the false illiberal notion, that she gained more by our depression than by our exaltation; had she treated us like brothers and friends, I may, with confidence affirm, a more affectionate generous ally never existed, than she would have found Ireland to her. But if the existing fraternity, my fellow-citizens, be the bonds by which you wish a connexion with Britain, I am not a delegate fit for your choice, for though I stood alone in the com-

mons of Ireland, I would move the repeal of every law which binds us to England, on those or any such terms. I will neither be conquered by England or France: nor are we any more bound to a disadvantageous alliance to one than we are to the other; and before England, the factions of Ireland, and the administration, I speak it, if it is more the true interest of Ireland to form an alliance with France than with England, she is free to adopt it. The jargon of standing or falling with Britain is false; in the days that are past, we have always been *down*; it is time we should seek to be *up*! Rich in a population of 4,000,000 of a healthy and intelligent people; rich in her fertile soil; rich in her harbours and navigable rivers; rich in her favourable position between the old and new worlds; rich in her insular situation, without usurping dominion over any people upon earth; what interest, what cause, what pretext can the administration of Ireland assign for the blood and the wealth they have lavished, in a war commenced in despotism, conducted in ignorance, and ending only by ruin? With 800,000 gallant citizens, able to arm, is it that the English and Scotch have more to fight for in Ireland than the Irish themselves, that we cannot be trusted with self-defence? When in the unanointed republics of the Swiss they can defy the invasion of Germany, of France, and Sardinia, those warlike and powerful nations, by which they are bounded, by that law which obliges every citizen from eighteen to sixty years old, to be provided with arms, why cannot Ireland defy the whole world by a like obligation? Why has the Gunpowder Act which disarms our people, been passed? The answer is too plain for infatuation to mistake it. Happy for Ireland if the prime mover of mischief had borrowed the councils of that great and intuitive mind,

England is ruined by having neglected. Happy, could he and his minions be taught, in the language and wisdom of Fox, that there is more strength to be gained by gaining the confidence of the people of Ireland, than in 40,000 of the best forces of Europe. Let them give up corruption and they may safely disband the troops it has furnished; let them cease to narrow the limits of freedom, as the expansion of intellect demands that they should be extended; let them rest assured, that a system which cannot be supported without spies and informers, must soon be abandoned; instead of buying, of bribing, or of persecuting the press, let them strip falsehood of the advantages she gains by concealment and misrepresentation, and give to truth that light and publicity, with which she must ever prevail; let them recall those base orders throughout the post-offices, for violating the secrets of friendship, and betraying the credit of commerce; let them open the dungeons, by repealing those laws by which they are crowded; let them abolish what the chief magistrate's deputy calls the *mildness* of government, and give us an adequate representation for the basis of liberty, and I will stake my life on it, *no nation shall ever invade us!* But, alas! my fellow-citizens, I lament that the same infatuation, usurpation, and folly which have been so much the order of the day, will still prevent those equitable terms from being conceded: But mark me, the whole Irish fabrick is supported by that of Great Britain, whose progress in ruin can only be equalled by her infatuation.

If the principles of the French revolution are as wicked, as destructive, and as diabolical as the minister has represented them, why was it necessary to involve the people of England in the horrors and ruin of war, that

they may not be persuaded to adopt them? Is it that the extreme of vice is so seducing, that the most violent of remedies only could prevent a wise people from rushing to meet it? And though the minister has assigned, day after day, different objects for having involved them; and that every assertion on which he has founded his arguments of the day, have been belied by the facts of the morrow; still they have been deaf to the councils of his glorious opponent, which, as long as tradition continues must ever remain a wonderful instance of the efforts of genius and patriotism, to rescue a besotted and misguided people from destruction. The privileged and the rich, yielding to fear and corruption, have deserted this champion of liberty, to prostrate themselves at the feet of that minister, it was once their province to control: placing terror in the seat of reason, and sacrificing every species of industry to the manufacture of soldiers, they have looked to the bayonet of the mercenary for their only salvation. Presumptuous delusion! Do they imagine they can force back the current of public opinion? Is it by that corruption whose necessities must increase by geometrical measure, while its means must decrease in the same rapid proportion? Is it by a carnage which would exhaust the creation? Is it by oaths wrung from oppression? Know they not that the first oath of allegiance is from the king to the laws, the constitution and people; and that if swearing, *without consideration*, was binding, Charles could never have suffered, James have been excluded, nor a Brunswick have sitten on the throne! We know that king, lords, and commons exist but by the people's permission; if useful, their titles can never be questioned; if not, they can never be bolstered by swearing. Vain efforts to change the current of the human mind, like the noisy winds, which, to the shallow

fight, give a seeming current to the troubled surface, whilst with ponderous weight great ocean moves the tide with slow majestic pace to its predestined limits.

Although it were in nature to rescue Britain from impending destruction, it is not in nature that Ireland can be longer held by the disgraceful and ruinous vassalage by which she is bound. Much has been said of the loyalty of the South, contrasted with that of the North; if they mean loyalty to that system of government which has been adopted; to the jobbing of grand juries; to tithe, tithe-proctors, and land-pirates; to the annual exportation of two million worth of the produce of Ireland, to pay absentees, without any return; to the immoderate high rents and the low rate of wages; or to the enormous expence by which these corruptions are moved and maintained, I will answer for it, that the people of Leinster, of Munster, and Connaught, are as sensible of the misery and poverty these grievances have caused, and that they will go as far as the people of Ulster to get them redressed. I know the means which have been used to persuade the catholics of the South that the persecutions of the catholics in the North, which have been so diabolically fomented and protected in Armagh, were the acts of the presbyterians of the North; but I stake whatever credit I possess with my catholic and presbyterian countrymen, on the assurance I give to the presbyterians that the catholics of the South have buried in eternal oblivion all religious distinction; and in the assurance I give to the catholics that the crimes with which their presbyterian countrymen stand charged, and for which so many are dungeoned at this instant, is their zeal for the union of Irishmen amongst one another, without distinction of sect or religion. Charity is the essence of

christianity, it is the essence of all morality, and cannot by human laws be abolished. Trust me, my fellow-citizens, that as the minister of England perceives the dying convulsions of a country, on the destruction of whose liberty he has so long supported his power, he will be obliged to change his system in Ireland of tyranny and force, into concessions and conciliation; you will then see his minions exchanging the saucy flippancy with which they now insult and traduce you, into humiliation and meanness, with which they will endeavour to soothe you; the insolence of the coward, the sport of the droll, and the petulance of the puppy will soon evaporate into the insignificance from whence they have risen; but let not wretched palliatives induce you to ally your cause with corruption; let nothing short of a perfect representation satisfy you. With this admonition I leave you; but that I may not be suspected of seeking your confidence by any other means than the fullest disclosure of my political sentiments, I promise you, as soon as time will permit, that I will lay before you the best account of the state of our country my poor abilities will allow me to furnish. The best assurance I can give of my fidelity to you and your cause, is, that I believe in a better order of things; that those who violate the property and rights of others will forfeit their own, whilst those who respect the rights and property of others will be certain to have theirs respected in turn. With these sentiments, knowing that you had wisely determined never to interfere any more in elections, under the system of corruption and undue influence, I have offered my services to use every means in my power to effect its destruction, and finding, that from the monopoly of one aristocratic faction or another, yours was the only place of popular election I could hope to succeed in.

Think it not presumptuous, my countrymen, that one who loves liberty should seek her in the only asylum she has left; think it not presumptuous, my fellow-citizens, that one who will never outlive the threatened liberties of his country, should seek an advanced post where he may triumph in her cause, or fall in her defence. In contempt of calumny, UNITED with you in brotherly love and affection, and in the glorious cause of reform, I will ever remain your faithful friend and fellow-citizen.

ARTHUR O'CONNOR.

Belfast, Jan. 20, 1797.

FINIS.

