

James Fintan Lalor

Clearing The Decks

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It is never the mass of people that forms its real and efficient might. It is the men by whom the mass is moved and managed. All the great acts of history have been done by a very few men. Take half a dozen names out any revolution upon record, and what would have been the result.

Not Scotland, but Wallace, barred and baffled Edward. Not England, but Cromwell, struck a king from his seat. Not America, but six or eight American men, put stripes and stars on the banner of a nation. To quote examples, however, is needless; they must strike at once on every mind.

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 the island are ready to find and furnish everything which can be demanded from the mass of a people — the numbers, 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, not the praters and pretenders, and bustling botherbys of the old agitation. 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.

But very many of our present prominent leaders must first retire or be dismissed. These men must at once be got rid of utterly. They must. There is nothing else for it. They are stopping our way, clinging round our arms, giving us up to our enemies. Many of them come into this business from the mere desire of gaining little personal distinctions on safe terms, and at a cheap and easy rate of obtaining petty honours and offices — of making a small Dublin reputation — of creating a parish fame or a tea-table fame. They will never suffer the national movement to swell beyond the petty dimensions which they are able, themselves, to manage and command; and are therefore, a source not of strength, but of weakness. But for them we could walk down the utmost force of England in one month.

In a movement of the nature which had been going on for years in this country, it was impossible to prevent the intrusion into offices of command of that class of men who mar success instead of making it. Indeed it was into their hands those offices have been almost exclusively confided up to the present hour. This can hardly be called a mistake, for it was unavoidable. The movement, naturally and of necessity, belonged to them. It was of the mock-heroic order, the machinery of which none but mean hands could undertake or be competent to manage.

The class of men who make revolutions, and who



doubtless exist here as elsewhere, have been altogether disgusted and driven away from the service of their country by the peculiar character of that sort of “struggle for freedom,” the system of “moral agitation” which Ireland thought fit to adopt; and from which their pride of manhood and pride of country revolted. The staff leadership which that system created, and has left behind it, is composed of men utterly unfit, and unwilling to take charge of a military struggle, and who ought at once to be superseded and replaced. For two generations — may history forget to mention them — those men have been working to do this — the best work that ever yet was done for tyranny — to take from the people the terror of their name and make popular movement a mockery.

And what now are they working to do? To hold Ireland down, hand and foot, while her chains are being locked and double locked; and her four noble prisoners sent fettered and handcuffed to a penal colony of England — hear it, O Earth, and hear it, O God! — for saying that Ireland should suffer famine no more.

Oh ! worse for us than the foreign tyrant is the native traitor; and worse than the open traitor in the enemy’s ranks is the vile trickster and the base craven in our own. Away with them! They must quit at once or be quashed. One man, and every man, of those now in the prison of Newgate, is worth a host of the dastards and drivellers who are bidding you stand by and “bide your time,” while your best and bravest are being transported as felons in the face of your city, in the sight of two islands, in view of all earth.

But how are you to know them, those menials of England in the green livery of their country? By this ye shall know them. Any man who objects to every plan of armed resistance that is proposed, while he produces none or no better one of his own. Or any man who tell you that an act of armed resistance — even if made so soon as tomorrow — even if offered by ten men only — even if offered by men armed with stones — any man who tells you that such an

act of resistance would be premature, imprudent or dangerous — any and every such man should at once be spurned and spat at. For, remark you this and recollect it, that somewhere, somehow, and by somebody a beginning must be made; and that the first act of resistance is always, and must be ever, premature, imprudent and dangerous. Lexington was premature, Bunker Hill was imprudent and even Trenton was dangerous.

There are men who speak much to you of prudence and caution, and very little of any virtue beside. But every vice may call itself by the name of some one virtue or other; and of prudence there are many sorts. Cowardice may call itself, and readily pass for, caution; and of those who preach prudence, it behoves to inquire what kind of prudence it is they speak of, and of what class of prudent persons they belong themselves. There is a prudence the virtue of the wise and bravest — there is a prudence the virtue of beggars and slaves. Which class do those belong to who are prating now for prudence against premature insurrection, while rejecting every proceeding and plan for preparation?

Against the advice of those men, and all men such as they, I declare my own. 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 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 those 40,000 men.

If required to state my own individual opinion, and allowed to choose my own time, I certainly would take the time when the full harvest of Ireland shall be staked in the haggards. But not infrequently God selects and sends His own seasons and occasions; and oftentimes too, an enemy is able to force the necessity of either fighting or failing. In the one case, we ought not, in the other we surely cannot, attempt waiting for our harvest-home. If opportunity offers, we must dash at that opportunity — if wherefore, let us fight in September, if we may — but sooner, if we



must.

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