

SPEECHES

OF

HON. SCHUYLER COLFAX,

AND

GENERAL J. O'NEILL,

(Who whipped the Queen's Own in Canada.)

DELIVERED AT THE GREAT FENIAN PICNIC, CHICAGO, AUG. 15, 1866.

Speech of Mr. Colfax.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I came here at your invitation, because I had read the noble and patriotic resolutions which you had adopted, and because on the green flag of Ireland, which you love, you here in Chicago had written, "Liberty to all and justice to all." It is a noble and patriotic motto, and it thrills my heart. I clasp the hand of every man as a brother who proclaims that noble sentiment in our land.

I shall talk to you now briefly, in the few minutes in which I shall address you, of the recent course of the Administration in regard to the Irish invasion of Canada. What was the conduct of Great Britain toward us when the storm cloud of war burst upon our land? There was but one army of rebellion in existence at Fort Sumter. All the guns and the muskets that they had, they had stolen from the arsenals of the United States; but then, when the rebel banner floated at but one place in our land, when but one rebel army was arrayed against our country, before the American Minister could reach the shores of Great Britain, the British Ministry hastened to issue their proclamation to the civilized world, saying that there were two belligerents upon the American soil. They proclaimed equal rights to both of them, and after that proclamation they gave aid and comfort to these traitors. When rams were about being fitted out for the purpose of preying upon our commerce upon the high seas, and when our Minister laid testimony before the British Ministry, they spurned it. They submitted the testimony to their law officers, and while they were engaged in poring over it, the rams started on

their path of devastation and outrage.

Wherever on the globe the British flag floated, these pirates, manned with British crews and bearing British guns, could sail in, and in every British colony obtain whatever they needed.

Everything that could tend to increase the resources and prolong the existence of the rebellion, came from Great Britain, and when, at last the war was over, and we submitted respectfully to Great Britain our claims and asked her to look at them, she spurned them from her presence and treated them with contumely and insult. Even when we asked her to allow them to be submitted to the arbitration of any friendly neutral power, she kicked the claims out of her ante-chamber.

I do not believe in the iron rule, which is that might makes right. I believe in the golden rule contained in the words, "Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye unto them." But I believe in my heart of hearts in the silver rule between nations: "Whatsoever they have done to you, do ye even so unto them."

When the hour of England's trial came; when the Irish army was upon the Canadian line; when the brave men who had left the Emerald Isle of the ocean, who came here to enjoy liberty, showed that they loved their native land so much that they were willing to go forth to bleed, suffer, and even die to procure Irish independence—when they, I say, went to that Canada line, if the President had issued a proclamation, he should have taken the proclamation of the Queen, and have said, "Here is an army of reb-

els against Great Britain upon the Canada line"—just as there was an army of rebels against us at Fort Sumter—"they are an army with guns, not stolen from any one, but paid for at our arsenals"—there was an army just like it at Fort Sumter—"I declare them both belligerents. It is a fair fight. We will let them go on."

On the contrary, as you know very well, the proclamation was issued, and he went out of his way to speak of these men as "evil disposed persons!" Evil disposed! because they longed to release their land from the thralldom under which it had for centuries groaned!

Those against whom they went to fight were those who had exercised tyranny and despotism over Ireland. They were the very same men, as Governor Oglesby told you, who sustained and sympathised with the rebellion against liberty in our land of America.

You have stood together on the battle-field. Now stand together at the ballot-box. If you believe in liberty for Ireland, you must go to work and speak for liberty in America. The true way to aid your cause is to fight as the great Union Republican organization does, for human rights and impartial justice, and for the downfall of tyranny and oppression wherever it may exist.

Let me say one thing further. I remember that Canadian line. The recollection of the outrages that we suffered there during the rebellion are burnt into my heart. In those days of ours which were without sunshine, and nights without a star, I know that Canada was the hiding place for traitors. There were hatched the plots against our beloved land. There they plotted the sending of pestilence into our cities, that thereby they might depopulate our States. There they plotted the poisoning our wells, that thereby our people might be destroyed. Not content with this, they sent their emissaries over the Canadian line for the purpose of burning our towns and robbing our banks.

I remember those facts, and I remember further that when we appealed for justice, and when men were arrested who were guilty of these outrages, the Canadian authorities never lifted their finger to secure us justice. On the contrary, they

discharged them from their courts, just as Great Britain did the pirates of the Shenandoah when they returned to England after years of devastation.

I confess that I was humiliated when our army was sent there—an army to support which we are taxed—to act as police officers upon the Canada line to protect the Canadian provinces of the British Queen, and to be in the work of spies and detectives against the Fenians. I know that some people say that this Canadian invasion was a fool's errand, but if you read the speeches recently made in the Canadian Parliament, you will see that they acknowledge that Canada is as defenseless to-day as she was two months ago, and if it had not been for the interposition of the American army which intervened, notwithstanding the outrages of which Great Britain had been guilty, General O'Neill, who stands here by my side, would to-day have been at Montreal, and the green flag would have waved over Canada.

And now, my friends, I ask you why should not Ireland be free? They had a Parliament there from the thirteenth century down to the opening of the nineteenth, although during the last three centuries, down to the close of the eighteenth, it was under the thralldom of Great Britain, and was not allowed to hold its sessions except by the consent of the Lord Deputy of Ireland.

But at last, by the eloquence of Henry Grattan and his brave and patriotic associates, they had for seventeen years at the close of the last century a free and independent Parliament in that isle of the ocean. Would to God they had to day! But British gold has bought the union by which Ireland has been harnessed to the wheels of her conqueror.

I remember the beautiful language of Grattan when he moved, in 1780, the declaration of rights in the Irish Parliament. I copied it yesterday, and I want to read it to you, for it is imbued with the true sentiment that animates every Irish heart to-day.

In moving that declaration, which was to give them the exclusive right to legislate and judicate over the Irish people, he said:

"I wish for nothing but to breathe the air of liberty. I will never be satisfied so long as the meanest cottager in Ireland has a link of a Brit-

ish chain clanking against his rags."

He is dead, but his language lives to day, full of the same spirit that animates our noble Union organization.

Two years afterwards, in 1782, he again moved the Declaration of Rights, which was adopted unanimously with tremendous enthusiasm, and Great Britain, humbled by the war which our revolutionary fathers had conducted successfully in order to gain their independence, had to yield, and did yield for eighteen years. He spoke then in this language of triumph:

"I am now addressing a free people, and have only to admire by what heaven directed steps you have proceeded until the whole nation has to rejoice in the act of our deliverance. You have sought the liberty of your own members. See the Presbyterians of Bangor petition for the Catholics of the South. I am not afraid to turn back and look antiquity in the face."

There can be no nobler plea for Irish independence than this glory which blazed out on the last years of the 18th century.

I read the other day the following incident which occurred in a Dublin cemetery:—The graves of Tom Steele and Daniel O'Connell are close together, with only a marble slab to denote where each of them lie. An American gentleman, speaking to the sexton, said: "How happens it that these two men of such diverse creeds sleep together in the same cemetery?" The old man, leaning on his crutch, said, "Tom Steele was for Irish liberty, O'Connell was for Irish liberty, and liberty makes brothers of us all."

But here this Democratic party, that used to claim to be the friends of Irishmen, have gone down to Philadelphia. There they are to surrender their party name. They are to receive their creed, as this morning's papers say, from Andrew Johnson, who acted under the dictation of the British Minister.

But the Union party in Congress, faithful to those principles upon which it is based, sent to the President asking him to demand of the British authorities the release of the Fenian prisoners in Canada. That resolution the President has promised to obey.

Then, on motion of Mr. Spaulding,

a Republican, it was unanimously resolved by the House, in which we have an overwhelming majority, to ask the President to release the Fenian prisoners whom he had himself taken and locked up in jail upon our side of the line, or whom he had released on bail. I grieve to say that resolution has not been respected or obeyed yet by the President, although it came from the representatives of the American people. And here to-day stands General O'Neill with the bonds of the President of the United States upon him, and this because he loved Irish liberty and struck for its defense.

Finding the way in which British neutrality laws had worked, under the lead of Mr. Banks an attempt was made to scale down our neutrality laws, so that we might mete out to them such measure as they had meted to us. Then, too, when General Roberts, the President of the Fenian Brotherhood, a patriotic citizen whom I am proud to call my friend, spoke to a multitude at Washington, in the hall of the Soldiers, and Sailors, Fair room, and demanded that those who followed his standard should be in favor of equal rights to all, they refused to allow him to use the hall again. Then, on motion of Mr. Delano of Ohio, it was ordered that on the order of the Speaker and President of the Senate, the Fair room might be used for such meeting. Of the seven Democrats in the Senate, six voted against it. Senator Johnson feared that the passage of such a resolution would offend the British Government. But we passed it, and under my order as Speaker, they met in the room from which the Washington police had ejected them.

This Irish land is famous for the statesmen, orators, and warriors it has produced. It has a noble record. Now may you learn a lesson from our recent war. We failed all through until we reinforced ourselves by the Divine artillery of justice. At last we struck out slavery and wrote liberty upon our banners, and adopted the constitutional amendment, and banished that national disgrace from our land, and then victory came to us and the great rebellion was crushed. Do you the same. Stand by liberty wherever you find it assailed, all over the world. Rebuke oppression. Rebuke despotism and tyranny, and give to every people the same rights

you claim for yourselves, and, thus reinforced by the public opinion of the world you will succeed, and we shall rejoice in seeing again, as once before, an Irish Parliament on Dublin Green. [Great applause.]

General O'Neill's Speech.

General O'Neill, the hero of Fort Erie and Limestone Ridge, was then introduced to the audience, and said that he did not know why he should be called upon to speak except that his countrymen thought that, as he was brave enough to go to Canada, he would be bold enough to stand up before them and make a speech. He had seen bullets and he would rather face them than to address them; he was not a speech maker. He thought that was an Irish fault. They did that too much and acted too little, and to do so after listening to the eloquent and beautiful discourses they had heard, would be presumption.

The cause of Fenianism was a great and glorious one. It must be so when the Governor of the State, General Logan, and Speaker Colfax had expressed their sympathy with the order. The cause which those men were willing to advocate was that of human liberty for all men, black and white, who had been made after the image of God. He was willing to lay down his life at any time to secure the victory of those principles.

He knew Abolitionism was not a popular theme with his countrymen, because it had been denounced by a party who would deceive and sell them, and traffic in their votes and patriotism, yet would not aid the men who struck for Irish independence. But it was beginning to be popular even with his own countrymen, and a treacherous party would hold them bound to them no longer.

What others, and among them the President, had said of their friendship to the Irish was false. He had broken his pledges to them. The speaker's friends at Nashville had urged him not to assail the President, claiming that he was a friend to the Fenians; but *though he had never before voted, he intended hereafter to vote for the party and the men who by their deeds and not words had shown their sympathy for Irishmen.* They had been deceived often enough.

President Johnson had canvassed Tennessee against the Know-Nothings, but that was merely to become Governor. He did not love Irishmen. Of late, that man construed the neutrality laws in such a manner as to ruin their hopes, while if he had given them a fair chance they must have been successful. Many men did not believe they could put 10,000 soldiers in Canada, but if it had not been for the great vigilance of the President and his subordinates, 200,000 men would have been there, and they would in a month have held every fortified position in Canada.

Those Democrats who had pretended to be their life-long friends had betrayed them. He believed President Johnson would turn him (the speaker) over to the British if he dared, but the American people would not permit it. Their pretended friends had sold him, but he trusted they would be disappointed no longer, and while he did not intend to become a politician, he was going for the party that would assist *them, and he hoped that every Irishman there would do the same.*

They had been deceived and cajoled long enough. But that Democratic party had showed that when the Irish were prepared to strike off their chains they would not allow it, fearing that they might lose something thereby. At the time when the freedom of their land was within their grasp, it was snatched from them by the President and his associates.

Their army was not a purely Irish one. Hundreds and thousands of Americans who had fought North and South were ready to join in striking a blow for Ireland. Many officers were ready to go with them, but the President had, in his great speediness, stopped that. He was probably afraid to let the Irish go to Canada lest they would not be present to vote the Democratic ticket.

Had those men been allowed to stay in Canada, the English would have been on their knees to the Fenians. With Canada they could have fitted out privateers, destroyed English commerce, and before two years have brought her on her knees. It was his opinion they could have liberated Ireland without striking a blow there.