

Pamphlet No. 3

**Bishop O'Dwyer**  
**OF LIMERICK.**



**SPEECH AT LIMERICK**  
**September 14th, 1916.**

P. Gallagher, 12 Nicholas Street, Limerick.

# SPEECH

Made by HIS LORDSHIP

## The Most Rev. Dr. O'DWYER

on the occasion of the  
Conferring of the Freedom of the City of Limerick  
on him,

ON SEPTEMBER 14th, 1916.

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**H**IS Lordship, who was enthusiastically cheered on rising to reply to the address presented to him by the Limerick Corporation, said:—

Mr. Mayor and Gentlemen, I thank you very heartily for the great honour conferred upon me, but I confess that I feel somewhat strange in these surroundings of public favour. Popularity is a novel experience for me, and I must be on my guard against its fascination, not indeed that I ever attached much importance to it, or sought it. We all know the fickleness of the *popularis aura*, and the man that relies upon it will probably be marooned in the end. Some of you will remember the early years of my episcopate, when the correct thing politically was to treat me as the enemy of my country, because I had the audacity to think and to say that the methods of the political agitation were amenable to God's laws. I was heartily in sympathy with the farmers in their movement to emancipate themselves from the yoke of an intolerable landlordism, but I condemned as immoral the methods of the Plan of Campaign and boycotting as intrinsically unjust and the latter as essentially un-Christian; and for that, and that alone, an attempt was made to hound me down and silence me. A meeting was held here in my own city, under the shadow of my own cathedral,

and the full strength of a powerful organisation was exerted to discredit and defame me. Some men prominent in the agitation took part in that meeting, and seemed to be borne along on a full tide of popular enthusiasm, yet within six months I saw those mighty leaders hooted and pelted in the streets of Limerick, and guarded by their enemies, the police, from the fury of their own friends. It was a lesson, as well as my own experience, of the unsteadiness with which the wind of popular favour blows. And therefore, Mr. Mayor and Gentlemen, I trust you will not imagine that I am the less grateful for the signal mark of your favour which I have received to-day, if I remind myself that the weather may change at any moment, and the wind blow from another quarter.

My duty as a Bishop is not to flatter you, or play upon your feelings for my own ends, but to put God's law without fear or favour before you, and to speak the truth with the freedom of the gospel. Apart from that higher view of duty, I have too great a love and respect for my people, and—perhaps I ought not to say it—too much pride in myself, to stoop to the methods of the demagogue. At the time to which I refer I was drawn into controversies by my sense of my duty as a Bishop. I did not interfere for the sake of politics. I spoke in defence of the moral law of which I am, however unworthy, the guardian. But that did not save me from abuse and misrepresentation. At other times, particularly in connection with education, which is closely related to religion, I have had to interfere and incur the displeasure of some politicians, who think they can deal with ecclesiastics after the manner of Combes or Niviani, and the other continental infidels, and resent the action of a bishop, inside or outside the sanctuary, if it does not square with their notions. But I was right all the time. I knew I was right, and that testimony of my own conscience was more to me than the cheers of any multitude. Now again, gentlemen, I have been drawn into collision with politicians in the discharge of my ecclesiastical duties. General Maxwell had the

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the Bishop is not to flatter you, or play upon your vanity, but to put God's law without fear or favour and to speak the truth with the freedom of the gospel. In my view of duty, I have too great a love and respect for the methods of the demagogue. At the same time, I did not interfere for the sake of politics. I believe in the moral law of which I am, however unworthy, a minister. It did not save me from abuse and misrepresentation, particularly in connection with education, and in religion, I have had to interfere and incur the animosity of politicians, who think they can deal with me in the manner of Combes or Niviani, and the other day I resent the action of a bishop, inside or outside the door, who does not square with their notions. But I was sure I was right, and that testimony of my own conscience was more to me than the cheers of any multitude. Now I have been drawn into collision with politicians in the discharge of my ecclesiastical duties. General Maxwell had the

effrontery to give me directions for the government of my diocese,\* but I hardly think he will repeat the experiment. He was trained in Egypt and South Africa, and was brought back. He thought because he had the military power of England at his back that I would not dare to disobey him. He did not know much about Irish ecclesiastics, who have a proud tradition, and who have been shown by our predecessors to stand up to English brutality. But beside the protection of two priests against this military dictator, there was the question of my attitude towards the young men he had murdered in Dublin. Was I to condemn them? Even if their rebellion was not justifiable theologically was I to join in the condemnation of Pearse, MacDonough and Colbert, who were shot without trial, and of the men and women who, without trial, were deported from their country in thousands.

The British government and their friends ring their changes on the hopelessness of the rising, and the folly of a couple of thousand badly armed Volunteers attempting to overthrow the British power in Ireland. The Irish Volunteers were too few for the enterprise, but that perhaps is the worst that can be said against them. Rebellion to be lawful, must be the act of a nation as a whole; but while that is true, see the case of the Irish Volunteers against England. The very government against which they rose and which dealt with them so mercilessly, has proclaimed its own condemnation. What is that ghost of Home Rule which they keep in lavender on the Statute Book but a confession of the wrong of England's Rule in Ireland. I should like to ask Mr. Asquith if the destruction of the Irish parliament was not an atrocious crime against this country, and if as a nation we have ever condoned it or forfeited our right to redress? If he were an Irishman would he submit tamely to the perpetuation of the misgovernment of the country? Would he patiently look on at the deceit and chicanery

\* General Maxwell's letter says, "In this case I would be glad if your lordship could obviate the necessity of such [military] action by moving . . . and inform me of your decision."

with which this supreme interest of Ireland has been treated and never more scandalously than for the last ten years? Does he imagine that the young men of any nation would have the patience to bear with the tantalising perfidy, which after years of strenuous agitation pretended to concede their claims, and pass into law a measure of Home Rule, and then hang it up and announce that before it could be put into execution it had to be amended.

In the very height or depth of this juggling, the great European war broke out, and the political leaders of Ireland took up the cry from their masters in England that this was a war for small nationalities, to protect them from oppression, and to allow them to live and develop on their own national lines. No appeal could go deeper into the Irish heart. It is the dream of our people for generations, and to see it realised our fathers before us suffered poverty and exile and death itself. One could not be surprised if Irish Volunteers said:—If all this is true of Belgium, and Servia, and Poland and all the other small nations of Europe, does it not hold good for Ireland? When Lord Wimborne and Mr. Redmond and Mr. Devlin called on young Irishmen to go to Flanders and give their lives for Home Rule in Belgium was it not natural, in view of the state of their own country, they should ask themselves if it was not all British cant and hypocrisy, and in anger break out into rebellion. These Irish Volunteers imagined that Ireland had an inalienable right to govern herself; that the deprivation of it was worse for every interest of their country than any number of bad laws in detail that a foreign government forced on an unwilling people, that it was usurpation, and that resistance to it was a duty. Of course they were wrong. These reasons might hold good against any other country, but not against England, the home of freedom, the chivalrous and disinterested friend everywhere of small nationalities that take her side.

British Ministers and their allies in Ireland may condemn the criminal folly, as they call it, of those who raised the standard of revolt

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in Dublin, but whether they were right or wrong, I submit that, at least for a semblance of justice, people should remember that the Irish rebels only carried into practice their rulers' principles, and must be judged by the same standards that were applied to the Belgians in revolt against Germany, or the Serbians in revolt against Austria, or the Greeks against their own king to compel him to enjoy the luxury of war. Then see the result of the rising in Ireland. With all the pre-occupation of the war upon him Mr. Asquith from his retrenchment of "wait and see" sped across the channel to discover what was the matter with Ireland: and what did he find? That the Castle Government had failed. That is the recorded judgment of the Prime Minister of England, and will stand for ever as the vindication of the victims of the rebellion. What frightened him? It was not the number of the rebels nor the strength of their armaments, but the knowledge that they were the true representatives of Ireland, and the exponents of her nationality. He knows that English government in Ireland is indefensible, that no people in the world that could help it would stand being governed by strangers, men like Wimborne and Birrell and Nathan, a gang of carpet-baggers who came here for their personal interests at the behest of their party. But he has not the manliness to concede what he knows is our absolute right. Does he think that partitioning a country by religions is the way to emancipate it? If Germany were now to offer corresponding proposals to Belgium with what scorn would they be rejected; with what burning indignation would Mr. Asquith roll out his resounding periods in denunciation of such an outrage on National rights, and if some young Belgians, with more courage and patriotism in their hearts than worldly wisdom, faced the German soldiers, and fought like men until their resources were exhausted, and when they surrendered were shot in cold blood in twos and threes for days after, how England would appeal to heaven for vengeance on their murderers. One thing I know, and that is that their country would never disown them; and some day or other, when the light of

freedom broke again over their land, the monument to these young heroes would be set up in the Place de Martyres, in Brussels. Since the war began we have heard a good deal about the Empire, and our place in its greatness, and our duty towards it. That argument does not appeal to me. An Empire, in any true sense, consists of a number of kingdoms, each of which is a unit self contained and self governed, but all of which come together for their mutual support and benefit. But that is not the case as between England and Ireland. We are a subject province. We are like Egypt, governed by English satraps of an inferior kind, but in no sense are we constituents of the British Empire. Canada and Australia are parts of the Empire, but we are not; for we are ruled not by ourselves but by some English barrister from Bristol or Manchester, or by some Jew from Shoreditch. That is our share in the Empire, and I for one avow that it does not fire my enthusiasm for the Union Jack. Ireland is a nation, and never will be at rest until the centre of gravity is within herself.

Clever and plausible English ministers may do a good deal by way of corruption; they may buy the National press; they may mislead the members of Parliament; they may demoralise individuals, and even large classes, by an insidious system of bribery; but in my humble judgment there is deep down in the heart of Ireland the sacred fire of Nationality, which such influences can never reach, much less extinguish and which will yet burn on the altar of freedom. They may think that prosperity will wean our people from the old cause; that education will turn their thoughts into other channels. It is the flattering unction which tyrants are always laying to their souls, but the history of the world is against them. Ireland will never be content as a province; God made her a nation, and while grass grows and water runs there will be men in Ireland to dare and die for her. It is that national spirit that will yet vindicate our glorious country, and not the petty intrigues of parliamentary chicane. And if our representatives in parliament had relied on it, instead of putting their faith in Asquith

and Lloyd George to-day. By way of an alternative proposal the captain of a regiment of sappers to give the... It would be much more proposed to get... like to hear from... statement of the... minds.

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and Lloyd George and the liberals, they would not be where they are to-day. By way of defence some of them have been asking recently for an alternative policy to theirs: it is rather a cool demand: it is as if the captain of a ship, after running her on the rocks, invited the passengers to give their views of how the vessel should have been navigated. It would be much more to the purpose for him to tell them how he proposed to get her off the rocks. And for my part I should greatly like to hear from some one or other of our great politicians a clear statement of the plan of action which they now have before their minds.

But although, like the mass of the people of this country on whom the confidence trick has been played so disastrously I have no responsibility for the present deplorable condition of things, yet I will state my alternative to trusting the party who trust the liberals, and are now reduced to the statesmanship of Micawber—waiting for something to turn up.

When war was being declared I would have said to the English government, "Give us our national rights; set up a genuine parliament in Dublin; and we are with you." Again this very year, when the English government played false, I would have said to the Irish members of parliament, "Come home, shake the dust of the English House of Commons off your feet, and throw yourselves on the Irish nation." These are my alternatives. I think they would have been effective, but I fear that they would not be in favour with our present parliamentarians. O'Connell used to say that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity: but the modern maxim is—stand by England in her difficulties, and trust to her generosity when you have got her out of them: shed your Irish blood like water for her in France and Gallipoli and Mesopotamia and Egypt and the Cameroons (wherever that is), and you will be rewarded like the Irish agricultural labourers in Lincolnshire. It sounds like a poem, but there has not been much poetry in the history of England in Ireland. The gratitude of con-



querors is not much. Sinn Fein is, in my judgment, the true principle, and alliance with English politicians is the alliance of the lamb and the wolf: and it is at this point precisely that I differ from the present political leaders, and believe that they have led and are leading the National cause to disaster.

Some people imagine that because I condemn the policy of certain politicians I am their enemy, even their bitter enemy. In this they are wrong. I entertain no enmity to any living person, but if I am to speak at all on public questions I must speak the truth, and if I put my views strongly, it is not for the purpose of offence, but because the matters at issue are of vital consequence, and touch my deepest feelings. And now Mr. Mayor, and Aldermen, and Councillors, I beg again to thank you, and pray that God may bless you, and all belonging to you, and have our city in His keeping until we shall take our place once again as freemen in our own country.

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