

IRELAND UNDER LORD DE GREY

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Ireland Under Lord De Grey by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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*" Non obtusa adeo gestamus pectora Penni ;
" Nec tam aversus equos Tyria Sol juugit ab urbe."*

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IRELAND UNDER LORD DE GREY.

ON the thirtieth of August, 1841, Sir Robert Peel accepted the office of Prime Minister; and now, for more than two years, Ireland, with the rest of the empire, has been under his controul. After such a period, rendered remarkable by the existence in this country of a most extensive and organized confederacy, for the purpose of overthrowing the great international compact of 1800, and still in the presence of an agitation unshaken in its hostility to an united realm, a tempting opportunity offers for reviewing the political condition of this country.

Heretofore, in judging of the conduct of government in Ireland, the habit has been either unsparingly to condemn, or lavishly to praise, according as it suited the taste or the interest of the few who at all troubled themselves about our affairs. Whenever a vile purpose was to be carried, the hireling who undertook the office, whether he was the tool of faction, or the sycophant of power,

little regarded the means by which his end was accomplished; and our political writers, such as they were, cared not from what arsenals their artillery was drawn, provided that it sounded sufficiently of terror or discontent. Hence we see a government of this day confounded, without any affectation of apology, with a government of a century gone by, and the designs of public men are judged, not out of their own acts and mouths, but by the words and deeds of their supposed political ancestors. The country, too, is unfortunately treated after the same fashion, not as she is, but as she might have been, had other men in other times pursued wiser courses; and the annals of the past are searched under various pretexts, by those who carry their own selfish designs in perpetuating hatred and ill will amongst our countrymen. No writer who hopes to see the condition of Ireland ameliorated will follow such false lights, or trouble himself about the hateful passages of discord, turmoil, alternate treachery and tyranny which our history, distorted as it is, so plenteously affords. Researches of that nature are as mischievous as useless, and the anxiety with which the new born zeal of *young Ireland* reverts to such topics, should serve as a warning for cooler heads to avoid altogether their discussion.

But, to weigh in impartial scales the conduct of the Irish executive, to judge dispassionately of their acts, and give to them an enlarged and liberal interpretation, is a task which may be per-

formed without any sacrifice of personal independence, and with the greatest advantage to the country. It may tend to tranquillize the public mind, to separate the real wants from the imaginary grievances of the people; and, at all events, such an attempt is far more patriotic than to pass one's life in misanthropic lamentations over the disorganization of the people, or in unmeaning murmurs against the conduct of the possessors of power.

The difficulties which at first sight present themselves to this or any dispassionate enquiry, are of no trifling nature, for the public mind has been heretofore disturbed, not more by Mr. O'Connell's party, whose views will be presently discussed, than by a set of gentlemen, who, professing very violent opinions on the opposite side, appeared to have made up their minds from the outset, to be discontented with every act of government which was not arranged within their own circle, and to refuse the Minister and the Viceroy credit for all measures, not fully in accordance with the plans those gentlemen had formed before Lord De Grey's arrival in Ireland. They very much resembled in their conduct during the past year, that supporter of Sir Francis Burdett at one of the Westminster elections, who hearing a long *uhulatus* of "no war"—"no taxes"—"no Pitt," &c., &c., vindicated the liberality of his sentiments by shouting, "no nothing," as the *ne plus ultra* of non-conformity. They determined to reject everything which came

recommended by Lord De Grey or Lord Eliot, and whether the measure was one of conciliation or coercion, whether the blow was struck high, or low, or between, it appeared equally ill favoured. If coercion, it came late; if conciliation, it was truckling to the dismemberment faction.

Strange indeed were the political phenomena which the close of eighteen hundred and forty-one exhibited. The moment the great victory of that year over the Whig-Radical power was achieved, and scarcely was Sir Robert Peel yet invested with the insignia of office, when a howl of revengeful triumph was raised in Ireland by a most unmanageable class, the descendants and remains of the old Orange faction. Already they put forth their hands to clutch their prey, and very openly and very freely declared that Ireland should be governed upon "ascendancy principles;" that popular demonstrations must at once be met with the only weapons their forefathers condescended to use, the bayonet and the gibbet; that the system of national education should forthwith be taken from Archbishop Whately and Dr. Murray, and transferred to Lord Rathdowne and Mr. Gregg; and that the Viceroy would receive his guests at the Castle, to the martial air of the "Boyne Water." On the other extreme, there were found prophets amongst the liberal party who exclaimed—perchance the wish was father to the thought—that Ireland would soon reek with blood—that her fields would be stained with

agrarian murder — that the midnight assassin would stalk abroad—the gaols be filled—the ninety-eight system adopted—spies and informers let loose upon the country—martial law proclaimed—Catholics trampled upon, and that the patronage of the Crown would be confined exclusively to members of the protestant faith. Such were the representations of the two extreme factions. The programme of the ministerial policy was supplied by the one, and countersigned with what of authority the other could confer, and the announcement was made, that the new ministry were to open the theatre of Irish affairs with all the furniture of the vulgar melo-drama—massacre, bloodshed, and atrocity.

Not indeed that either party had from the advisers of the Crown, any grounds for calculating upon such a course of action. Quite the reverse : Sir Robert Peel made his advances to power, admitting that he felt the difficulties of the Irish administration, but demonstrating and proclaiming by every word and deed that he was determined to conquer all obstacles, come from whatsoever side they might, to the peace and prosperity of this distracted country. From the first moment he gave to the entire people of Ireland, to the friends as well as to the enemies of his administration, ample notification of what his policy would be. It seemed impossible for the greatest dulness or the greatest malignity, to misunderstand or misrepresent his intentions.