

**DANIEL  
O'CONNELL,  
THE IRISH PATRIOT**

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Daniel O'Connell, the Irish patriot by Wendell Phillips

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BY

WENDELL PHILLIPS

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## DANIEL O'CONNELL.

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A HUNDRED years ago to-day Daniel O'Connell was born. The Irish race, wherever scattered over the globe, assembles to-night to pay fitting tribute to his memory, — one of the most eloquent men, one of the most devoted patriots, and the most successful statesman, which that race has given to history. We of other races may well join you in that tribute, since the cause of constitutional government owes more to O'Connell than to any other political leader of the last two centuries. The English-speaking race, to find his equal among its statesmen, must pass by Chatham and Walpole, and go back to Oliver Cromwell, or the able men who held up the throne of Queen Elizabeth. If to put the civil and social elements of your day into successful action, and plant the seeds of continued strength and progress for coming times, — if this is to be a statesman, then most emphatically was O'Connell one. To exert this control, and secure this progress, while and because ample means lie ready for use under your hand, does not rob Walpole and Colbert, Chatham and Richelieu, of their title to be considered statesmen. To do it, as Martin Luther did, when one must ingeniously discover or invent his tools, and while the mightiest forces that influence human affairs are arrayed against him, that is what ranks O'Connell with the few mas-

terly statesmen the English-speaking race has ever had. When Napoleon's soldiers bore the negro chief Toussaint L'Ouverture into exile, he said, pointing back to San Domingo, "You think you have rooted up the tree of liberty, but I am only a branch. I have planted the tree itself so deep that ages will never root it up." [And whatever may be said of the social or industrial condition of Hayti during the last seventy years, its *nationality* has never been successfully assailed.]

O'Connell is the only Irishman who can say as much of Ireland. From the peace of Utrecht, 1713, till the fall of Napoleon, Great Britain was the leading state in Europe; while Ireland, a comparatively insignificant island, lay at its feet. She weighed next to nothing in the scale of British politics. The Continent pitied, and England despised her. O'Connell found her a mass of quarrelling races and sects, divided, dispirited, broken-hearted, and servile. He made her a *nation*, whose first word broke in pieces the iron obstinacy of Wellington, tossed Peel from the cabinet, and gave the government to the Whigs; whose colossal figure, like the helmet in Walpole's romance, has filled the political sky ever since; whose generous aid thrown into the scale of the three great British reforms, — the ballot, the corn-laws, and slavery, — secured their success; a nation whose continual discontent has dragged Great Britain down to be a second-rate power on the chess-board of Europe. I know other causes have helped in producing this result, but the nationality which O'Connell created has been the main cause of this change in England's importance. Dean Swift, Molyneux, and Henry Flood thrust Ireland for a moment into the arena of British politics, a sturdy suppliant clamoring for justice; and Grattan held her there an equal, and, as he thought, a nation, for a few years. But the unscrupulous hand of



William Pitt brushed away in an hour all Grattan's works. Well might he say of the Irish Parliament which he brought to life, "I sat by its cradle, I followed its hearse;" since after that infamous union, which Byron called a "union of the shark with its prey," Ireland sank back, plundered and helpless. O'Connell lifted her to a fixed and permanent place in English affairs, — no suppliant, but a conqueror dictating her terms.

#### HOW TO JUDGE OF O'CONNELL'S WORK.

This is the proper stand-point from which to look at O'Connell's work. This is the consideration that ranks him, not with founders of states, like Alexander, Cæsar, Bismarck, Napoleon, and William the Silent, but with men who, without arms, by force of reason, have revolutionized their times, — with Luther, Jefferson, Mazzini, Samuel Adams, Garrison, and Franklin. I know some men will sneer at this claim, — those who have never looked at him except through the spectacles of English critics, who despised him as an Irishman and a Catholic, until they came to hate him as a conqueror. As Grattan said of Kirwan, "The curse of Swift was upon him, to have been born an Irishman and a man of genius, and to have used his gifts for his country's good." Mark what measure of success attended the able men who preceded him, in circumstances as favorable as his, perhaps even better; then measure him by comparison.

#### THE MEASURE OF HIS SUCCESS.

An island soaked with the blood of countless rebellions, oppression such as would turn cowards into heroes, a race whose disciplined valor had been proved on almost every battle-field in Europe, and whose reck-

less daring lifted it, any time, in arms against England, with hope or without—what inspired them? Devotion, eloquence, and patriotism seldom paralleled in history. Who led them? *Dean Swift*, according to Addison “the greatest genius of his age,” called by Pope “the incomparable,” a man fertile in resources, of stubborn courage, and tireless energy, master of an English style unequalled, perhaps, for its purpose then or since, a man who had twice faced England in her angriest mood, and by that masterly pen subdued her to his will; *Henry Flood*, eloquent even for an Irishman, and sagacious as he was eloquent, the eclipse of that brilliant life one of the saddest pictures in Irish biography; *Grattan*, with all the courage, and more than the eloquence, of his race, a statesman’s eye quick to see every advantage, boundless devotion, unspotted integrity, recognized as an equal by the world’s leaders, and welcomed by Fox to the House of Commons as the “Demosthenes of Ireland;” *Emmet* in the field, *Sheridan* in the senate, *Curran* at the bar; and, above all, *Edmund Burke*, whose name makes eulogy superfluous, more than Cicero in the senate, almost Plato in the academy. All these gave their lives to Ireland; and when the present century opened, where was she? Sold like a slave in the market-place by her perjured master, William Pitt. It was then that O’Connell flung himself into the struggle, gave fifty years to the service of his country; and where is she to-day? Not only redeemed, but her independence put beyond doubt or peril. Grattan and his predecessors could get no guaranties for what rights they gained. In that sagacious, watchful, and almost omnipotent *public opinion*, which O’Connell created, is an all-sufficient guaranty of Ireland’s future. Look at her! almost every shackle has fallen from her limbs: all that human wisdom has

as yet devised to remedy the evils of bigotry and misrule has been done. O'Connell found Ireland a "bissing and a byword" in Edinburgh and London. He made her the pivot of British politics: she rules them, directly or indirectly, with as absolute a sway as the slave-question did the United States from 1850 to 1865. Look into Earl Russell's book, and the history of the Reform Bill of 1832, and see with how much truth it may be claimed that O'Connell and his fellows gave Englishmen the ballot under that act. It is by no means certain that the corn-laws could have been abolished without their aid. In the anti-slavery struggle O'Connell stands, in influence and ability, equal with the best. I know the credit all those measures do to English leaders; but, in my opinion, the next generation will test the statesmanship of Peel, Palmerston, Russell, and Gladstone, almost entirely by their conduct of the Irish question. All the laurels they have hitherto won in that field are rooted in ideas which Grattan and O'Connell urged on reluctant hearers for half a century. Why do Bismarck and Alexander look with such contemptuous indifference on every attempt of England to mingle in European affairs? Because they know they have but to lift a finger, and Ireland stabs her in the back. Where was the statesmanship of English leaders when they allowed such an evil to grow so formidable? This is Ireland to-day. What was she when O'Connell undertook her cause? The saddest of Irish poets has described her.

"O Ireland! my country, the hour of thy pride and thy splendor  
hath passed;

And the chain that was spurned in thy moments of power hangs  
heavy around thee at last.

There are marks in the fate of each clime, there are turns in the  
fortunes of men;

But the changes of realms, or the chances of time, shall never  
restore thee again.