

REDPATH REFUTES BEECHER

A Striking Reply to the Charges against the Irish.

The Brooklyn Preacher's Attack on their Character, Fidelity, and Intelligence Exposed—Beecher's Ignorance of History.

Mr. Beecher has spoken many eloquent words of sympathy for the people of Ireland. Yet, within the last three weeks, Mr. Beecher has been vehemently denounced by Irish-American orators and journalists in every part of our country.

Last week Mr. Beecher delivered a lecture at Washington on "The Moral Use of Luxury and Beauty." He interjected into this lecture an attack on the Irish character. He said:

"It is said a German will live upon what a Yankee throws away, and the Yankees are considered close; that the Jew will live upon what a German throws away, and a Chinaman will live upon what a Jew throws away. (Applause.) This is the reason why the immortal Irish hate them so. (Laughter.) This popular prejudice against the Chinaman is pure Irish-bred prejudice. It is doing again what the Know-Nothings tried to do—these very Irish themselves. From time immemorial the Irish people have been vehement for their liberty and—damn liberty to other folks! (Applause.) Write this in not part of the lecture, it is an addendum that comes in very aptly. (Laughter.)"

Now, both with regard to ancient and modern times, these statements about the Irish are conspicuously incorrect, whether the test be applied to the relation of the Irish people to civil or to religious liberty. Wherever there is an element of truth in the charge that Irishmen have fought for their own liberty and yet have been unwilling to grant liberty to other races, it is still an unjust attack on them, because it isolates them from the communities in which they have shown these uncomely traits, when, in this respect, they have not differed from the most honored names and most representative classes in the history of the people among whom they have lived.

Instead of being an exceptional race in their intolerance, there is no race, except the French, that has shown so great a love for equality of rights. The Irish, first among races, recognized and legalized the principle of equality in religious rights.

When one criticizes a man, or a race, or a Church, he assumes that he is at least free, both as an individual and as a representative, from the particular fault that he condemns. Mr. Beecher is a representative American citizen, a representative descendant of the Puritans, and a representative exponent of the Protestant faith. Let us examine and contrast the record made by the American people themselves, by the Puritans in Ireland and America and by the Protestant Church in Ireland, and see whether Mr. Beecher has any right to criticize the Irish as American citizens, or their Catholic forefathers in Ireland, or the Irish adherents of the Roman Catholic Church of to-day.

The man is either a saint or a serf who does not fight for his own liberty. From mystical or religious motives, as well as from lack of manhood, a person may submit to tyranny; but whatever his reason, and whatever the effect on his own soul, the effect on the progress of civilization is essentially the same; serfs and saints alike are obstacles in the pathway of liberty. Yet, although it is noble to contend for one's own rights, or for the rights of one's own race, it is not essentially a human trait—far less an exalted human trait—for the rat, the wolf and the lion for centuries have fought as courageously for their natural rights to life and liberty as Leonidas, or Wallace, or Washington or any other of the heroes of civil liberty. There is no other people of which it can be said with more truth that, "from time immemorial, they have been vehement for their own liberty and damn liberty to other folks," that it can be said both of the English and the Americans. England is proud of her struggles for liberty, and yet she is a tyrant in every quarter of the globe to-day. What did the Revolutionary patriots of '76 do? Was it not true of them, each and all of them, that they were "vehement for their own liberty and damn liberty to other folks." Did Washington, even when he overthrew London tyranny, overthrow the more inexorable tyranny of Mount Vernon. Why denounce Pat for a moral venial offence that was committed by George? Again: If it is wrong for the Irish of California to oppose the immigration of the Chinese, was it not wicked still for the Revolutionary Fathers to continue the enslavement of the Africans? When were Americans as a nation ever otherwise than "vehement for their own liberty, and damn liberty to other folks?" Slavery was not abolished from philanthropic motives, but as a resistless military necessity. Bullets, bombs and freedom were each, and they were equally missiles of war. If the Irish, therefore, have been "vehement for their own liberty and damn liberty to other folks," they have been neither better nor worse than the Americans from Washington to Lincoln, and including both of these distinguished representative men. For, although President Lincoln fired off emancipation at the South, the same Lincoln showed that he was "vehement for liberty" for Americans "and damn liberty to other folks" when, as a member of Congress from a Free State, he voluntarily introduced a bill to extend the operations of the Fugitive Slave law over the District of Columbia. Pat and Mike, therefore, judged by American history, are not worse than George or Abraham.

When we come to examine Mr. Beecher's right, as a descendant of the Puritans, to criticize the Irish race, what does a glance backward at colonial annals tell us? It shows that the Puritans of New England were "vehement for their own liberty and damn liberty to other folks." Religious liberty owes them nothing. Religious liberty in America was established by the Baptists of Rhode Island and the Catholics of Maryland.

What did the Puritans do in Ireland? After a campaign under Cromwell, whose income was barbaric, and written into their very bones, they contrast the most savage campaigns of Sitting Bull and our other Indian savages—after massacres of women and children, as well as of unarmed garrisons that had surrendered—after driving the whole Irish race from the lands they owned, and had rendered arable in the East into bleak and sterile Connaught; the Puritans added religious persecutions to their agrarian robberies and military atrocities. They enacted a code of penal laws against the Catholics, of which,

when it had attained its complete growth under later Protestant rulers, Montesquieu said that "it must have been framed in hell to be executed by demons," and of which Edmund Burke said that "it was a machine of wise and deliberate contrivance as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man." That was what the Puritans and Protestantism did for the Irish in Ireland. Yet the Puritans professed to be champions of civil and religious liberty; or, rather, their descendants make that claim for them. The Protestant Church in Ireland has always professed to be the upholder of English liberty. Would it not be as fair to say of them then, as by any possibility it could be fair to say of the Irish, that from "time immemorial they have been vehement for their own liberty, and damn liberty to other folks." The history of the Protestant Church in Ireland is one unbroken record of religious despotism and persecution.

These Irish "Protestants" were British settlers. What record has been made by the real Irish—the "old stock"—in respect to religious liberty? When the old Irish were pagans they never persecuted. St. Patrick was welcomed and allowed to propagate the new religion. No blood was ever shed and no violence was ever used to prevent him or his successors from undermining the foundations of the older faith? How have the Irish Catholics acted when they have had the power? There were no persecutions in Catholic Ireland from St. Patrick to Henry VIII. The people, it is true, were all of one faith; but the internal dissensions of the Church were also free from the bloody quarrels that so often disgraced the ecclesiastical annals of Eastern Europe. But a time was coming to test the sincerity of these Irish Catholics—to show whether, in the Godly phrase of Mr. Beecher, they were "vehement for liberty to themselves—and damn liberty to other folks." James II. was a Catholic. On his accession to the throne of England he appointed the Earl of Clarendon as the Viceroy of Ireland. Clarendon admitted Catholics into the Privy Council and advanced them to the Bench. King James published a declaration giving equal civil privileges to all classes of religionists. On the landing of William of Orange, King James fled to France. Soon afterward he determined to strike a blow for his crown in Ireland. He landed in Ireland in March, 1689. He was loyally received by all classes of the Irish—the corporations, the gentry and the clergy; for even the clergy of the Protestant Church vied with the Catholic priesthood in ardent professions of allegiance. The Irish Parliament met in May. It was opened by the King in person. It was the first and the only Parliament that ever met in Ireland, from the earliest English invasion down to the present hour, that fairly represented all classes and both religions of the Irish people. The Catholics predominated in the House of Commons. In the House of Lords there were Protestant Bishops, but no Catholic prelates. What did this representative Irish Parliament do? Did it demonstrate the truth of Mr. Beecher's assertion, that "from time immemorial the Irish have been vehement for their own liberty—and damn liberty to other folks?" No! The King's speech denounced all violations of the rights of conscience as abhorrent to his principles. He promised security of property. He upheld the perfect equality of Protestants and Catholics. This Parliament passed an act for the full establishment of liberty of conscience. In this Parliament the vast majority were Catholics, yet this act received their unbroken support by vote, and their most cordial support by voice.

This act was the first law ever passed by any race recognizing and establishing religious equality. This act, to be remembered, was passed when religious intolerance was one of the most conspicuous as well as one of the saddest features in the contemporary history of every nation in Europe, whether Catholic or Protestant—for in this respect the two rival religious houses did not greatly differ. I claim, therefore, that this act is the especial glory not of the Irish as Catholics, nor of the Irish as Protestants, but of the Irish as a race, and that to the Irish people must forever be ascribed the immortal glory due to the establishment of religious liberty in modern times and nations. This great act was repealed and still worse penal laws passed than were enacted by the Puritans, just as soon as the English rule was re-established in Ireland and the Protestant interest permanently backed up by English bayonets.

What has been the record of the Irish people since that date? The penal laws against the Catholics were not repealed until 1829. Up to that date, therefore, the Catholics of Ireland had no more opportunity, excepting by speech, to show their true relation to civil liberty than the negroes in our Southern States in the days of slavery. It is certain that during all this time the Irish were "vehement for their own liberty," and if it be true that, as the old Greek said, "The Gods look down with admiration on the spectacle of a great man struggling with adversity," surely they must have beheld with equal sympathy and greater admiration the spectacle of a great race, always overpowered, constantly beaten down, but never subdued, and forever struggling to be free. This long struggle is one of the grandest moral spectacles in European history. Up to 1829, if the Catholics wanted a leader in Parliament, they were forced to elect a Protestant, because the penal laws disfranchised the Catholic. No special credit is due to Catholic constituencies, therefore, up to 1829 for electing or for following Protestant leaders. But since the penal laws have been repealed Catholic constituencies in Ireland have elected Protestants, times without number, to represent them in the Imperial Parliament and in other representative capacities, as well as recognized their leadership in national political movements. The present leader of the Irish people is a Protestant—Charles Stewart Parnell.

The most Catholic county in Ireland is the County Mayo—that is, there are fewer Protestants in it to the square mile than there are in any other county in Ireland. Yet Mayo is represented in Parliament to-day by O'Connor Power, a nominal Catholic, and by Rev. Mr. Nelson, a Presbyterian preacher from Belfast. There have been hundreds of cases since the repeal of the penal laws—since Catholics have been eligible—in which Catholic constituencies in Ireland have elected the most pronounced Protestants to represent them politically. There has not been a single instance in the annals of "West British," or English-Protestant Ireland, in which a Protestant constituency has elected a Catholic to represent it. In the full record of Parliamentary history during this century, there have been only seventeen instances in which Protestant constituencies in England, Scotland, or Wales have ever elected an English Catholic to represent them—and in every case, save one, I believe, an anti-Irish man as the most malignant English Protestant Tory. Looking back at this long record of over two centuries, how can any honest man say that,

as Mr. Beecher phrased it, "From time immemorial the Irish have been vehement for their own liberty—and damn liberty to other folks?" Does not the history of our race, and of our religion over these show it is not of the Irish, and not of the religion of a vast majority of the Irish; but, on the contrary, of the people of our blood and of our creed that it may be said with justice that they have been "vehement for liberty for themselves—and damn liberty for other folks."

Only ignorance of Irish history can account for Mr. Beecher's slanders of the Irish race. But, as "ignorance of the law excuses no man" when he commits a crime, so ignorance of the history of Ireland is not a sufficient excuse for Mr. Beecher in thus defaming the Irish people. He went out of his way on his Balaac-like mission to utter these calumnies, but unluckily, for his own credit, he went on foot. I trust he will study the history of Ireland, and especially the epochs I have indicated, and that he will be glad enough to confess his error when he finds, as he will find, that he has done the Irish race a rude injustice.

If Mr. Beecher referred to the Irish in America only, his statements were both ungenerous and unjust. But I have not space to discuss that phase of it. What he says with respect to the origin of the prejudice against the Chinese is not only historically incorrect but conspicuously ridiculous. Mr. Beecher can soon learn, if he will study the history of the protest against the admission of the Chinese into California, that it is not the result of a "purely Irish prejudice," but that it is pre-eminently an American movement—that the entire population of the coast, native as well as naturalized, alike and equally, are "solid" in the opposition to the unlimited and unregulated introduction, nor of Asiatic emigrants, but of Chinese serf-labor into their Pacific States and Territories. If it is true, as the opponents of the Asiatic influx assert, that these laborers are introduced under such onerous contracts to capitalists at home as to make their coming here not an emigration of free men, but an importation of Chinese serf-labor to compete with American free labor; then the people of California are not only acting in opposition to the cardinal ideas of American civilization, but in thorough and loyal obedience to them, and they are suffering from our resistance to their petitions for protection a greater wrong than the wrong that drove the colonies in armed rebellion against King George III.

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