

ADDRESS

Head Quarters O'Neill's Irish American Colonies,
1439 North 12th. St. Philadelphia, Pa.

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Fellow Countrymen:

It is now a little over eleven years since I first joined the Fenian Brotherhood. I then believed and have had no reason to change my opinion that there was a splendid opportunity for the Irish people in America to strike a fatal blow at our Ancient enemy England. With an army of trained and disciplined soldiers of our own race fresh from the battlefields of the late war not only willing but anxious to embark in the movement, with thousands of Americans and men of other nationalities ready to join us, with some of the ablest generals of America who had offered their services to command, with the greater portion of the American people both north and south in sympathy with and willing to assist us, with the government at Washington disposed to wink at the movement, with nothing but an imaginary line between us and that hated red flag which represents the English Government, I confidentially believed that one of the best opportunities ever presented to an oppressed people to strike for their freedom had been placed within our reach. But unfortunately for Ireland the ancient curse of our race, disunion, which it has ever been the policy of England to encourage, followed us across the Atlantic, and the opportunity which should have found us organized, united and determined upon a common platform found us quarrelling amongst ourselves and fritting away our strength on non-essentials until the opportunity had passed. While a fragment of the Irish race were willing to risk their lives in striking a blow for the old land the great bulk of our people were not

ready, and some of them I fear will never be ready. They can talk patriotically enough but when it comes to practical work they prefer to talk a little more. The first attempt upon Canada in 1866 failed because the Irish people in America were not ready or willing to take advantage of the splendid opportunity which then presented itself.

After the failure of the first movement some of those who had been engaged in it were willing to abandon the cause and thereby virtually acknowledge that they were whipped. Such men should never have embarked in a revolutionary movement or induced others to do so. They are not made of the stuff out of which patriots are moulded. ~~Marching up Broadway in New York or any other city in the United States on St. Patrick's day would suit them much better than marching to meet the enemy in hostile array and drawing the works of champagne bottles at St. Patrick's night suppers would be more congenial work than drawing the fire of the red coats on the battle field.~~ There were others, however, who believed in making another effort, - men who were not willing to acknowledge defeat the who thought that the cause for which so many martyrs had perished (and which had been transmitted to us by our forefathers) was worthy of greater sacrifices than any of us had yet made. (And here let me say that although we professed to be following in the footsteps of the patriots who had gone before us, yet our sacrifices and sufferings were but very little indeed when compared with theirs.) I was one of those who believed in making another effort and under the most solemn pledges and assurances of assistance and cooperation ~~was induced to accept the Presidency of the organization, and for nearly two years and a half with others I worked~~ incessantly night and day to prepare for a second attempt. Finally the time arrived when I was satisfied that our arrangements were as complete as we could expect to make them and at the same time keep up the morale of the organization, for after various disappointments the members, particularly the

military men, were becoming impatient. Demoralization began to set in and I was convinced that the longer we waited the weaker we would become and the better prepared the Enemy would be to meet us. I therefore insisted upon carrying out the pledges which we had repeatedly made to the people to commence the fight. I was well aware that our preparations were not such as would enable us unsupported to continue the struggle with the enemy for any length of time but all that I ever expected of the Fenian organization was to furnish the nucleus of an army with which to commence the work, take up a position in the enemy's country, no matter where, and hold it for a short time. This being done I had no doubt but that the millions of our race in the United States would come to our assistance promptly and with enthusiasm. A few thousand men properly handled were all that were necessary for the start and to convince the world that we were in earnest.

It is not my intention at present to enter into the details of the cause of the trouble between myself and the Senate of the Fenian organization, for this would require a good sized volume which has yet to be written. The reason given by the Senate for opposing the second movement upon Canada was that we were not prepared for it. Of course they assumed that they were more competent to judge of this matter than I was but the true cause of the trouble was that I believed, and I had good reason for the belief, that the Senate or at least the controlling power in that body had no intention of fighting at all. It was not until I was fully satisfied on this point that I decided to act on my own judgment and independantly of the Senate. I saw that many of the members of that body were much more concerned about advancing their own interests politically than they were about the freedom of Ireland and were using myself and the organization over which I presided, so far as they could do so, simply to serve their own personal ends and aims. They could well afford to wait for an indefinite period but the honest earnest

men of the organization who had everything to loose [!] and nothing to gain by delay were differently situated. Very few of the Senators were of any earthly account in building up or keeping the organization together. Many of them indeed were dead weights to carry. In nearly every place I visited where one of them resided I found the organization completely demoralized and the members loud in their complaints against them, yet as an engine for tearing down and destroying they were all powerful, and the fact that I had been associated with them so long gave them the power to seriously injure me when it suited their purpose to do so.

~~Previous to ordering the men to the front for the second attempt upon~~
Canada in 1870 I had every assurance and as fair promises as any man can ever have that I would be supported, but the actions of the Senate and their false statements by letters, circulars, personal appeals and had the desired effect and the members of the organization were thrown into confusion and hesitated and delayed until it was too late. The Senators and their friends had proclaimed that the movement would be a failure and in order to make their word good did everything in their power to make it so. If one fourth of the men who had previously pledged themselves to obey my orders had only done so and had been on the border in time to meet me - no man can say that I ordered him to the front and staid behind myself, for I was there with the first - then we could have taken up a position on the other side of the line and got out arms and ammunition across and there held our own until a sufficient number had joined us to justify an advance upon the enemy. But the men did not come up in time and the movement failed and I had to bear the blame. Now, so far as I am personally concerned I have never admitted and don't now admit that I failed in anything I undertook inconnection with the Fenian organization

I did not undertake to do all the work myself and it is unjust for others to blame me for their own failures. I did all that any man had a right to expect of me.

~~Immediately, after getting out of prison in the fall of 1870,~~ in conjunction with others, I ~~commenced making arrangements for yet another movement against England, which was inaugurated in the fall of 1871 in the Red River Country [of] British North America north of the State of Minnesota and the Territory of Dakota.~~ I have always believed in striking at England wherever we could reach her, and wherever the English flag floats and the English government is recognized and there are English soldiers in arms to defend the flag and maintain the government I hold that the Irish people, particularly the Irish Exiles whom her oppressive laws have driven from their native land, have a right to go there and make war on England. No doubt she would much prefer having them make the attempt nearer home where she could more readily concentrate her forces and crush them out, but it is high time that Irish patriots who claim to be revolutionists should learn to act not as England desired but in the way best calculated to serve their own purpose. If we could meet England at a disadvantage at the North Pole, that in my judgment would be the best place to strike her. ~~There is no spot of earth on the habitable globe where I would rather fight England than on Irish soil but if it is not practicable to fight her there then I am in favor of fighting her wherever we can reach her.~~ There is a long line of British frontier between Nova Scotia and Van Couver's Island, with the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as an outlet, and there are millions of the Irish race in the United States from whom to recruit an army and man [!] privateers to prey on British commerce. I imagine that if Hugh O'Neill or Owen Roe, Patrick Sarsfield, Wolf Tone, Lord Edward Fitzgerald or Robert Emmett were living in America today it would not be long before an Irish army would be encamped on British soil

with the green flag floating over it. Fellow countrymen, there is not one of you, I know, who does not feel a pride in the achievements of these heroes of the past, but are you on whom devolves the responsibility of defending the cause for which these patriots fought and bled and died ready to perform your duty to Mother Ireland as they performed theirs? If so, England can soon be made to tremble for her North American possessions and her commerce on the high seas.

~~The failure of the movement in the Red River Country was caused by a mere accident. The boundary line between the United States and British North America as originally surveyed was supposed to be on the 49th parallel, and directly north of this line the British Custom House and the Hudson Bay Company's Fort are located. But subsequent observations made by a United States Engineer officer while stationed at Fort Pembina led to the discovery that the boundary line had not been correctly located and that the British Custom House and Hudson Bay Company's Fort were on American soil. This fact, however, was not generally known and I was not aware of it until too late. We took possession of the Custom House and Fort and had occupied them as a vantage ground but a short time when Colonel Wheaton of the United States Army with his command crossed over after us. The Colonel, who was in command at Fort Pembina, a frontier outpost of this government located a short distance from where we crossed the line, being in sympathy with the British government and willing to do England's dirty work, took advantage of the information which he possessed in reference to the boundary line to interfere with us and in doing so acted without authority either from his Department Commander or from the Government at Washington. He is not likely to receive a gold medal from Congress for his exploit on that occasion. We either had to fight or surrender and while we were unwilling to surrender, for we felt that Colonel Wheaton had no right to interfere with us, yet so long as there was any doubt~~

about the boundary line we did not wish to offer resistance, which we could have done successfully as we had more men than he had and besides had the advantage of being inside a stockade.

The correct boundary line has since been established by a joint commission appointed by both governments, the United States and Great-Britain, and hereafter no Irish revolutionary body need mistake the territory of the United States for that of Ireland's enemy.

I could not without compromising others and exposing my future plans enter into an explanation of the many advantages of this movement. Suffice it to say that I regard it as the most practical and easy of accomplishment of any of the movements in which I have been engaged, and the ultimate result equally as certain.

Perhaps it ought not to be thought strange if, after participating in three different failures inside of five years and after being vilified and slandered with a persistent villanery [!] by men who very unjustly blamed me for their own short-comings, and feeling keenly the injustice done me, I had abandoned the cause, but no such thought ever entered my mind. I did not join the Fenian organization for the purpose of gaining the applause of men, but simply to discharge a duty which I felt incumbent upon me in common with all other Irishmen who desired to see their native land free and who were willing to assist in accomplishing that much desired result.

It is true that for more than six years and a half I have taken no active part with any Irish national organization, but it by no means follows that I have ceased working or have abandoned the cause. I have studiously avoided active or public work for two reasons - first, to recruit my health and to replenish my exchequer, both of which were seriously impaired by my connection with the Fenian Organization, secondly because I desired to leave the field clear for those everlasting growlers, so called Irish patriots,

who were so loud in their denunciations of my every act while I was officially connected with the organization, and to give them a chance of showing to the Irish people how much more competent they were and how well they could manage the affairs of the Brotherhood when left to themselves. I don't know whether they are yet satisfied with themselves or not, but judging them not by their professions or their own estimate of themselves but by their deeds and by the estimation in which they are held by the public, who have had an opportunity of seeing the hollowness of their pretensions, I don't think it is necessary for me to hold back any longer. I now come before the Irish people of America to say that I am prepared to continue the work commenced on the 2nd of June 1866 at Ridgeway, Canada West, where a few hundred Irish soldiers met the English enemy on his own territory and whipped him. "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity" was the favorite maxim of O'Connell, but whether the present complications in Europe will afford us the long sought for opportunity or not if we are only true to ourselves, either with or without the aid of the Czar of Russia, in the name of God and Ireland I now ask you, fellow countrymen, to stand by me and assist me in striking another blow for Mother Ireland.

You should certainly know me by this time. You know I have never deceived you. You know I have never made a pledge of a promise to the Irish people which I have not tried to redeem, and if I have not been successful it was because they listened to the voice of the Slanderer who misrepresented [!] me and did not sustain me as they had promised. You know that on more than one occasion I risked my life in defense of the cause which you love so dearly, and I am now ready to risk it again. Yes, and sacrifice it if necessary, on the alter [!] of Irish liberty.

Some of the men who were prominently connected with the Fenian organization have already passed away and have appeared before Him who judges of

the motives and the acts of men, not by the misrepresentations [!] of their enemies but by the light of truth and justice. In a few years hence we will all have passed away. Robert Emmett says, "the man dies but his memory lives"- We fellow countrymen who claim to be patriots and who desire to follow in the footsteps of Robert Emmett what have we done that our memories should live? Remember that when the future historian comes to write the glorious deeds of the past it is not the number of wounds which we have inflicted upon one another or the number of homes we have made unhappy by our unjust and uncharitable accusations that are going to count in our favor, but the number of wounds we have inflicted upon the enemy of our name and race, England.

~~I have always believed that the next best thing to giving the Irish people their freedom at home is to encourage and assist such of them as come here of their own colition in procuring homes for themselves in this free land. And immediately after the failure of the movement in the Red River Country, knowing that some time must necessarily elapse before I could undertake another movement, I commenced just five years ago to travel through the western states with a view to seeing the country and selecting suitable places for colonies.~~

I spent two years in examining the cuntry and for the last three years have devoted most of my time to organizing and locating colonies in Nebraska. This of itself I regard as a noble work, and one worthy the serious consideration and support of every true Irishman. The thousands whom I have recently met in this and other cities, begging for the priviledge [!] of working for the means to keep them from starving, fully confirms me in this opinion. But ~~I had a double object in encouraging our people to emigrate from the over-crowded cities and states of the east to settle upon the cheap and free lands of the west. The first was that they might better their own condition and that of their families and the second that they might be in a position, from~~

* Their improved circumstances and their nearness to the contemplated field of future operations, to assist the cause of Irish liberty. I think I can safely promise from the colonies which I have already established at least some of the young men to assist on the battle field while the older ones are raising corn, flour, potatoes to help sustain them. And I know that there are many other settlements in the western states and territories ready and willing to do their share of the work. One correspondent writes to me from the Black Hills that he has enough of men there ready to inaugurate the movement whenever ordered to do so. Although the grasshoppers, who have been our most formidable enemies so far, have seriously interfered with my immigration scheme, yet I have every reason to be thankful for the success which I have met with up to the present. Some of those who have migrated to the west may think that they have a hard time of it because everything is new and strange to them and for the present they are deprived of many of the conveniences and comforts which older settlements afford, but I can assure all such that there are thousands of their countrymen and countrywomen in the East, now out of employment, who would willingly change places with them. In a few years these same parties who are now dissatisfied will bless the day on which they started for the west and commenced working for themselves on their own farms instead of depending on others for their daily bread and often begging for the privilege [!] of working to enrich their neighbor. I shall continue to furnish information on the subject of immigration and organize colonies, and for this purpose have established an office in this city and have secured the services of a competent Secretary, Colonel William MacWilliams, a well known Irish Nationalist, who will attend to all correspondence in my absence. I shall travel through the country myself, devoting the next few months to this state, and attend meetings and deliver lectures on Irish immigration and Irish Revolution, for I propose to have both these noble

objects go hand in hand. A circular of instructions for organizing immigration committees will accompany this address and the necessary information for military men and intending immigrants will be forwarded in due time.

In conclusion, fellow countrymen, I beg of you to lend me your assistance in this movement. Give me one chance untrammelled and my word for it, you will never regret it. The governing passion of my life, apart from my duty to my God, is to be at the head of an Irish army battling against England for Ireland's rights; for this I live and for this, if necessary, I am willing to die.

Sincerely yours,

John O'Neill.

NEBRASKA STATE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY