Thoughts on the Kingdom of Ireland written during the Debates on the Irish Propositions in the year 1785

When national bodies of men are disturbed from their ordinary habits of tranquility, & shew general indications of discontent, it is the part of true policy, not to disregard such tokens as can never arise, or exist in a state, without danger. If any case of injury exists or is supposed to exist, the dangers which may result from thence become evident, and the causes being open and proclaimed, either the redress of the grievance, or the suppression of the complaint, comes to decision according to the accustomed mode between nations which from the want of some superior tribunal, is too frequently referred to the fate of arms. But the case of injury is not the case of Ireland. No such charge is imputed. No injury has been committed. The government of the Country for many years past has been administered with lenity and national moderation. Nevertheless, there exist unequivocal tokens of a disturbed public mind. But as there is no basis of inveterate anger, founded on national injury, no malignance can exist in the case,

If Ireland has felt herself aggrieved by some latent & incommodious part of her constitution, the extent of her complaint towards England, does not amount to any charge of injury.

The Constitution of Ireland is a mixt Monarchy, similar to that of England, and all its parts are equally ballanced for internal peace. The Crown is in the possession & exercise of all its constitutional prerogatives, not only without envy or ill-will, but it is fortified by other branches of the constitution, wh are combined in concurrent interests with the Crown. There is a nobility, & landed gentry, which in every country are the natural & constant supports of a Throne. The pride of birth, hereditary honours, & the ambition of the nobility in public employments, attach them to the Crown. Similar principles in gradation, affect the body of the landed gentry, and one common interest of all those persons, whether nobility or gentry, who possess fortunes unequal, and superior to the property of the multitude, ranges them on the part of the Crown, against any republican principles of equalization.

The proprietors of land in Ireland are more bound to the support of quiescent government, than any landed proprietors in any other kingdom in the World. The reason is, because

the great landed fortunes of Ireland, have at some time or other been acquired under the banners of English settlements. And altho much time has elapsed since these first settlements, yet even the most antient titles might be shaken, if any general convulsion were to happen. Besides these obsolete claims against the oldest settlements & landed titles, which nothing but general confusion could now revive, it is to be considered, that there are other lurking claims of more recent date, against which a very great body of Irish landed proprietors can have no protection, but in the stability of their government. To go no farther back than the reign of King James the first, and from thence to the end of that century, viz to the settlements of Ireland after the Revolution, where are the title deeds which within that period have not been harrowed up again and again, by inquisitions, confiscations, settlements, revocations of those settlements, resettlements &c &c, together with numberless acts of fraud and violence, attendant upon all these changes? All proprietors of lands, who are conscious to themselves of being under these circumstances, must be sensible that any searching times of confusion, might drive them from their possessions into the wide world. As this class constitutes the body of the protestant interest

in Ireland, it is acknowledged by all parties, that the protestant interest cannot subsist but by the support of a protestant government, and of a protestant throne. The protestant church of Ireland, which may be called a class of spiritual nobility and gentry, are doubly interested in the support of the foregoing principles. All these parties can only secure themselves by combining their own interests with those of the Crown. They have one common cause to support, viz the present constitution of mixt Monarchy, without any biass or private interest leading towards republican independence

There is another interest growing up in Ireland, which is at present considerable, tho partially distributed, viz the manufacturing & commercial interest. This is a protestant interest; and as far as it extends, it coincides in views with the foregoing interests. Peace is the harvest of commerce & manufactures. Of all wars, those wch are most destructive to their interests, are domestic wars, entailing unquiet possessions & turbulent governments, thereby destroying both the exertions & objects of pacific industry. Besides these obvious interests, by wch commerce is attached to quiet government, it is to be observed, that commerce partakes of the soil where it is planted.

Commerce accumulates property, & therefore in these kingdoms, where the acquisition of land, & every gradation of ascent, is in course of time open to the merchant or the manufacturer, they feel themselves ultimately upon the same bottom with the landed interest. They are impatient to acquire settlements in land, they partake of all its interests, they entail their acquired estates upon their families, & in every respect occupy the places of those who have left them, and thus they fill up a succession of persons still grafted upon the same system of landed interest, and by this succession, they are assimilated from time to time, into the constitution of a landed kingdom, of which, after their adoption they become similar and concordant parts.

The consideration of these points is essential in discussing the present state of Ireland, to shew, that altho Ireland has claimed & acquired to herself, an independence of the legislature of the English parliament, yet they have no wish or tendency, to become independent of the Crown. Their only object has been, to acquire the rank & constitution of an independent kingdom, in every respect similar to the mixt monarchy of her Sister Kingdom. The Crown is therefore now become the bond of union between the two nations.

Ireland has hitherto been a province to the Crown & Parliament of England. The original settlements of Ireland were made by joint adventures of Kings of England, & of English subjects. The famous laws in the reign of Henry 7th, commonly called Poynings laws, wch have lately been repealed to give independence to Ireland, with respect to its own legislature, were originally passed for the protection & security of the English pale, & settlers in Ireland. The English settlements in Ireland were at that time in a very crude & hazardous state. It had been found impossible, by the principle of conquest alone, to exterminate the old native interests of the original Irish. Several parts of the Country were therefore united from time to time with the English interests, by compromises of treaties & alliances. Such compromises were substituted in default of power, and the effect wch they produced was, that of enabling the native interests to contend with the English interest in Councils as well as arms. It was to defend the settlers against this consequence, as well as to secure the dependence of the settlers themselves upon the Crown of England, that the famous law of Poinings was enacted, for notifying the causes of Parliament to the privy Council in England. It was both an act of union, and protection to the settlers.

In the subsequent periods, from the reign of Henry the 7th to William the 3d, altho the native interest of the antient Irish was gradually obliterated, yet a constant succession of national troubles, producing perpetual changes & uncertainties in the state of landed property, there was no permanent body of landed proprietors, receiving & transmitting their landed properties in hereditary succession, who could claim the character of the hereditary people of Ireland. From the period of the revolution to the present time, a continued state of civil tranquility & of undisturbed possessions for nearly a century, has organized, & drawn forth into form, the inherent spirit & faculties of a nation, ambitious to acquire the coordinate rank & constitution, of that mixt monarchy, from which the settlements of Ireland are derived, and under one united Crown to become an independent kingdom.

It is thus that the Irish nation has arrived thro various fortune, & successive gradations, to the claims of an independent kingdom. But if it be an honorable ambition which has prompted Ireland to aspire to Independent Empire, the same ambition will not permit them to stop there, or to leave the corresponding parts of that system unfinished. If from a province they are become an independent kingdom, their first attentions

ought to be directed, to prepare a new & splendid rank for their sovereign, now no longer the sovereign of a province, but wearing the national crown of an independent kingdom of Ireland. Having requested a separation from the Parliament of England, wh heretofore has acted in concert towards the government & protection of Ireland, it is a debt wh they owe to themselves, as well as to their sovereign, to strengthen his hands, by an additional civil establishment suitable to Royalty, & similar to the civil establishment of the Crown of England. a Royal Household, a Court, a Marine, Ministers, Ambassadors, &c which would again return to themselves, in offices of honour & trust, conferred upon the nobility and gentry of Ireland.

If their Sovereign, having been for many years attached & wedded to a Sister Kingdom, should condescend to adopt his eldest son & heir apparent, as the partaker of his Throne, to receive the first coronation of an Irish Crown at Dublin, would not the ambition which has called for a King, give him that reception of dignity and honour, which would be due to such a King, being the Son and Heir apparent of the Sovereign, and his representative.

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But any such step or the most distant thought towards it, must alone proceed from the will & pleasure of the Sovereign. It could not however be considered as any derogation to the Sovereign. Collega Imperii was a Title well known, & frequently in use with the Roman Emperors. The occupancy of an united throne by the Heir apparent, would extend the Stability of the reigning family upon a broader basis. It would be an augmentation of the dignity of the Crown, without endangering the liberty of the Subject. It wd not be an accumulation of power in the Crown operative against the liberty of the Subject. It wd be an enlargement of the circle of regal dominion, in the place of provincial dominion. Every other member & faculty of the Constitution, within this enlarged pale of regal dominion, wou'd receive a corresponding encrease, which would therefore preserve the ballance of the constitution, as a mixt monarchy. The nobility & gentry and people of Ireland, would acquire importance equal to the splendor of the Crown. The dignity of the Crown, & the prosperity of the people, would go hand in hand together.

A new creation of an independent kingdom, displayed in all its parts, & claiming its rank among the Crowns of Europe, wd add a most decided importance to the united Empire, among all foreign nations, as well as to the family of the Sovereign under whom they are united.

The transfer of domestic dominion to Ireland, would draw off its subjects from looking to foreign spiritual powers, or entering into the military service of foreign princes. Free liberty of conscience in matters of religion, under a domestic prince, requiring no other tests but those of civil fidelity, wd reunite all the divided parts in one national cause, & restore all the sons of Ireland to her own bosom.

The residence of a Prince's court, wd recall the wandering absentee to his native home. It would repeople the Country with nobility gentry & yeomanry. It wd inspire new life into the peasantry, now most dejected & oppressed. Hospitality would smile upon the land, and industry would lay open all its hidden treasures. Manufactures & commerce wd carry the glad tidings to the extremities of the earth. All these blessings may happen to Ireland, if a prosperous issue should attend what has been called their emancipation. That lot is now cast. It will require much temper & moderation to steer successfully towards that prosperous issue. The world is crowded with rival nations, who may not wish to see any prosperous end to these things. This maxim is therefore most infallible, that the most distant tendency to any rupture between England & Ireland, would be serving the envious views of foreign rival states, and sacrificing all salutary purposes of our own.

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With a domestic prince reigning in Ireland, thereby completing the circle of domestic Empire, every possible jealousy arising from the apprehension of external influence will be removed. The volunteers of Ireland would then become the national & constitutional militia, under the sanction of their own legislature, & under the command of the domestic executive power.

Edward the first gave to the Welch a native prince to reign over them. This indeed was but the favour of a name. The substantial boon which attached Wales to England, being both upon one soil, was their incorporation into one legislature. Nature does not equally favour a legislative incorporation of Ireland. Ireland by the immutable laws of nature, is and always must remain a distinct & separate Island, circumscribed by its own Ocean, beyond which nothing can be called domestic. But that which cannot be incorporated, may still be united. The Sovereign may be the bond of union. Ireland has hitherto been a royal farm unimproved because unoccupied. It has moved in an excentric orb, straining heavily upon the distant hand of government. The occupancy of the throne of that Kingdom by the Sovereign's eldest son if approved by the sovereign, will relieve the distant pressure, restore the equipoize of government, & connect the two Islands by the two hands of common sovereignty, instead of one. And in future times, even native princes may reign over Ireland.

The delegation of the kingdom of Ireland to the heir apparent, the inheritance being indivisible, wd enlarge the scope of action without dividing the unity of interests. It wd be a bond of affection, & of unity of action, within the royal family. It wd consolidate the interests of two generations. A Royal settlement for the Heir apparent would anticipate a new & splendid sphere of action for the successor, wch would reflect its lustre with equal dignity upon the present Sovereign. It wd prevent foreign emigrations, by multiplying the objects, & the means of domestic affluence. It wd invigorate & protect the distant parts of the united Empire, and fortify its extreme barrier, where the hand of government cannot be in full strength, and where the ties of common interest are feeble in proportion.

The decline of Empires commences from extreme parts. There are in all the political establishments in the world, latent imperfections, coeval with their original constitutions. The superintending eye of domestic government, may watch over the first tokens of such defects, & still keep them in a quiescent state. But if they once break out into tumult & contention, various other latent discontents, are ever ready to seize the occasion, & to raise their heads. The evils which are first seen are the least part, those wch are behind the Curtain, form the secret & desperate ambush, to encompass national destruction.

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In such cases the only prudence of government consists in prevention, or early & pacific remedy.

The infirmities of the Constitution of Ireland are too obvious to be mistaken, or to be glossed over by fallacious confidence. They extend no less than to the very elements of civil & religious union. The national settlements of landed property have shallow and therefore precarious roots. In spirituals, a foreign hierarchy hangs over their heads, like a two edged sword, in temporals as well as spirituals, suspended by a single thread. These are the Rocks of danger to Ireland.

The new Constitution wch they have so earnestly sought for, may be preferable to provincial dependence; It may be a laudable object of ambition & pursuit; But on the part of a nation which has two feeble internal parts, the meditated change should be courted not compelled. The completion of that change, by a fundamental system of political establishment, compact & uniform in all its parts, may afford arguments for its adoption, which the unconnected claims of single & separate parts, might not be entitled to. That constitution, if it is to lead to tranquility & permanence, shd arise from a general combination of congenial interests, and become the basis of greatness, to those who are to give, and to those who are to receive.