

Wright Letters 069

Daniel O'Connell's renown stems largely from his effecting repeal of the 1800 Act of Union (Northern Ireland and England). He was successful in his campaign to achieve Catholic Emancipation in 1829, granting Catholics the right to sit in Parliament. He played a convincing role in seeking emancipation for the slave; condemning slavery vigorously. William Wilberforce the founder of the British anti-slavery movement, retired around 1824. Part of the new generation of slavery antagonists, O'Connell, a Catholic, was outspoken and his views controversial. They denounced the institution, hurling invective and employing public remonstrance, in efforts to eradicate it. O'Connell backed immediate emancipation. Unlike many abolitionists of that time period, he saw black slaves as the equals of free white men. He didn't confine his commentary to the British Kingdom, but rather voiced criticism of U.S. slavery, labeling it a "blot on their democracy." He differed from his evangelical forbearers in the movement, who saw opportunity for Christian conversion in slave communities. O'Connell's tone, decidedly all-encompassing, imparted a humanitarian tone to acrimonious abolitionist discourse.

A member of the House of Commons, O'Connell reproached Britain's government for reimbursing slave owners (over 20,000 pounds sterling) for the loss of slave labour as a result of the 1833 abolition of slavery in the British Empire. He also railed against the replacement of slavery with apprenticeship. Britain abandoned it as a substitute in 1838.

In 1839 O'Connell refused to recognize the American Ambassador in London, Andrew Stephenson, because he was a 'slave breeder.' He attended the 1840 first international Anti-Slavery Convention in London. He was acknowledged to be leader in the global anti-slavery movement and a brilliant orator.

O'Connell died in 1847, but his writings and speeches continued to be disseminated. In the antebellum period., they were reprinted in the North of the U.S. O'Connell's tenor and approach inspired abolitionists who were new to the cause.

Source: Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement by Christine Kinealy

The Edict of the Inquisition of Ancona Against the Jews (Italy) was decreed in the Chancellory of the Holy Inquisition, on the 24th of June 1843, during the tenure of Pope Leo XIII. A revival of an old decree, its reintroduction was instigated by Fra Vincenzo Soliva, Inquisitor of Ancona. Under its terms Jews were required to live and work inside the city's ghetto. The edict was canceled after a short while. A revolution in 1848 freed Jews from Arcona's restrictions. The Jewish community in Ancona is one of the ancient and most esteemed in Italy. The Jews there were freed during the reign of Napoleon but were again constrained and ostracized after Napoleon fell.

In the following, Rights of Conscience refer to moral convictions and ethical codes, and tangentially to religious beliefs. The tension which O'Connell mentions is likely between one's compact with God and one's allegiance to civil laws.

Merrion Square
25 August 1843

My Dear Friend

I am sure I do not know whether the edict purporting to emanate from what is called the Inquisition at Ancona be a genuine document or a fabrication. XXXX from some expressions in it, I have a strong conviction that it is at least in part fabricated. But you may be sure of two things __ First, that I detest its cruelty towards the Jews as much as you do; and that I as a Catholic am as free to condemn it as you are. If it be genuine it must have the sanction of the law-makers at Ancona, whoever they be; and its whole force of authority arises from those law-makers, and is binding __ that is, so far as an unjust law can be said to be binding – upon those persons only who are subject to those law makers By the word “binding”, I mean “binding by legal authority” only; and by no means obligatory on conscience on them but quite the reverse.

One thing is quite clear – that your anonymous correspondent would persecute Catholics if he had the power; which, thank God! He has not. How ignorant the creature must be of the history of persecution not to know that persecution has been supereminently a protestant practice, infinitely beyond the practice of that crime by Catholics. He is also brutally ignorant not to know that it was Catholics who first, since what is called the Reformation, established freedom of conscience; and that protestant states have not yet ceased to persecute Catholics; and indeed Protestants also, if the latter were not precisely of the same sort of Protestants as themselves. I believe there is no Catholic country at present in existence, in which there is any law in force for the persecution of Protestants. I am convinced there is not. Then as to Ireland the contrast between Protestants and Catholics is most disgraceful to Protestantism and most glorious to Catholicity. The Penal Laws were a disgrace to human nature; and were doubly so because inflicted in the most palpable violation of a solemn Treaty. ~~It is~~ And there is this cruelty in addition __ that Protestant bigotry, no longer able to slaughter our persons, indulges its malignity in the endeavor to murder our reputations.

You and I, my dear friend, have this consolation __ that we concur in detestation of slavery of every kind __ mental and corporal and above all, that we detest any violation of the rights of conscience; and in particular every species of persecution.

In haste

Believe me to be

Most truly yours

Daniel O’Connell

James Haughton, Esq