

In any human disaster it is human nature to try and see the funny side of things for a whole complex of individual and community psychological reasons, in fact the Rebellion needs a good psychological history. The 1798 period was no exception as the following humorous pieces confirm. They are reasonably contemporary having been published in 1811; italics, blanks and spelling are as in the original.

1) In the late Irish rebellion, J. C. Beresford, Esq. a banker, and member for Dublin, rendered himself so obnoxious to the rebels, in consequence of his vigilance in bringing them to punishment; that whenever they found any of his bank-notes in plundering a house, the general cry was: "By Jasus, we'll ruin the rascal! We'll destroy every note of his we can find" and they actually destroyed, it is supposed, upwards of 20,000l. of his notes during the rebellion

2) During the rebellion of 1798, while the regiment of Ancient Britons were gallantly carrying the terrors of fire and sword through the Wicklow and Wexford mountains, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wardle, their commander in Chief, Sir W. W. Wyne, was detained at Dublin, by a slight wound to the hand, which, however, did not prevent him from walking the streets daily, with his arm in a crape sling; while his iron shod boots, and his trailing scymeter, raised such a clatter on the pavement, as could not fail to impress the rabble with the terrors of his warlike presence.

Passing one day by Black Dick's laboratory, the artist's deputy says to his master, "I believe dat's de man dey call Sit Watkin Win, of the Welch horse" "Well, and what of that?" answered Dick. "Noting" answered the deputy, "only dey say he's a great hero; but I don't tink he looks much like one". "Your soul to the gallice!" rejoined Dick, "Do you want a goose look like an eagle?"

3) Previous to the breaking out of the Irish rebellion, Lord Clare, who took a marked and leading part, both in legislative and ministerial measures for pulling down the popular spirit, which he followed up till the consummation of the Union, used frequently to declare, speaking of the leaders and advocates of the popular factions, "that he make those fellows as tame as gelt-cats;" and obtained amongst the multitude the nick-name of the Cat-gelder. A few years after the noble lord died in Ireland, in consequence of a dreadful accident he sustained while riding in Rotten Row, St. James's Park, His remains were interred in the church-yard of St. Peter's Dublin. His funeral had, indeed, a most popular attendance; and just after the body was deposited in the grave, and the Minister had pronounced these words of the burial service, "Earth to Earth! Ashes to Ashes! Dust to Dust!" a sudden yell from the surrounding multitude rent the air, like the squall of a thousand cats, and the dead bodies of above a dozen tabby mousers, which the bearers had brought beneath their great coats, were tossed aloft, and fell into the grave upon the coffin, as an hecatomb to the memory of the departed statesman. His mourning relations, who surrounded the sarcophagus, were highly shocked and exasperated at this insult to the memory of the Patriot Peer, but it was impossible to discover any of the offenders

4) The asperity of Lord Clare's politics during the disturbances of 1797 and 98, rendered him peculiarly obnoxious to the mass of the people, and so conscious was he of this, that he generally walked the streets with pistols in his pockets and accompanied by his two nephews armed in like manner. Passing a bookseller's shop one day, on his way to the House of Lords, his tailor, who was talking politics in this

temple of knowledge, observed him pass, and dryly observed, “Well, there you go, my Lord Clare, and sweet bad luck to you; for I’m sure God Almighty is sorry he ever made you”.

5) During the disturbances of Ireland in the year 1798, Mr. Claudius Beresford, of humane eminence, commanded a corps of Volunteer Cavalry, entirely composed of revenue officers, and of whose discipline he was very proud. Boasting one day in the presence of Counsellor Lysaght, on the excellence of his regiment, the witty barrister said, “I don’t doubt it gallant Captain, for they are all seizers (Caesars) to a man”.

6) In the reign of terror, which at that time was the order of the day in Dublin, The Riding House of Mr. Beresford’s corps was organized under certain auspices as one of the flagellating tribunals, and the instrumental and vocal music produced by the cats of the drummers and the cries of the victim were generally heard for about six hours per day by the surrounding neighbourhood. A wag passing by this tribunal wrote with a piece of chalk in large letters upon the gate, Mangling done here by Claudy and Co.

7) An unlikely mistake occurred at this time with respect to an old man, an honest manufacturer of coffins and packing cases, in whose timber-yard about a mile from his residence, a small coffin filled with pike-heads was discovered. In the summary justice of the times, there was no difficulty in identifying by analogy the coffin-maker himself with this deposit of rebellious arms. He was therefore marched without trial or ceremony to the triangles and complimented with a dose of 500 lashes. The man’s innocence was proved beyond all question in the course of a few days, and he had the consolation of being informed by the Executive Directory of the Riding-House, that he was flogged in a mistake.

8) At the same time an officer high in the service of the Government, viz. The Castle Sweep-Chimney, named Hoarish, was accused by the secret information of some mischievous wag with a plot to blow up the Castle, murder Lord Camden, and marry the Lord Mayoress. Ridiculous as this imputation was, this sooty conspirator, who was an honest and industrious fellow, was dismissed from his office, hurried before the Tribunal of the Department, and was almost flogged to death. His innocence also was proved in a little time, and he was restored to his fuliginous dignities, but whether he obtained indemnity for the past, or security for the future, was an arcanum imperii which never transpired.

9) During the discussions in Ireland upon the Union the minds of all classes were exasperated on the subject, and the people considered it then as they do now, a most unwarrantable injury and ruinous insult to their country. The Viceroy, Lord Cornwallis, was adored for the benevolent contrast of his character to that of his predecessor; but he suffered his share of obloquy as the instrument of that odious and irreconcilable measure.

On St. Patrick’s Day, the national festival, the veteran viceroy taking a morning ride on the north side of Dublin, accompanied by two of his aids-de-camps, he was met by a squadron of cockle-women who had been collecting their commodities on the neighbouring strand, and were returning to Dublin to sell them. They opened to the right and left to give passage to his Excellency, but did not fail to salute him with this

compliment, “The devil’s back to you, blind Corny! You are come amongst us to take St. Patrick’s day, the joy of Ireland, home to your own bl---dy county.”

10) The populace of Dublin who are all politicians and patriots, sieze with singular avidity upon every speech, pamphlet, or other publication, which involves a question on their country’s interest, and this principle pervades even the lowest classes. The question of Union did of course interest all minds, and every assembly from the senate-house to the humbler dram shop, talked of nothing else during the discussion. Above fifty pamphlets were published by the opposers in two months, and as many distributed by the Government in favour of it. The authors of the measure held out strong promises, and not only Dublin, but Cork, Waterford and every other sea-port town were respectively assured that their harbours were to become the chief emporiums of British commerce, and rapid posterity in consequence of the measure. While Parliament was engaged in debating the subject, two coal-heavers issuing from a porterhouse close to the House of Commons, began to converse on this prevalent topic. “Paddy” says on, “I’m tould for a sartinity the’ll take this Union away to England with them.” “What matter for that?” answered the other, “sure devil a good Parliament does us; and Dublin is made a free port, any how”. “Oh!” replied the other, “to itself. I wouldn’t give up the honour of poor ould Ireland. We don’t know what the English may do with us; however, devil fire me if I ever I’ll part with my c---s for the sake of making my a---a cake shop.”

11) Written during the late Rebellion, by Sir -----, an Irish Member of Parliament, to his friend in London.

My dear Sir,

Having now a little peace and quietness, I sit down to inform you of the dreadful bustle and confusion we are in from these blood-thirsty rebels, most of whom are, however, thank God, killed and dispersed. We are in a pretty mess – can get nothing to eat, nor any wine to drink, except whiskey; and when we sit down to dinner, we are obliged to keep both hands armed; whilst I write this letter, I hold a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. I concluded from the beginning that this would be the end of it; and I see I was right, for it is not half over yet. At present, there are such goings on, that every thing is at a stand.

I should have answered your letter a fortnight ago, but I only received it this morning. Indeed, hardly a mail arrived safe, without being robbed. No longer ago than yesterday, the coach, with the mails from Dublin, was robbed near this town; the bags having been judiciously left behind, for fear of accidents, and, by good luck, there was nobody in the coach, but two outside passengers, who had nothing for the thieves to take.

Last Thursday notice was given that a gang of rebels were advancing hither, under the French standard, but they had no colours, nor any drums, except bagpipes. Immediately every man in the place, including women and boys, ran out to meet them. We soon found our force much too little, and they were far too near to us to think of retreating; death was in every face; but to it we went, and by the time half our little party was killed, we began to be all alive. Fortunately the rebels had no guns, but pistols, cutlasses and pikes; and as we had plenty of muskets and ammunition, we put

them all to the sword; not a soul of them escaped, except some that were drowned in an adjoining bog; and in a very short time, nothing was to be heard but silence. Their uniforms were all of different colours, but mostly green. After the action we went to rummage a sort of camp they had left behind; all we found was a few pikes without heads, a parcel of empty bottles full of water, an a bundle of blank French commissions, filled up with Irishmen's names.

Troops are now stationed every where round the country, which exactly squares with my ideas.

I have only leisure to add, that I am in great haste.

Your's,

P.S. If you do not receive this in course, it must have miscarried; therefore, I beg you will immediately write to let me know

11) When the Irish Union was effected, sir John Parnel's health was frequently drunk in genteel companies. Being one day, in a convivial party he observed jocularly, that by the union he had lost his bread and butter. "Ah! My dear sir", replied the gentleman, "never mind, for it is amply made up to you in toasts."

12) During the time that martial law was in force in Ireland, and the people were prohibited from having fire-arms in their possession, some mischievous varlets gave information that a Mr. Scanlon, of Dublin, had three mortars in his house. A magistrate, with a party of dragoons in his train, surrounded the house, and demanded in the king's name, that the mortars should be delivered to him. Mr. Scanlon, a respectable apothecary, immediately produced them, adding, that as they were useless without the pestles, these were also at his majesty's service.

13) During the recent unpleasant situation of affairs in Ireland, a watch-word was required of every passenger after a certain hour, with liberty for the centinel to interrogate at will. A poor harmless Irishman, traveling from Kilmainey to Kilmore, being asked concerning his place of departure, and place of destination, answered, to the astonishment of the enquirer, "I have been to kill-many, and am going to kill-more." "That you shall not," said the centinel, and immediately ran him through with his bayonet.

14) In one of the late revolutionary battles in Ireland, a rebel hairdresser ran up to the muzzle of a cannon, to which an artilleryman was just applying the match, and thrusting his head into its mouth, exclaimed, the moment before he was blown to atoms: "By Jasus, I have stopp'd your mouth, my honey, for this time."

14) Some differences lately occurred between a corps of volunteers and their commandant. The regiment was ordered to appear before the inspector general, and the colonel, of course, gave the word of command, "Attention – Shoulder Arms." Not a muscle, not a musket moved. The command was repeated in a louder voice, the corps was still motionless. The general surprised, beckoned to a serjeant, and asked why the corps refused to act? "An't plasse your honour," says Pat, making his due obeisance, "it is bekays the colonel and regiment are not on spaking terms."