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SPEECH MADE BY THE MOST REV. DR. O'DWYER

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERRING ON HIM OF THE
FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF LIMERICK,

SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1916

MR. MAYOR AND GENTLEMEN, I thank you very heartily for the great honour conferred upon me, but I confess that I feel somewhat strange in these surroundings of public favour. Popularity is a novel experience for me, and I must be on my guard against its fascination, not indeed that I ever attached much importance to it or sought it. We all know the fickleness of the *popularis aura*, and the man that relies upon it will probably be marooned in the end. Some of you will remember the early years of my episcopate, when the correct thing politically was to treat me as the enemy of my country because I had the audacity to think and to say that the methods of the political agitation were amenable to God's laws. I was heartily in sympathy with the farmers in their movement to emancipate themselves from the yoke of an intolerable landlordism, but I condemned as immoral the methods of the Plan of Campaign and boycotting as intrinsically unjust and the latter as essentially un-Christian; and for that, and that alone, an attempt was made to hound me down and silence me. A meeting was held here in my own city, under the shadow of my own cathedral, and the full strength of a powerful organisation was exerted to discredit and defame me. Some men prominent in the agitation took part in that meeting, and seemed to be borne along on a full tide of popular enthusiasm, yet within six months I saw those mighty leaders hooted and pelted in the streets of Limerick, and guarded by their enemies, the police, from the fury of their own

friends. It was a lesson, as well as my own experience, of the unsteadiness with which the wind of popular favour blows. And therefore, Mr. Mayor and gentlemen, I trust you will not imagine that I am the less grateful for the signal mark of your favour which I have received to-day, if I remind myself that the weather may change at any moment, and the wind blow from another quarter.

My duty as a Bishop is not to flatter you, or play upon your feelings for my own ends, but to put God's law without fear or favour before you, and to speak the truth with the freedom of the gospel. Apart from that higher view of duty, I have too great a love and respect for my people, and—perhaps I ought not to say it—too much pride in myself, to stoop to the methods of the demagogue. At the time to which I refer I was drawn into controversies by my sense of my duty as a Bishop. I did not interfere for the sake of politics. I spoke in defence of the moral law of which I am, however unworthy, the guardian. But that did not save me from abuse and misrepresentation. At other times, particularly in connection with education, which is closely related to religion, I have had to interfere and incur the displeasure of some politicians, who think they can deal with ecclesiastics after the manner of Combes or Viviani, and the other continental infidels, and resent the action of a bishop, inside or outside the sanctuary, if it does not square with their notions. But I was right all the time. I knew I was right, and that testimony of my own conscience was