

William Francis Roantree

Speech from the Dock

January 24, 1866

I did not think it possible that any jury could bring in against me a verdict of guilty; guilty of conspiring, when it must have been clear to every unprejudiced man that it was the Crown conspired. After an absence of seven years, I returned home from America. I was set upon by one of the Crown officials, and I was publicly denounced by one of its creatures as an infidel. I wish it to be known, and generally known, that no matter who or what he is, no one can hope and live in Ireland except he be a Schofield or a Nagle. I was set upon, as I have said: every word of mine was misinterpreted and distorted in the hope of finding some excuse for my arrest. Finding none, Nagle was set upon me, and I was arrested upon his information. I am now, after four or five months close imprisonment, asked, after a few little preliminaries, what I have to say why sentence should not be passed upon me. Would any word of mine avail me now? I am your prisoner, powerless, for the present, to do anything more than appeal, as an American citizen, against your sentence, not to any pro-English-American Consul, but to the great American people. I have, as an Irishman, done my duty to my country, but my only regret is that I have not it in my power to do a great deal more. There is one thing more I would like to dwell upon – namely, the insane document referred to by Judge Keogh. It was Nagle handed me that document and said to me, 'What do you think of it?' How was it possible I could get such a document as that from any of the convicts in Mountjoy? As an Irishman, I appeal against your sentence to the Irish people, and I pray that the God of Justice and Vengeance may guide and strengthen them in their holy determination.³⁶