

HIBERNIAN HORRORS:..

OR,

THE NEMESIS OF FACTION.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

BY ALFRED AUSTIN.



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HIBERNIAN HORRORS;

OR,

THE NEMESIS OF FACTION.

To the RIGHT HONOURABLE W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

SIR,

WHEN last I presumed to address you, you occupied what you have since described as a position of greater freedom and less responsibility. There were those who ventured to remind you that a person of your eminence in vain seeks to widen the limits of the one without enlarging the boundaries of the other; that freedom and responsibility, where such a one is concerned, are the finely adjusted scales without which the balance of the Constitution cannot possibly be preserved; and that you could, by no expedient of the mind and no ingenuity of the conscience, resort to any form of public action, or indulge in any method of public utterance, for which the responsibility was not exact and commensurate. You took no heed. On the contrary, you expanded your liberty into what most men regarded as licence, and acted as though you were irresponsible altogether.

What have been the consequences? It is true you have become Prime Minister. But, in what chiefly appertains to our Foreign Policy, upon which, as a critic, you expended such tumultuous energy, you had to signalize your accession to Office by an unedifying

apology that has since ripened into a retractation. In regard to Ireland, upon whose politics you lavished the remainder of your invective, you have been more consistent; but you have been consistent at the expense of your country. It was impossible you should throw yourself overboard altogether, and yet pretend to remain the pilot of the State. Compelled, by the resolute attitude of a Power you had most unseasonably denounced, to desist from your famous project of co-operating with Slavonic ideas for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, you had no option, unless you were to abandon every portion of your Opposition programme, but to co-operate with Irish ideas for the disintegration of our own.

The result is now before the world. It is little more than four years since I took the liberty of remonstrating with you. You had just entered upon what may be called the pamphlet period of your career. You had published "Bulgarian Horrors." Yet, is it possible that the author of that notorious production, and the present tolerant First Lord of the Treasury, are one and the same person? You, the writer of "Bulgarian Horrors," have allowed Ireland to be turned into a Bulgaria, yet you do not seem to be horrified!

Surely we are here in presence of an extraordinary exhibition of inconsistency. You were not responsible for the atrocities committed in Bulgaria; and neither was Lord Beaconsfield, upon whom you laboured, with a persistency that rather scandalized than convinced, to fasten the obligation. Yet you filled the heavens with your clamour, and protested that you could not sleep till the abominations of Turkish misgovernment were swept away. We are now, and have for some time been, in presence of atrocities nearer home, and

of misgovernment that touches us somewhat more closely ; yet you appear to find these atrocities, though they are perpetrated at our very door, more or less tolerable ; and for the misgovernment and apathy of the Executive in Ireland, which were never exceeded by Beys and Bimbashis, you have not a syllable of reproof, since for these you do happen to be responsible, in a word, because this amazing misgovernment is your own. Are you aware what your countrymen are thinking ? They are contrasting your fury of four years ago with your tameness now, your prodigious activity when you ought to have been quiet, with your portentous apathy when you ought to be up and doing. Is it wonderful if they conclude you expended so much energy in wanton agitation, that you have none left for the proper purposes of Rule ?

Yes, we, alas ! have got our Bulgaria ; and, what apparently is still more unfortunate, we have got you to deal with it. Pamphlets are, as a rule, fugitive productions ; but you can scarcely hope that your "Bulgarian Horrors," and your "Lessons in Massacre," are forgotten already. Will you allow me to cite from them a few brief passages, by reason of their singular pertinency to your and our present condition ? At page 11 of "Bulgarian Horrors," I find it stated, that in order to obtain security against the repetition of unexampled wrongs, "The nation will have to speak through its Government ; but we now see clearly that it must first teach its Government, almost as a lisping child, what to say." At page 19 of the same work, we meet with scornful allusions to "general attenuations of the matter, as what must be expected to happen among savage races, with a different idea or code of morals from our own ; difficulties in deciding on which

“side lay the balance of crime and cruelty, bold assurances that the insurgents were the aggressors, suggesting the reflection that the chief responsibility must rest on him who strikes the first blow ;” while at page 33, we read withering accounts of “the entire and violent lawlessness which still stalks over the land.” If we turn to “Lessons in Massacre,” we are informed, in burning language, at page 43, that it was “four, nay, more nearly five months,” before the Turkish Government began to perform its duty ; at page 55, that “one outrage perhaps in a hundred had been repressed or noticed,” and that “the presence of a military force in Bulgaria had been a bad security against outrage ;” at page 68, that “trials had taken place far from the scene of the outrages, proceedings had thus been delayed, the effect of example lost, and the ends of justice to a great extent frustrated ;” at page 70, that “the Porte prolonged the reign of terror and suffering in Bulgaria, by advisedly withholding military guardianship ;” at page 74, that the Porte, which you stigmatize as “weak, impotent, and passionate,” “stands unalterably identified with the outrages ;” at page 76, that to exorcise the mischief “will be easy, when the exorcisers are agreed,” and finally, at page 80, the last page of the pamphlet, that a respite “is simply a respite to the criminal, not from punishment, but from prevention, a year of grace only another year of debasement, misery, and shame.” If it were not invading your copyright, it might not be amiss, and it would certainly be timely, for some one to issue a fresh edition of your celebrated pamphlets, only substituting the word “Ireland,” for the word “Bulgaria,” and for the Government of the Porte, your own.

Yes, the condition of Ireland is indeed appalling, and

surely warrants the designation of "Hibernian Horrors." Yet it is not for the purpose of describing the condition of Ireland that I have taken up my pen. That has been made a work of supererogation by a crowd of witnesses, who speak with more knowledge, more ability, and more authority than I can pretend to command. The object of this letter, as its title implies, is rather to point out that these Hibernian Horrors are the Nemesis of Faction; that you personally are responsible for them; and that your responsibility for them commenced with, and dates from, your abdication of the dignified reserve of a Statesman, and your unhappy adoption of the resources of the agitator. You have inspired numbers of your adherents with an enthusiasm almost akin to veneration; and though your political opponents may not regard you with homage equally indiscriminating, the more judicious of them entertain for you sincere respect. But some distinction has necessarily to be drawn between the elevation of your private character, and what they consider the perversity of your public conduct. You allowed this distinction before; and your indulgence is craved for it once again. On most occasions, when a character is challenged that men esteem, though they may not pervert truth to his extenuation, they can at least be silent. But suffering patriotism knows no such refuge. When the common weal is in danger, reserve is a crime.

The points, then, to be established, are these:—

1st. That you, the author of "Bulgarian Horrors," are mainly, and more than any one else, responsible for Hibernian Horrors.

2nd. That this awful responsibility is the Nemesis of Faction; the lineal and inevitable sequel of the unfor-

tunate course adopted by you in the autumn of 1876, and persisted in till the spring of the present year, when you acceded to Office.

I am well aware that in an age which labours to be very tolerant in order to appear a little wise, it would be easy to purchase some cheap credit for impartiality by allowing that the land laws of Ireland should in fairness be saddled with a portion of your responsibility. But who would care to acquire a character for judicial impartiality at the expense of justice? If the land laws of Ireland were as vicious and inequitable as, only ten years ago, you assured us you had by your Land Act rendered them fair and reasonable, and if every landlord in Ireland stickled for the last iota of rights which we will assume to be excessive, though you yourself conferred them, that would not help your position, nor diminish your responsibility one jot. It would not, in the very faintest degree exonerate you from the obligation to uphold the law as it stands, and to deal swift and sharp retribution upon those who agitate for its alteration by ringing the changes upon every crime known to the calendar of felonious offences. Do you think that your countrymen are such sophists, or the slaves of such sophists, that you or any one can persuade them that, even if the Irish Land Laws you so recently reformed are still in need of reformation, an organized conspiracy to violate them is a proceeding you are not bound to prohibit and to punish? Do you suppose that they have become such converts to new ideas of right and wrong, so completely fascinated by the superior morality of philosophical Radicalism, as to consider it highly reprehensible in Irish landlords to entertain a lingering regard for statutes of your making, and only natural and to be expected that Irish

tenants should resort to breach of contract, to turbulence, and to intimidation, in order to procure their repeal? No, no, Sir! There is a limit to the stultification of the human reason, even by such lofty authority as yours; and prone as men are to admire you, they cannot allow you to play fast and loose either with their conscience or with their understanding. No doubt, you have done what you think to be right. But it is not enough to be virtuous; it is equally indispensable to apprehend in what public virtue consists. It is true that, since you have obtained power, you have ceased to be an agitator; but are you not still suffering from something of that perverted moral judgment which the practice of agitation almost invariably entails? It has been observed by a great moralist who has instructed us all, and the sad tidings of whose death reaches me even as I am writing, that "no man, whether prophet, statesman, or popular preacher, ever yet kept a prolonged hold over a mixed multitude without being in some degree degraded thereby." The reference is to Savonarola. With him, however, it might be inappropriate to compare you, since in consequence of your extreme sensibility to popular currents, you are perhaps scarcely likely ever to become a martyr to your opinions.

But one thing must be made clear, and kept clear; and that is, the utter irrelevancy of the merits of the Irish Land Laws to the paramount obligation under which you lie to uphold law, order, and personal liberty in Ireland. No one says that the Land Laws of Ireland are perfect. It is not necessary to maintain that they are not very defective. If you like, they shall be as bad as you have recently discovered that they are. But what then? No Irish landlord can by any possibility

have extorted from his tenants anything more than existing laws, and to a certain extent laws made by yourself a decade ago, assign him. Few landlords have dreamed of extorting as much. The vast body of them have always been content with considerably less. But even if this were not so, you cannot hold those who observe the law, however selfishly or pedantically, responsible for the illegalities of those who violate it. Let good laws be maintained, and let bad laws be abolished or modified; but let both be respected, and, if you happen to be the Executive, cause both to be respected, until they are changed. This is precisely what you have not done. Nay, you have done immeasurably less than this. Because there are certain features in the law of contract between landlord and tenant in Ireland, which you allege ought to be altered, you have allowed Irish tenants to violate every portion of the contract between themselves and their landlords; and not only have you allowed them to do this, but you have permitted them to break every law of God and man, in attempting to coerce their landlords into being consenting parties to that violation. When it is said you have permitted these things to be done, these crimes to be permitted, these violences to be perpetrated, what is meant of course is, that you have sate idly by, and have deliberately abstained from trying effectually to prevent them. Indeed, you have allowed people to conclude that you consider a portion of the existing laws so objectionable, that you, the Executive Government of these Realms, cannot think of applying for the necessary force to compel respect for law at all! What should we say of a person who refused to extinguish a fire because he did not quite like a portion of the house that was being burnt? And what would be

our opinion of him, if he further happened to be a professed fireman specially left in charge of the premises, and handsomely paid for extinguishing the flames in the contingency of there being a conflagration? That Irish tenants have broken their contracts with their landlords, is notorious; but they have not done so more flagrantly than you, Sir, have broken yours with the English people. You have done so, no doubt, from ignorance, from inadvertence, from misfortune, from a passion for consistency, from sympathy, from enthusiasm, from I know not what, but, in any case, from the best of motives. But the result is as unfortunate as though you were inspired by the worst. It is difficult to speak as one would wish of a Minister people privately esteem, yet whose conduct they publicly deplore. You have immense attainments, rare eloquence, long experience, superhuman energy, earnestness that frightens, and perseverance that appals. You know every language worth knowing; you are acquainted with every literature, every art, and almost every religion; you are familiar with the inner meaning and personal purpose of poets concerning whose very existence some persons have doubted; you are learned in Conclaves, Councils, and all the weary controversies of Christendom, past, actual, and to come. In fact, you know everything under the sun, except how to govern.

The attempt, therefore, to extenuate your responsibility for the horrors to which Ireland has become a prey, by invoking the imperfection of the Irish Land Laws, is of no avail. But we have been told that, by rejecting your Compensation for Disturbance Bill last Session, the House of Lords ought in fairness to be held in some measure responsible for the present Reign of Terror in Ireland. You are hemmed in, on every side,

against advancing such a pretence. In the first place, the Bill, if passed, would have done absolutely nothing to preserve peace and order in Ireland; though it is probable that the fact of its having been brought forward has ministered in no small degree towards promoting their infraction. Let us call into court the most unimpeachable witnesses. Night after night, when your colleagues were struggling to force the acceptance of the Bill on a reluctant House of Commons, the men who are now the mouthpieces of disorder, sedition, and disloyalty in Ireland, kept protesting, in language peculiarly their own, that it was a mean, miserable, and beggarly measure, and that it was in no sense, and in no respect, what the people of Ireland demanded. They have since a thousand times repeated this description of it, while addressing the monster meetings convened by the Land League; and, to crown all, Mr. Parnell declared, only a fortnight ago, that the only reason he had for not taking the trouble to offer an effective opposition to a Bill he regarded as an imposture, was the certain conviction that the House of Lords, as he gracefully put it, would perform that dirty work for him.

That is the first answer to the plea that the House of Lords is partly responsible, along with yourself, for the horrors that are being enacted in Ireland. But there is another answer equally cogent and equally conclusive. Observe what the plea amounts to. It infers that the repeal of a law by the House of Commons is, for all practical purposes, final and sufficient, even though the consent of neither the House of Lords nor of the Crown has been obtained. This is pretty Constitutional doctrine, to proceed from the Head of a Cabinet that contains six actual Peers and

another in prospect! This truly is an appropriate argument from the Leader of the Liberal Party, by whose votes alone the Bill would have been rejected in the House of Lords, had every Conservative Peer absented himself from the Division, and a considerable number of whose members even in the House of Commons abstained from voting, while several of them, in spite of unparalleled Party inducements and menaces, voted against it.

No; the deeper and the more unflinchingly we search for the authors of the present hideous condition of Ireland, the more inevitably are we driven to the conclusion that your Cabinet, and you more than any member of it, are the persons of whom we are in search. This is not to forget the far-reaching vindictiveness of that democratic sinecurist, your Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who doubtless flatters himself that he will soon be able to chant his *Nunc Dimittis*, since he descries the coming fulfilment of the malevolent dream of his life, the destruction of large landed properties and the disappearance of English country gentlemen, against whose existence he cherishes a grudge, the cause for which I will not attempt to determine. This is not to forget the special responsibilities of your Lord Chancellor, *vir pietate gravis*, who is in a peculiar sense entrusted with the vindication of the law, but who appears to think he has sufficiently vindicated it when he has delivered himself of some platonic platitudes at a Mansion House Dinner. Neither need we lose sight of the exceptional responsibilities of your Secretary of State for India, who has lent you his character for moderation and strong sense, and who will certainly never get it back. Nor are men oblivious of the pitiable vacillations of poor Mr. Forster,

who, for some reason unknown to me, excites rather their pity than their anger; or yet of the damning reserve of your once voluble Home Secretary, since nothing but superhuman embarrassment could shame him into silence. But these, one and all, inferior figures, inferior factors, they instinctively brush aside, when they contemplate the awful state to which law, society, morals, everything deserving of honour or preservation in Ireland has been reduced, and, casting about them for the main culprit, they look for you, and with profound reluctance, but no hesitation, exclaim, "Thou art the man!"

For when, and how, did the present desperate condition of our affairs begin? It began with the sowing and scattering of reckless agitation; and agitation, grown into violence, and ripened into sedition, is the harvest we now have to reap. The original sin was yours; yours was the serpent's seed. It was you who drove the furrow; it was you who prepared the crop. This is far, as you will see, from being the whole or the end of your responsibility; but it was, so far as Ireland is concerned, the first in that succession of sinister events that have culminated in the repudiation, by a large proportion of the Irish people, not only of all legal contract, and of all social obligation, but of all moral law. The deplorable words by which Irish tenants were first incited to employ violence against their landlords, and Irish rebels encouraged to propagate disloyalty to their Sovereign, have repeatedly been quoted. But so long as treasons, stratagems, and toils, torment the loyal portion of the Irish people, those words can never become obsolete. Besides, there is a fresh application to be made of them, and one more proof to be adduced, and that a damning one, of their

fatal consequences. Here are the words, in their hideous nakedness, as approved by yourself, and republished with your special sanction:—

“ When it came to this, that a great jail in the heart
“ of the Metropolis was broken open under circum-
“ stances which drew the attention of the English people
“ to the state of Ireland, and when in Manchester
“ policemen were murdered in the execution of their
“ duty, at once the whole country became alive to Irish
“ questions, and the question of the Irish Church re-
“ vived. It came within the range of practical politics.”

Now, Sir, be good enough for a moment to accompany me across the Atlantic, to follow me to a large hall in Newark, New Jersey, and to listen to another orator, another agitator, addressing a multitude as large and as enthusiastic as any you yourself ever addressed in Midlothian. See, he speaks:—

“ I want you to help us to put on the pressure which
“ is necessary to bring England to her senses. What did
“ Gladstone say the other day in Scotland? He said it
“ was not till a prison was blown up in the Metropolis,
“ or a police officer shot in Manchester, that the Irish
“ Church question came within the domain of practical
“ English politics. I think that these people murdered
“ yesterday will help us forward yet. We in Ireland
“ are not listened to in England.”

Do you recognise the orator? You ought to do; for, though apparently co-operating with you now, he has obstructed you often. It is Mr. Parnell, and the day is the 6th of January, 1880—a strange and ominous anticipation of another 6th of January, yet to come. You grow pallid; and well you may. Is it from terror, from stupefaction, or from remorse? But, come away.

If you linger, he may recognise you, may single you out from the crowd, and crush you to the ground with the grateful quotation :—

“ A Daniel, still say I—a second Daniel !
I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.”

Do you not see how fearful is your responsibility ? How came you, men are all asking, to enter upon the insane course which has conducted you, by the inflexibility of moral fate, to so terrible a termination ? You were not bound to be an agitator. You were not obliged to write “ Bulgarian Horrors.” You were under no compulsion to pursue Lord Beaconsfield, day after day, week after week, and month after month. You were free to practise a dignified and patriotic reserve, or, if departing from a silence you had ostentatiously imposed upon yourself, you might have assisted an anxious Government, notoriously conspired against by the eternal and unsleeping enemy of this country, in its difficult endeavour to avert a formidable menace to European peace. But you fancied you saw an opportunity of embarrassing, and possibly of overthrowing, Lord Beaconsfield ; so you suddenly plunged from the sweet recesses of contemplative retirement, into the bitter turmoil of uncompromising agitation.

From that moment your freedom was gone. You forfeited the independence of your will and the liberty of your judgment, and you bound yourself, hand and tongue, a slave to necessity,—the necessity of carrying your point and driving Lord Beaconsfield from power. Your expectation, your hope, the plan of your campaign, was to expel him from power upon the Eastern Question. In that, you were baffled. But you had

put your hand to the plough, and you could not turn back. Disappointed in your strategy of trying to force on an immediate Dissolution, and fearing that by the time a General Election occurred the misconceptions concerning foreign policy propagated by your passionate invectives would be dispelled, you cast about you for another subject for popular oratory, and you found it in the Land Question. Having failed to befool the nation on the question of its honour, you approached a large and powerful class on the vulnerable side of its greed. Borrowing the desperate ejaculation of the most vindictive of pagan divinities,

“Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo,”

you shifted your appeal from the loftiest sentiments to the lowest passions of mankind, and having failed to persuade them to betray their country, you began to incite them to plunder their neighbours. Every one will recognise the adroitness that inspired you, in conducting your new campaign, to break ground first in Ireland. Neither can it be truthfully denied that your success in that country has been immense. Possibly it has exceeded even your own expectations, for your victory there is blazoned in Hibernian Horrors. Are you horrified now? Upon my word, you need to be; for they are indeed the Nemesis of Faction.

You do not hear that phrase for the first time in reference to your unhappy victory. On the morrow of your apparent electoral triumph, there was one who ventured to predict that you would be “steadily dogged from the outset, and in the end ignominiously defeated, by that great earthly Nemesis, human nature.”* But no one thought that “*Pœna pede claudo*” would

* Vide “The Fortnightly Review” for June, 1880.

overtake you with such prodigious strides. Lord Beaconsfield has remained silent respecting the methods by which you destroyed his Government, and the awful series of political blunders, of political disasters, and, if I am to say what every one is thinking, of political crimes, that have darkened your own. But though he has maintained silence, others have not failed to contrast you with him; and your countrymen are at this moment all saying, some with regret, some with remorse, that if Lord Beaconsfield had been still in office, Ireland would not now be in a state of social disorder and moral disintegration, compared with which open insurrection would be almost a welcome change. He has made no sign, he has raised no hand, he has struck no blow. But you have avenged him on yourself. At this moment his reputation as a Statesman stands higher than ever; while yours is plunged into an abyss of discredit from which it is difficult to see how it can ever emerge. Yours has been the career, with the inevitable conclusion, of the avalanche, which after threatening to crush the mountain side under its headlong plunges, finally dwindles and disappears in the valley it filled for a moment with its evanescent noise. His fate it has been to seem for a while to suffer from your precipitate fury; but, on calmer and closer inspection, dented by a few noble scars, he still soars aloft in silent majesty.

A few years ago, there was a public character that attracted to himself much public curiosity, and some popular sympathy. He called himself the Claimant, and succeeded in persuading Lady Tichborne, and for a time the mercurial multitude, that he was her son. With kindred success, you persuaded the country that you were its hope. Unfortunately, the parallel ends

there; for he was put under durance, while you were put into Downing Street. But there was One, greater than you, that entered with you; noiseless of step, quiet of mien, passionless, though cherishing a steadfast purpose, unprecipitate, yet penetrating everywhere, a ghost unnoticed and unseen, cloaked, silent, but unsleeping, your perpetual companion, your constant shadow, ever waxing in length, ever darkening in gloom. Go where you would, it still attended you. When you spoke, it prompted; when you wrote, it dictated; when you acted, it led. It directed your hand, it penned your despatches, it presided over your councils, it decided your policy, and determined your doom. It, not you, was First Lord; and its name is Nemesis.

This most faithful of Private Secretaries, already indefatigable, though as yet unpaid, was evidently at your side when you prepared for the Opening of Parliament, and put into the mouth of the Sovereign, the following announcement:—

“The Peace Preservation Act for Ireland expires
 “on the First of June. You will not be asked to renew
 “it. My desire to avoid the evils of exceptional legis-
 “lation in abridgment of liberty would not induce me
 “to forego in any degree the performance of the first
 “duty of my Government in providing for the security
 “of life and property. But, while determined to fulfil
 “this sacred obligation, I am persuaded that the loyalty
 “and good sense of my Irish subjects will justify me
 “in relying on the provisions of the ordinary law,
 “firmly administered, for the maintenance of peace and
 “order.”

No one who had not, by bartering his liberty for success, become his own Mephistopheles, could have

composed such sentences at such a time; and you hastened to demonstrate how complete was your servitude, by the most extraordinary contradiction on record. Immediately after announcing that you were persuaded that the loyalty and good sense of the Irish people would justify you in relying on the provisions of the ordinary law for the maintenance of peace and order, you introduced a most extraordinary measure, and a measure to whose extraordinary character you testified, by proposing that it should operate for only two years; and having introduced it, you then sought to extort the acceptance of it from the Legislature by pleading that Ireland was within a measurable distance of civil war! In presence of self-contradiction so flagrant, one is reduced to silence. One can but state it, and pass on.

But stay! There is a loophole of escape for you. I perceive that your words were that the ordinary law would suffice, if "firmly administered." Would you like to plead that it has not been firmly administered? Certainly, everybody would agree with you; and if you desire to pass under that door of humility, it is left open for you.

But there is yet another observation to be made respecting this extraordinary justification of extraordinary measures after you had protested that ordinary measures would suffice. What could you have meant by saying that your "desire to avoid the evils of exceptional legislation would not induce you to forego in any degree the performance of the first duty of your Government in providing for the security of life and property?" What was your object in announcing that you were "determined to fulfil this sacred obligation?" I should think you would be a little perplexed to furnish answers to these questions. But

Nemesis can answer for you. Nemesis inspired you with the above copious assurances, in order that you might first publicly confess that the obligation was sacred, and then not fulfil it; in order that, having pledged yourself not to forego your duty in any degree, the contrast between promise and performance might be all the more glaring, when you came to forego your duty altogether.

The Session proceeded; and every day the Legislature assembled made it more patent that, promise and protest as you would, you were a mere powerless puppet in the hands of your irrevocable past. As we have seen, you had announced, with a curious infelicity which could have been prompted only by that unrecognised but avenging inspirer that was bent on your confusion, that you would in any case "avoid the evils of exceptional legislation in abridgment of liberty." Yet the very first thing you did was to propose legislation avowedly exceptional, in abridgment of the liberty of landlords. The boast was hardly uttered, before you introduced your Compensation for Disturbance Bill, by which the liberty of landlords to evict tenants who could not, or would not, pay their rent, and to replace them by tenants who both could and would, was not only abridged, but was, to all intents and purposes, abolished for two whole years! Who could explain such contradiction, such inconsistency, such tergiversation, unless he knew that Nemesis was already pursuing his pitiless task, and leading you with silent mockery further and further, and deeper and deeper, into the treacherous quagmire of your Irish bog!

What treatment a Measure, so conceived, and so defended, met with, and what treatment it deserved, it is superfluous to describe, save in the curtest language.

It was openly repudiated by every independent member of your Party, and silently rejected by many members of your Party who were not supposed capable of emotions of independence, even under the grossest provocation; whilst by the Representatives, whether in Parliament or out of it, of the class to propitiate whom the Measure had been invented, it was scouted as contemptibly inadequate, and little better than an insult.

It is no wonder that it was so viewed by them; for, instigated by your memorable words, the Land League had meanwhile been formed, had matured its purposes, and determined its methods. The Session drew to a close; and despite fresh warnings and renewed supplications, you allowed the Legislature to separate without providing yourself with those powers of precaution and prevention it was ready, nay eager, to concede you. Determined, indeed compelled by the irony of Nemesis, not to govern Ireland at all, rather than govern as Lord Beaconsfield had governed it, you contented yourself with expressing a platonic hope that a bountiful harvest would confer peace and happiness upon Ireland. A more bountiful harvest was never vouchsafed to that or any country; but it was attended with results the very opposite of those you had affected to anticipate.

The Vacation commenced; Parliament rose; and as the corn ripened and the roots swelled, so swelled and ripened that harvest of agitation of which you, in your days of irresponsible freedom, had driven the drill and sown the seed. The machinery of fraud, force, and disaffection had now been perfected, and was put in motion. On the 31st of August, Mr. Boyd was murdered in Wexford. Notices were posted in various parts of Ireland, signed by Rory of the Hills, and threatening with death any tenant that paid a higher

rent than Griffiths' valuation. On the 12th of September, John Martin, a bailiff on the estate of Mr. Blennerhasset of Kilkee, was attacked in the middle of the night by ten men with blackened faces, who tied him down in his bed, and clipped off his ears. On the 15th, Mr. Hunt of Danesfort, a landed proprietor, was fired at in a railway train. On the 25th, Lord Mountmorres was murdered in Galway, with every conceivable incident and accompaniment of atrocity. On the 1st of October, armed men surrounded the houses of herdsmen in the employment of Captain Boycott, and compelled them, under menace of death, to leave his employment. The sequel is known to the whole world; and the transfer of the powers of the Executive from your hands to those of the Land League was effected, under the system henceforward known as "Boycotting." On the 18th of October, Mr. Hutchings was fired at in broad daylight on the high road, and Downey, the driver of the car on which he was travelling, killed.

But what is the use of continuing to recite the catalogue of agrarian outrages and murders committed in Ireland during the last four months? I have before me a mere bare enumeration, without detail or comment, of these offences, from the beginning of August down to the end of November; and for that period only it occupies sixteen pages of closely-printed matter, in itself longer than the whole of this Letter. I suppose there is not an educated man in the Kingdom who has not read the substance at least of the charges delivered by Mr. Justice Fitzgerald, Mr. Justice Dowse, and Chief Justice May. It would be idle to attempt to reproduce them here. I will only quote, as a sort of summary of the situation, and as a summary carrying authority and weight I do not possess, two short

passages, one from the charge of Chief Justice May, spoken on the 4th of this month, and the other from the charge of Mr. Justice Fitzgerald, delivered on the 7th. Here is the first of them :

“ For several months this country has been in a state
“ of anarchy ; law has been openly defied and trampled
“ upon ; a large portion of the community, urged on
“ by members of this Land League, have practised a
“ system of fraudulent dishonesty in refusing to pay
“ their just debts ; the process of the law cannot be exe-
“ cuted, and the Queen’s Writs cannot issue. . . . This
“ country has been for months in a state of terror. It
“ has been tyrannised over by an unauthorised conspi-
“ racy. The people of this country are afraid to assert
“ their rights, and it is not too much to say, the law is
“ defied, life is insecure, and the rights of property
“ cannot be asserted.”

Now for the second. After drawing a picture of the comparative tranquillity and freedom from crime in which Ireland had been left by the Government of Lord Beaconsfield, though of course without mentioning the latter, Mr. Justice Fitzgerald went on :

“ But at the return from the summer vacation at the
“ end of October last we found all changed. We found
“ that some organization—I do not profess to say or
“ know what it was, but some organization acting on
“ the cupidity, the passions, and the fears of the people—
“ had reduced some districts in the country to anarchy
“ and confusion little, if at all, differing from civil war.
“ Gentlemen, in addition to that, it was obvious to
“ every one that you had to deal with an armed popu-
“ lation. The offences which I shall have to describe
“ to you were all committed by armed people. As far

“ as I can judge from the official reports, in certain
“ districts in the province of Munster, which we are
“ now dealing with, every boy, every farmer’s boy,
“ every farmer’s son, and persons of that class, seem to
“ be armed with a rifle and a revolver; and they cer-
“ tainly have been used freely in the commission of the
“ outrages which I shall have to advert to. . . . I do
“ not wish to be guilty of exaggeration or to create
“ excitement or alarm. I desire now to express myself
“ in calm and measured language. That best becomes
“ one to whom the administration of justice is committed,
“ and I should fall short of my duty if I did not point
“ out to you that in several districts, embracing a large
“ portion of Munster, true liberty has ceased to exist,
“ and intolerable tyranny prevails. Life is not secure,
“ right is disregarded, the process of the law cannot be
“ enforced, and dishonesty and lawlessness disgrace the
“ land.”

Nothing, Sir, as you know, so deeply impresses the law-abiding, law-reverencing people of this country, as a statement emanating from one of Her Majesty’s Judges; and the delivery of these charges sent a thrill of amazement and consternation through the land. The London daily press had already done its duty; but, high as stands its character for energy, vigilance, and veracity, men will never be so much affected by the correspondence of newspapers as by the language of the Bench. Day after day the columns of our leading London journals had teemed and overflowed with accounts of the chaos into which Ireland was drifting; and even the organ which extends to you a support of very doubtful value, and whose arguments and ideas of fairness are of so peculiar a kind that I should think you must often

exclaim, "Save me from my friends!" was reduced to palliating, in its leading articles, the facts it was compelled to print in its correspondence. Still, you made no sign. You had dined at the Mansion House on Lord Mayor's Day, and seemed thoroughly satisfied; and Mr. Bright, encouraged by your ostentatious neutrality between violence and its victims, between fraudulent tenants and ruined landlords, took heart of grace openly to declare that, where such persons are concerned and such circumstances prevail, force is no remedy.

But the utterances of the Judges, weighted with normal authority and pronounced with exceptional solemnity as they were, roused you from your inconceivable apathy. You hastily called your Cabinet together, and a number of Councils succeeded each other with unparalleled closeness, while the sittings were unprecedentedly protracted. Men said you were at last going to do something. What it was exactly, they did not profess to know. But the general belief was that you were about to call Parliament together, and to ask for a renewal of the Peace Preservation Act you had so jauntily allowed to lapse, and possibly for power to suspend the Habeas Corpus for a fitting season. At any rate, they all agreed that you would do something or other. They were mistaken; for it soon transpired that Mr. Bright and Mr. Chamberlain would not let you. You had suffered the fate of Irish landlords, and were Boycotted in your own Cabinet by the crypto-Republican members for Birmingham.

What had occurred? Nothing less than the most shameful incident in the long and not particularly edifying history of English Party. Your Chief Secretary for Ireland had tardily reached the conclusion that

force *was* a remedy, and the one effectual and necessary remedy for the horrible condition into which you had allowed Ireland to sink; and he announced his conviction that whatever remedial legislation might be deemed indispensable in the future, the need for Coercion was urgent and immediate. The word at length had been spoken; and several members of the Cabinet signified their assent to the views of Mr. Forster. Mr. Bright, and Mr. Chamberlain at once declared that if Coercion was resorted to previously to the introduction of remedial land legislation, they should at once resign. If you hesitated a moment whether or not to let them go, I cannot say; but at any rate, your conclusion was to keep them. To part with these two men would doubtless have been to decompose your Cabinet, possibly to break up your Party, and—awful contingency!—to open the road for the return of Lord Beaconsfield to power. Sooner than do that, you determined to leave Ireland to what one of Her Majesty's Judges had just told you was the tyranny of an unauthorized conspiracy that defied the law and made property and life utterly insecure, and another of Her Majesty's Judges, with tears in his eyes and in despairing tones, had described to you as “anarchy and confusion, little, if at all, differing from Civil War.”

The scandal was great, and the nation was dumb-founded. Like the messenger in Henry IV., Mr. Forster had posted across the Channel with tidings Shakespeare anticipated with prophetic accuracy—

“Great lords, from Ireland am I come amain
To signify that rebels there are up.

* * * * *

Send succours, lords, and stop the rage betime,
Before the wound do grow uncurable.”

Beaufort, the great-uncle of the King, exclaims

“ A breach that craves a quick expedient stop;”

and all England was of that opinion on the present occasion. What expedition did you show? What stop did you propose? Something had to be done to satisfy the uneasiness of your own Party; some salve had to be administered to the more tender consciences in your Cabinet, if indeed conscience can be properly mentioned in connection with such a flagrant dereliction of duty. But that something had to be compatible with your retention of Mr. Bright and Mr. Chamberlain; and it was shortly announced that a compromise had been effected, by virtue of which some measure of Coercion should, if still found necessary, be proposed, when Parliament met, along with a large and liberal Land Bill, for redressing the wrongs of the helpless tenants of Ireland!

It may safely be said that so self-condemnatory a decision was never before arrived at by a body of perplexed politicians. When you first formed your Ministry, its admirers boasted that it was the Ministry of All the Virtues, while even its adversaries confessed that it looked uncommonly like a Ministry of All the Talents. A short but painful experience has shown that it was neither the one nor the other, and if it be remembered in History at all, as I fear it will be by reason of the miseries it has caused and the calamities it will bequeath, it will surely be as the Ministry of All the Faults and All the Follies.

For just consider what this decision of your Cabinet implied. It was indeed a compromise; for it has compromised you all. After delays and indifference no one could understand, you had at length avowed that

the provisions of the ordinary law were not sufficient for the preservation of peace and order in Ireland; and that very exceptional measures indeed, and Coercion in some very explicit and stringent form, would be indispensably required, to re-establish law, to reorganize society, and to restore civilisation. Yet at the very same moment that this reluctant avowal was extorted from you by a section of your own followers, you proceeded to put the finishing touch to your self-stultification, by appending the announcement that these necessary measures, this indispensable Coercion, would not be resorted to till the 6th of January at the earliest, or nearly four weeks from the date of your arriving at that conclusion! Meanwhile, confusion was to become worse confounded in Ireland; the American desperadoes whose assistance, as we have seen, Mr. Parnell invoked in order to put pressure upon England, were to have another month for the completion of their projects, for the organization of menace, outrage, and assassination, for the threatening of Judges, for the intimidation of witnesses, for the abolition of property, and for the annihilation of the authority of the Queen. One has heard of men shutting the stable-door after the steed had been stolen, but one never understood that they were regarded as models of wisdom. Yet their sagacity was of a high order when compared with yours, which apparently consists, when you hear that half the stud has gone, in leaving the door ajar until the other half shall have disappeared.

Thus you concluded to do nothing, after arriving at the conclusion that something ought imperatively to be done; and you sought to cover your abstention from

effectual and appropriate action by pouring more and more troops into Ireland. One of the constant charges of Mr. Bright, the corner-stone of your Ministry, against Conservative Governments has been, that they apparently could not govern Ireland with less than twenty thousand troops. At any rate, they governed it. Again, see the Nemesis of Faction! You and Mr. Bright cannot, or at least do not, govern it, with considerably more than that number.

One more device for the pacification of Ireland, it is true, you have attempted. I allude to the famous Prosecution that still hangs fire. But, as none know better than yourself, it is, to use a classical Irish phrase, a sham, a delusion, and a snare. It is a *postiche* Prosecution. Were it a real one, you and your colleagues would have to be included in the indictment.

People there are who, in the vexation of their minds and the bewilderment of their consciences, have tried to solve what seems insoluble, by insinuating that you have purposely, and of malice prepense, tolerated the growth of crime and disorder in Ireland, in order to create an excuse for the introduction of an Irish Land Bill of an extreme and revolutionary character; in other words, that you have deliberately Boycotted the English people. Let me say at once that, where men of such elevation of character as yourself, as Lord Selborne, as the Marquis of Hartington, as Earl Granville, and others are concerned, the suggestion is incredible. But there is one member of your Cabinet, and now evidently its controlling spirit, if not its absolute master, of whom, I submit, it is not unreasonable to believe that he would regard with toleration, if not with complacency, almost any amount of turbulence

that promised to lead to the extermination of the territorial aristocracy of these islands.

For the present, you have fallen under the spell of that evil counsellor, as, all your life, and in every period of your career, you have succumbed to the influence of some person or other less gifted but more adroit than yourself. Under his incantations you are still slumbering. Indeed, all your Cabinet seem to have been thrown into a profound sleep, from which it would appear that, like certain case-hardened criminals, they will not awake, until they are roused to be led to execution.

But that, though a just and, it is to be hoped, not distant penalty, will not recall the mischiefs or end the anxiety you have caused your country. What is the political state of Ireland at this moment, it might not be patriotic to describe in language of too much accuracy. But Mr. Parnell has told you, in words of explicit defiance, that the end of the campaign you chose to inaugurate is entire severance from England; and your conduct has been admirably calculated to further that conclusion. Meanwhile all the fair Charities have been banished from Ireland, and the discredited Humanities are dead or hiding. Reptiles and poisonous things have repossessed the land, and the Island of Saints has been transformed into a lair of demons. How long will England tolerate the shameful spectacle? Do you not hear the rising murmur of an indignant nation? Your popularity has waned; your prestige is gone; and you have only to put it to the test to discover that your magical power to mislead is well nigh exhausted. Believed we otherwise, we should have to conclude that Nemesis was a mere

pagan divinity, discountenanced and dead, and the
Eternal Equities a fiction and a name.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient humble servant,

ALFRED AUSTIN.

SWINFORD HOUSE,
Christmas Eve, 1880.

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