

MR. TREVELYAN ON IRELAND.

10th February, 1883.

Mr. Trevelyan, M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland, addressed his constituents at Hawick last night. He met with a most hearty reception. Mr. Robert F. Watson, Provost of the burgh, presided, and on the platform were many influential citizens.

Mr. Trevelyan, who was well received, said, "Mr. Provost and gentlemen,—I can hardly tell you what a pleasure it is to me to find myself once more on this well-known platform, in the presence of old friends, free, for one night at least, from the alternation of drudgeries and anxieties which constitute the daily existence of those who are concerned with the government of Ireland—for the government of Ireland is not one department but many departments rolled into one. (Cheers.) At this moment the position, if not of Ireland, at any rate of the Irish Government is more critical than it has been at any preceding time, on account of the want of knowledge on the part of a great many people on this side of the Channel of what Ireland really is. The cardinal division of Irish society is not, as is sometimes imagined, between Whig and Tory, between Protestant and Catholic, between the camp of the tenant and the camp of the landlord. Those divisions exist, and the questions relating to them belong to the field of politics. But if you want to get at the truth, you must never forget that there are two Irelands—the Ireland of men of all parties, and creeds, and ranks, and callings, who, whatever else they differ upon, unite in wishing to preserve law and order and the right of every citizen to go about his business in peace and safety; and there is the other Ireland—the smaller Ireland, as I firmly believe—of the men who foment and condone and sympathize with crime. It is the gravest mistake to underrate the numbers and the claim to respect of the party of order in Ireland. It is not a political party. (Hear, hear.) It includes the great Liberal party of the north, which, in all its essential features, resembles the Liberal party in Scotland. It includes the Conservatives. I had heard a great deal beforehand of the bitterness of Whig and Tory in Ireland; but, as far as my personal experience and observation are concerned, I never came across men

more ready, at a crisis, cheerfully and unostentatiously to place patriotism before party than the Conservatives of the sister island. (Cheers.) The party of order includes the best, and, as I believe, the great majority of the Catholic population; it includes most certainly every Catholic bishop and clergyman with whom I have had the honour of talking, and that is not a few; it includes all but a handful of the Parliamentary representatives of Ireland. It includes every farmer who does not want to rob the landlord of his due, and who does not want to be forced to pay blackmail to agitation; every poor fellow who desires to be at liberty to earn a day's wages, by whoever they are offered him, without being shunned, insulted, beaten, and, too probably, murdered; every artisan who is thrown out of work by the flight of capital from the country; everyone who desires to lead a quiet life in private, and to obtain his political ends, whatever they may be, by legitimate and constitutional means. (Cheers.) On the other side stand the men who planned and executed the Dublin murders, the Galway murders, the boycotting, and firing into houses, the mutilation of cattle, and intimidation of every sort and kind throughout the island. These are the men who not long ago were masters of the rural districts, and tyrants of the streets of Dublin. When we went to Ireland last May we found society profoundly disorganized; we found the best elements in it depressed, and the worst elements triumphant. And how should it be otherwise, when instead of the law being a terror to evil-doers, evil-doers were a terror to the law-abiding and the industrious? There is no country in the world which would not go from bad to worse as long as crime was unpunished in proportion as it was grave, and that was the case in Ireland. There were 17 agrarian murders in 1881, and not one single conviction. In the first eight months of 1882 there were 18 agrarian murders, besides the massacre of the Joyce family in Galway. Not one of these had been punished, and not one of them under the old system would have been punished even if the evidence of guilt had been as clear as the sun in heaven. Under these circumstances, the one duty of the Government, the one chance for Ireland was to appeal to the law-abiding and orderly members of the community (hear hear); to encourage them, to protect them, to protect themselves, in the character of witnesses who would swear to the truth, and jurymen who would give a just verdict without fear of man. (Cheers.) The fact is that there has

been a real and genuine rise in the respect paid to human life in Ireland since murder began to be punished. There are three classes of crime which are murderous in intent—murder itself, firing at the person, and firing into dwellings. In the four months ending December, 1881, there were 130 of these crimes. In the four months ending April, 1882, there were 125. In the four months ending August, 1882, there were 79. But at that date, for the first time for more than two years, a murderer suffered for his guilt; and in the four months that followed these murderous crimes fell at once from 79 to 14. (Cheers.) I suppose there never was such a significant fact in the annals of crime. During the last two months of last year there was not a single agrarian murder. And what class, gentlemen, has gained by this disuse of crime? Is it the rich, the powerful, the highly connected? Since murder began once more to be punished capitally in Ireland the leading members of the Irish Administration have been exposed to a torrent of the most horrible abuse by voice and pen that public men in any time or country ever endured. I shall not insult your ears by any specimens of the foul calumnies which form the daily fare of the men who are trying to do their duty by Ireland. But the substance of them is always the same—that we are butchering Irishmen in order that the rich and wealthy may live at their ease in Ireland and that the English connexion may be preserved. Let us see how the matter stands. Let us see who were the victims of the murders which have been capitally punished. There was an old herdsman, of past 60, earning, I think, 6s. a week, who was shot dead through the eyes with a charge of snipe-shot. There were a farmer and his son—and you know what that sort of Irish farmer is, as compared to the tenant farmers of this district in wealth and comfort, who were pulled out of bed and shot to death on their doorstep amid the shrieks of their family. There was another farmer of the same class shot dead in a field. There were a family of miserable, untaught, half-dressed poor creatures, who, from the grandmother down to the child, were roused from their sleep to be slaughtered in their hovel; and, finally, there were a boy of 16 and his grandfather, whose united wages would be about those of a rural letter-carrier, who were killed, tied up in a sack, and thrown into the waters of a neighbouring lake. That is the wealthy and powerful English interest on behalf of which the Irish Government is engaged in vindicating the

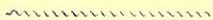
law. No, gentlemen, it is the humble, the poor, and the unprotected who have profited by the fact that, for the last three months at any rate, the cabin of the peasant has been safer from outrage and his heart less burdened by the fear of it. (Hear hear.) Now, in carrying out this work, we have been subjected to a good deal of criticism, and especially to the criticism that we have interfered with liberty of speech and the liberty of the Press. No fair man, resident in Ireland, who reads the speeches which are made and the articles which are written there, without any interference from the Government, would believe such an accusation; but in England it is to a certain extent believed, because people in England are systematically misinformed of what is passing in Ireland. When you have listened to my explanation of what we have been doing, you shall say for yourselves whether we have interfered with legitimate liberty of speech and writing, and I venture to say that your verdict, whatever it may be, will be the verdict of the country at large. When we came to Ireland, crime went unpunished, because the juries belonged to a class who were easily intimidated. Since last August, however, things passed into a different phase. The Crimes Prevention Bill placed the duty of giving a verdict in the hands of men who were above being intimidated. Verdicts were brought in Dublin against the perpetrators of three horrible murders; and then began what I believe to be the greatest crisis that has occurred, time out of mind, in the history of Ireland. The party of disorder knew that, if these sentences were carried out, the keystone was knocked out of the system of terrorism. An unfounded charge was made against the jury. The Irish people heard day after day, in newspaper articles and on public platforms, that men were being done to death by a partisan judge and a drunken jury; and the consequence which follows from that sort of rhetoric in Ireland ensued at once, and the life of a brave and just magistrate and of honest and public-spirited private citizens were exposed to fearful dangers. Mr. Field was terribly wounded by men who fully intended to kill him. Judge Lawson would have been killed but for the presence of mind of one of his attendants; and there is not the smallest doubt that these gentlemen were selected as victims, because they had been denounced and pointed out to the assassins in incendiary articles and speeches. The Government were respon-

sible for the personal safety of the men who were doing their part as citizens to render government possible in Ireland; and that responsibility was recognized in two ways. We brought over from England an ample force of marines, who assisted the Dublin police in the very heavy duty of guarding the jurors and keeping the peace in the streets of Dublin. (Hear, hear.) But the duty of Government went further still. While they quite admitted that the constitution of the juries and the working of the Crimes Prevention Act were legitimate subjects for discussion, they were determined to protect judges and jurors alike from a class of articles and speeches which are not made for the purpose of argument, but for the purpose of denunciation, and which are just as much a part of the machinery of murder as the sword-cane and the pistol. But, besides the jurors, there are another class of the community who require protection, and those are the farmers. The farmers of Ireland, speaking of them as a class, acquired by the Land Act of 1881 a secure hold of their farms at a fair rent. The tenant's title to his holding is now as good as the landlord's title to his estate; but a very great number of farmers were unable to avail themselves of that title because they were overburdened with arrears of rent which they could not pay. The Act of last year gave them a fresh chance. In the November Session the Government was told, both by Conservatives and Home Rulers, that the Arrears Act was a failure. The Irish Government took another view, and that view has turned out to be the correct one. (Cheers). Nearer 90,000 than 80,000 tenants have availed themselves of the advantage of the Act; and, now that they are secure in their holdings, the great mass of the tenant farmers of Ireland are desirous to live in peace and quietness. If left to themselves, they would settle to industry like other people who have something to lose. But there are men who will not leave them to themselves. Last autumn an agitation began which promised at first to be legitimate, but a change in the nature of which the Government has watched with profound disappointment. Whatever the National League was intended by Mr. Parnell to be—whatever he himself, both at Dublin and at Cork, has tried to make it—the Government was bound to inform itself as to what its character really is. And as to that character there is no doubt whatever. Most of the earlier public meetings of

the National League were held for the purpose of conducting a fierce and undisguised agitation for three objects—the destruction of landlordism, the breaking up of grazing farms, by terrorizing the larger tenants, and the separation of Great Britain and Ireland. If the movement had been unchecked, in three months we should have had our worst difficulties all over again; the outrages would have been as numerous as ever, and the country would have been uninhabitable to any orderly or peaceable person. But there is another consideration which is not sufficiently recognized on this side of the water. During the last few years there has sprung up in many parts of Ireland a class of men who gain their livelihood by criminal agitation. There are many districts where the small local agitators live on money which is got under the name of political subscriptions, and which the farmers, as we are certainly and authoritatively informed, will now only continue to pay under terror. I will give you a single illustration. The English people have been told that a public meeting was broken up at a place called Ballymana, near Loughrea, and that some reporters, who were present in the exercise of their calling, were punished for being at the meeting. That is the story, on the strength of which, without waiting to examine it, English newspapers have condemned those public men who, under fearful difficulties, are trying to serve the country in Ireland. What are the real facts? The district of Loughrea is one in which murder literally had become an institution. Between May, 1881, and July, 1882, eight successful assassinations, extraordinarily audacious and skilful in execution, were committed in the neighbourhood. The agony and terror caused by these horrible crimes had only just commenced slightly to abate when National League meetings began to be advertised. From the information which we received as to the circumstances under which those meetings had been got up, we had no choice but to forbid them. At Ballymana the men who are called reporters were present, urging the people not to disperse, and consequently to defy the law. They may have been reporters. I daresay they were. But they likewise were well-known local agitators, who had been in prison on suspicion of being accessory to murder, or on suspicion of being concerned in intimidation. Where the country is still unsettled—where murder and intimidation were but lately the order of the day—it would be criminal to allow violent public meetings

to be held under the auspices of men whose object is to disturb the peace and levy black-mail on the farmers. (Cheers.) The Government will not permit Ireland to be organized, and drilled, and excited for the purpose of effecting objects which would be Ireland's ruin if obtained, and which could only be obtained by civil war. (Loud cheers.) That is the plain fact. As to the peril to which this policy exposes us, we have no illusion whatever. I do not speak of the personal danger. That is a consideration which has never influenced the public conduct of men of our nation. But there is a danger much more formidable in my eyes, that of being charged with deserting the principles of our party. The persistent and implacable hostility of speakers and writers in Ireland, who give us no quarter on principle, because we are the representatives of the central Government, has begun to communicate itself to some Liberal newspapers in this island; and we are told that no Liberal ought to govern Ireland as we are governing it now. Well, gentlemen, as against any of my accusers, I appeal confidently to my record as a Liberal. (Cheers.) Since entering public life I have laboured as men labour at a profession, in bringing administrative and political questions through the period when they were novel and unpopular up to the point when people wondered that they ever differed about them. My answer to the critics of the Irish Government is, that I do not read, like them, the duty of Liberal Ministers in Ireland. That duty consists—first, in showing that life is safe and order secure under a Liberal Government. (Cheers.) Next, their duty is to find out those points in which Ireland is at a disadvantage as compared with the rest of the kingdom, and do their best to apply a remedy; and in this task I earnestly hope that Irish members will assist us. Ireland is better off than England and Scotland in some respects, but it is worse off in others; and an Irish Secretary should be anxious to remove any disadvantage which is told against Ireland as if he were himself the representative of an Irish constituency. (Hear, hear.) Wherever Irishmen are anxious to remove genuine grievances by constitutional means, they will have the sympathy and assistance of the present Irish Government. (Cheers.) But it is with law-abiding politicians alone that we can co-operate. (Hear, hear.) To them we appeal; on them we rely. There are enough of them, we believe, in the country, if only they are encouraged and protected, to form and

constitute a much happier and more prosperous Ireland. Peace, confidence, and security are the first requisites for Ireland, as for every other community of men; and, in regarding these as the first objects of our care, we are, I think, obeying the dictates alike of sound policy and of genuine Liberalism. (Cheers.) Mr. Trevelyan concluded by referring to the Egyptian campaign.—*The Times*, February 10, 1883.



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