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LAW AND ORDER IN IRELAND.

THE Coercion Bill and the attempt to drive it through Parliament is really a matter of great simplicity, although the whirl of party politics has made it seem somewhat intricate. It is the mere "outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace" of that Conservatism, Toryism, or Reactionism, whichever you please to call it, to which all the respectability of Parliamentary life gravitates, and which has engulfed not only the grave and portentous Philistinism of the once Tribune of the People, John Bright, but also the gathering ambition and vague aspiration to do something remarkable of Joseph Chamberlain; besides many other luminaries of a lesser order, some of whom have been set down as Radicals, and perhaps thought themselves to be so, but surely only because other people called them so.

However, even this outward and visible sign is a serious thing, not only for Ireland but for England also, and must at the outset be admitted to be far more serious than any other Coercion Bill, not because of any speciality in its provisions, nor even because it is to last permanently (which may mean perhaps as long as next year), but rather because it is to be enacted in the teeth of the disapproval of a great part of the English population. That is to say that the ordinary Englishman supposed that former measures of coercion were passed to restrain a band of plotters and miscreants in Ireland from injuring the ordinary peaceful law-abiding people there, who had no sympathy with their doings. Therefore, though some of the more advanced politicians might oppose such measures on principle, and others because they thought there was no special need for such strong measures, yet the greater part even of those who usually take some interest in politics would pass such matters by with the vague idea that it was a necessary step to take against Fenians and moonlighters, and other rebels, as unreasonable as only Irish can be. All that is changed now, and it is only in Parliament that any one pretends to think that the Coercion Bill is directed against a minority of the Irish people. It is, however vaguely by some persons, felt to be what the *Pall Mall* called it the other evening, a declaration of war against Ireland; to say to a part of the Empire: "We are going, not to suspend, but to abolish your civil rights by the strong hand, and let us see what you dare to do in resistance to this violence," is to admit that such people are in rebellion against the central authority, and are perfectly conscious of their solidarity as against it; and if they had, I will not say any chance of success, but any opportunity, they would make that manifest by rising in armed revolt against the central tyranny, and to a large part at least of the peoples of England, Scotland, and Wales, that rebellion seems a righteous one; to how large a portion no general election will make clear to us, but rather the march of events.

It is a pity indeed that agitation on a really large scale cannot be at once set on foot, so as to show the reactionists that they are rashly playing with fire; but though it can scarcely be doubted that a genuine poll of the country would give a large majority against landlord-magistrate law in Ireland, yet it is hopeless to expect a serious expression of opinion at all in proportion to the dissatisfaction that doubtless exists, still less any expression of opinion which would mean a serious threat of "Don't try that on again!" The politically minded part of the workers who can claim to have any approach to organisation, have unhappily been organised to be at the beck and call of their leaders at election time, and also to forbear even the mildest agitation unless the wire-pullers give the sign. They have been so debauched by allowing themselves to be treated as the mere machinery of a Parliamentary party, that now when the time comes that even that organised hypocrisy, their party, would be glad of their help they can do but little; at the best they can but show that they exist as dissatisfied persons in some numbers, which the reactionists know already, but any genuine

strong and fierce outburst of feeling from them is scarcely to be expected when one thinks of the deep respectability of the gentlemen that lead them.

However, what can be done must be done, and that out of Parliament. The Bill will certainly be passed. The Radical Unionists, all but two or three, will have a sop thrown to them by the withdrawal of the clause for changing the venue of the bigger trials, which was probably put in to be withdrawn, as also perhaps was the "permanency" of the bill, which, however, these precious Democrats have swallowed so sweetly. And then the Reactionists will have their way in Parliament, as is but natural, and all one can hope is that the country will wake up after the bill is passed; though it is no use hoping that anything more will come of that but a dissolution and general election. Home Rule may follow that, though of course only a compromise Home Rule, and the ground will be cleared so far for the question of property in Ireland—and elsewhere. The day of the Tories proper has passed with this Coercion Bill. To-morrow the Liberals in the English Parliament will have to be dealt with, criticised, and resisted. The day after it will be the turn of the Dublin Parliament. Let us hope that true social feeling in Ireland will not have exhausted itself in combining to defeat the English landlords, but will rise with the new condition of affairs and demand freedom not only for the tenants but for all.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

LEGALITY.

THE respect for law as law is one of the most marked characteristics of the bourgeois mind. One is particularly struck with the strength of this superstition on occasions like the recent attempt at St. Petersburg. There are probably few middle-class Englishmen who would in so many words condone the atrocities and murders of the Russian Government. And yet there are probably few who would refuse the word crime to any act of self-defence initiated by its victims. Here is a case in which you have on the one side what every Englishman (bourgeois though he may be) that knows anything about the matter would in his heart admit to be an organisation of brigands, a mass of corrupt officials, seizing and secretly torturing or murdering, on the slightest pretext, any person they imagine to be obnoxious to them, tearing men away from their families at a moment's notice to serve in an army, not of defence, but of oppression—in short, establishing a reign of terror in all the towns of a vast territory. On the other, you have their victims, the population, who are endeavouring to defend themselves against this organised brigandage. There is a difference, however, a vast line of cleavage, between the two. The one operates under the name of "established government," and hence all its transactions, however criminal in themselves, are protected by the trade-mark "legality." The other does not operate under the name of established government, and hence all its hostile transactions, however justifiable in themselves, are contraband as not bearing the trade-mark "legality." For this reason the average bourgeois hesitates or refuses to denounce the one as criminal or to uphold the other as righteous. In this course he is insincere. It may be unhesitatingly affirmed that any sane man who says he believes it wrong to kill the Czar, lies. No man's conscience is so grotesquely twisted as to make him think thus. For it must be remembered this is not a case of Socialism *v.* anti-Socialism, but of the most elementary rights—liberty and life.

The Czar and his bureaucracy render life, even from the bourgeois point of view, all but impossible in Russia for any one outside their own body. The man, therefore, who hesitates to justify to the full any action that may be taken in self-defence is plainly dishonest. But his dishonesty has its explanation; "this defect defective comes by cause." And the explanation of his dishonesty is to be found in his unwillingness to violate that "blessed word," "legality." But whence the magic of this word? Thereby hangs the tale, of personal property, crime, and contract—in short, the tale of civilisation. Law, nowadays, is not usually identified as in Russia with direct personal violence. On the contrary, one of the great planks of the bourgeois in his struggle with Feudalism has ever been security of person and property from overt violence. To this was subsequently added liberty