

A PLEA FOR THE AMERICAN ANARCHISTS.

BY MR. WILLIAM MORRIS.

AT a time when all lovers of freedom are righteously indignant with the wrong-doing of an all-powerful Executive in Ireland, I wish to call their attention to the final act of official vengeance which is threatened against the victims of another all-powerful Executive. I allude to the seven Anarchist prisoners who have recently appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States against the confirmation by the Supreme State Court of the judgment passed on them last October. The accusation against these men of having caused to be thrown the bomb the explosion of which killed and wounded several policemen was sustained by evidence admitted to be very unsatisfactory even by persons who are far from being partisans of Socialism, and any unprejudiced person who has read their trial carefully must in his own mind dismiss this charge against them. For the rest they were present at a meeting at which shots were exchanged between the police and the citizens. That meeting was not an Anarchist or Socialist meeting, but a meeting of workmen called together to protest against the brutal and illegal violence with which a former meeting had been treated by the police and their allies, the hired swashbucklers of the capitalists; and it was attacked with shot by the police as an *in terrorem* measure, directed not against revolutionists, but against workmen on strike; and certainly, according to the opinion so strenuously and so righteously supported by Radicals in England to-day of the right of citizens to defend themselves against police violence, this meeting in the Haymarket at Chicago had as good a right to defend themselves as the Irishmen at Michelstown had. In short, if these seven men are executed, they will be put to death not for murders (which they did not commit), nor for exciting a riot (which was begun by the police), but for expressing revolutionary opinions which are daily and freely expressed in England, and still more, perhaps, for supporting workmen who were claiming shorter hours of labour, and general terms which would interfere with the profits of their "employers;" put to death by a Government which has seized on an opportunity for revenging itself on their inconvenient freedom of speech.

The speeches delivered by these men before sentence was passed on them last October have been printed and widely circulated; those who have not read them will perhaps call them Anarchist ravings. Those who have read them must admit that they are manly, courageous, and simple, and that there is little if anything in them to which even a moderate Socialist would object. If these seven men are hanged after lying in prison a year or more their speeches will become the dying words of seven Socialist martyrs, and will be fruitful enough for the cause of Socialism after being sprinkled with their blood. The faults and the blunders they may have committed we Socialists shall forget, but we shall remember that they have been slain for setting forth the reconstruction of society, and the freeing of labour from monopoly, which we believe to be the one thing worth preaching in these days.

We have been told that American society has shown itself placable towards its rebels; the victors in the Great War freely forgave the leaders in the rebellion for the part they took in bringing about the shedding of an ocean of blood; probably because they felt that the wrong was not wholly on one side. Will they now be so blind as not to see the wrongs which lay behind that Chicago meeting, as not to admit, if they admit nothing else, that American bourgeois society needs forgiveness also. Cannot the Americans of the well-to-do classes practice clemency once more in the case of the rebellion of a few workmen? If they cannot, it is because they are the bond-slaves of a hard, blind class-commercialism, which refuses to see the wrongs it commits, and looks on everything hostile to its interests as a crime to be punished with whatever severity may be necessary for the safeguarding of those interests, which goes on its course with a cold and lazy cruelty, the sneer of the first murderer on its lips—am I my brother's keeper? Let John Brown's gibbet, and what came of it, be a token of the future of a society so enslaved.