

LORD LEITRIM'S MURDER AND THE HOME RULE PARTY.

THE terrible crime committed at Milford, Donegal, on April 2 last, by which the Earl of Leitrim and two of his attendants lost their lives, has startled the whole British Empire. When the thoughts of all were in the East, and our internal complications were forgotten or laid aside, when domestic peace appeared to be assured, this tragedy like a thunderbolt has fallen upon us, and at a sweep has turned the minds of the people from Stamboul and the government of the Bulgarians to Donegal and the laws of Ireland.

I would not have troubled to notice this outrage in your columns were it not for its probable political effect, as your readers have as many opportunities of obtaining the particulars and judging of the consequences of the crime as myself. But, from the view taken of it by the leaders of English thought, and the influence it may have on the Home Rule Party in Parliament, I thought it would perhaps be no intrusion to offer a few remarks for the consideration of your readers.

The crime was a cold-blooded and atrocious one, and the particulars as told by the valet of the murdered Earl exhibit a degree of ferocity on the part of the murderers that fills us with horror. There can be no doubt that the deceased nobleman possessed ideas which were more suitable for a Pasha of the Turkish Empire, or more in consonance with the usages of the days of feudalism, than adapted to the position of an Irish landlord. He wished to be "monarch of all he surveyed" on his own estates, absolute ruler of his tenantry, law-maker and law administrator, controller, in fact of the lives, liberties, and destinies of the people occupying his land. He was vain-glorious and irritable, and would not tolerate the slightest opposition to his own arbitrary will. He was in spirit a Greek oligarchist, despising the people as mere animated objects, created for the purpose of ministering to the greatness and increasing the wealth of a haughty aristocracy. That the people, socially beneath him, but morally so infinitely his superiors, could be supposed to possess any right to or interest in the soil of which he was supreme lord, was a presumption that he treated with contemptuous ridicule. His private character has been demonstrated to have been anything but that which we should expect a peer of the realm to possess. A Mr. Grant, who says that for twelve months he was superintendent of estate works to Lord Leitrim, writes a long letter to the *Times* in defence of the principles the deceased nobleman had in view, but not, he takes the trouble to point out, of his "whimsicalities of will and temper," nor of the "eccentricities of his iron will." He endeavours to show that Lord Leitrim was a most exemplary landlord, with an enthusiastic wish to increase the comforts and raise the social status of his tenantry. This sounds like grim irony, when we read the accounts of his life in the Irish journals of all shades of opinion. He ever felt an unbounded delight in evicting even the most helpless, and spent thousands of pounds to defeat the law of the land and exhibit his petty power for the purpose of terrorising over his unfortunate vassals. Behold, for instance, this case:—"A widow in Fanet, having incurred his lordship's displeasure, was ejected, a pledge being given that she should get her crops. His lordship, however, sent his men and carried off her corn, potatoes, &c., thus leaving herself and family not only without a home but also without food." The man who could so arouse the indignation of a Presbyterian clergyman as to make him give utterance to the following language cannot certainly have been anything but an implacable foe of the poor. The Rev. Sampson Jack said, at a meeting in Milford, "I plead the cause of the weak and suffering against power and oppression, and though I may fail in giving utterance to language sufficient to condemn the conduct of the oppressor, the language of God's word will be found to be sufficiently powerful." Another minister said: "He would say to them be firm and stand back to back and shoulder to shoulder to put down tyranny there in Milford, and, if they did so, they would cripple the monster over the province. Let them concentrate their forces on that Redan of tyranny and the Sebastopol of oppression would crumble before them. There was nothing like a text and sticking to it, and his text was the village below and Lord Leitrim. The finger of scorn would yet be pointed at him from every part of the kingdom, and it would be said 'There is the noble Earl who took advantage of the law, and turned out in the depth of winter the poor Presbyterian minister; there is the noble Earl who turned out in his old age the universally respected James Lavins; there is the noble Earl who evicted John Lavins, and converted his house, upon which he had expended seven hundred pounds, into a police barrack; there is the noble Earl who raised the poor widow's rent from 6d. to 7½d. per week, and the poor working man's from 8d. to 9d.' This noble Earl was a provident man, the additional 2½d. would pay for the washing of a shirt for him."

To my mind the above extracts seem convincing proofs of the tyrannical nature of the deceased Earl, and of his total unfitness for the position in which he had been placed by an accident of the cradle. He was a century behind the age, and completely deaf to the demands of the circumstances of the present time. But, notwithstanding all this, his murder was none the less atrocious and horrifying, and will cause considerable detriment to the Irish cause in Parliament. He should have been left for the chastisement of God's unerring finger, and the time by no means distant when in the ordinary course of things both coronet and estate would have fallen from his grasp.

There cannot be a doubt but that the murder was the outcome of vengeance for private wrong, and not as the English press seeks to prove, the result of a wide-spread conspiracy because of Lord Leitrim's general principles. The immediate cause must have been some particular act of overbearing tyranny, not unlikely, perhaps, as has been hinted, an outrage or attempted outrage on Irish virtue. But, in the absence of any direct proof of a conspiracy, and in the face of statistical evidence of the pacific condition of the whole country, the action of the British Government in proclaiming the Coercion Act is an invasion of public liberty that demands the loudest protest from the whole Irish people. What would be thought in New Zealand, if because a murder had been committed in a certain place, the inhabitants of the whole district had been immediately

presumed to be murderers, and a cordon of police interrupted the communications, and prevented, under pain of arrest, the exit of any one from the locality? Yet such is now the state of things in Donegal. In the House of Commons several Irish members expostulated with the Government for the severe measures they had adopted in the district in which the murder had been committed, by which thousands were compelled to endure indignities because of a crime in which they were totally innocent of any complicity. Mr. O'Donnell proposed a motion condemning the action of the Executive, and in support of his argument that the murder was the result of an ebullition of private vengeance, began to speak of the character of Lord Leitrim, and to adduce circumstances of that nobleman's oppression and debauchery which had been proved to be true. The small batch of Conservatives present who mainly constituted the House, would not listen even to incontestable facts, and after the reporters had been excluded negatived his motion without a division. It is said by the English Press, notably the *Times* and *Saturday Review*, that Mr. O'Donnell's action has been warmly censured by prominent Home Rulers, and that the matter is likely to create a split in the party. They are exulting over the prospect of its complete dismemberment since Mr. Butt has finally retired from the leadership. Let us trust that their hopes will be ignominiously disappointed, and that those of the party, whose ardour in a righteous cause and consciousness of having justice with them, has occasionally led them to adopt imprudent tactics, will moderate their zeal under their new leader—whoever he is to be—and subject themselves to that party discipline which is a *sine qua non* of success. It is perfectly right that on such minor matters as that to which Mr. O'Donnell's motion referred, the members of the party should be allowed to exercise their individual opinion, and owe responsibility to no authority but that of their constituents, but if the coherence of the party is to be maintained, only honourable and constitutional means must be employed to achieve the object which is the principal cause of their presence at Westminster. Unconstitutional tactics will only irritate the House of Commons and detract from the political respectability of the party. No good end can possibly be served by them as it would be ludicrous in the extreme to suppose that English and Scotch members would yield to the senseless obstruction of a few that which fair argument had failed to convince them was just and necessary. No great reform was ever carried in a day, and why should we expect the question of Home Government to be an exception to the general rule. It is a perfect marvel how the movement has grown to its present proportions in the extremely brief period of its existence, and the extensive influence it has acquired in Great Britain. It promises to go on progressing from its present vantage ground even more rapidly than hitherto, and in truth the prospects of the immediate future appear to exhibit a hopeful brightness that ought to reassure and incite to renewed exertions all lovers of their country's legislative independence.

And now, that the tact, talent, and energy of a few great men have unified Irish thought and amalgamated Irish feeling, if, through petty personal whimsicalities, the hopes of the party are shipwrecked and the movement ends in disaster, a terrible responsibility will attach to those who shall have been the cause of the calamity, and history shall deal with them with a heavy and unsparing hand.

W. J. N.

Auckland, July 10th, 1878.

"AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NOBODY GOOD."

AUCKLAND.

THE offensive manner in which the Protestant press has recently acted towards Bishop Moran and the Rev. Father Hennebery has possibly brought some more grist to your mill. The Catholics of the colony probably begin to see now what they should have long ago seen—that it is their duty to support a friendly, in place of a hostile, newspaper press. There is no reason why a Catholic journal, if adequately supported, should not serve all the general purposes of an ordinary broad sheet, besides giving Catholic news and defending the Catholic cause against all its enemies. Every journal in this colony, whatever may be pretended to the contrary, is like every school—either Protestant or Catholic. The pretended non-sectarian and purely secular journals and schools are either decidedly Protestant, or something worse. Why, then, should Catholics support such journals with their money if they can find a journal conducted on Catholic principles, which can fully support all their wants in the way of newspaper reading? The TABLET is being well—wonderfully well—supported, but it might easily be better if Catholics generally were true to their cause, and acted a noble part to it.

Every non-Catholic book or newspaper is not necessarily injurious to Catholic faith and morals. But it is plain that the great majority of them are so; either openly and avowedly, or, indirectly and in a stealthy insidious way. Protestant publishers, even the most "respectable" in the trade, and newspapers too, will, within the limits of the law of the land and common decency, publish anything that will pay, however hostile it may be to Christian principles. This shows the necessity of Catholics supporting a Catholic Press, and more especially a Catholic periodical press.

The newspaper and the magazine are the most powerful arms of the press. They have long been and are now being exerted with terrible force against the Church everywhere in England and these colonies especially. If the Church had not been sustained by a divine hand it never could have survived such hostility. What an amount of knowledge, of strength, of talent and zeal and of money is not arrayed in support of the Protestant press, which is striving from day to day to "write down" the Catholic Church. To see Catholics adding to the strength of this hostile army by their money, and giving their own press the cold shoulder is something deplorable and pitiful, and says but little for them. Do Protestants monopolise all the talent in the world?

The Catholic Church brings about many strange and many very unexpected things. Among these we may well reckon the recent establishment of a Catholic newspaper in Dunedin, under the very