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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

OPEN CONFESSION.

THE whole method of the Unionists in dealing with the Irish party is now briefly and neatly explained to us by one of themselves. It appears that lying for reasons of State is approved and admitted as just and proper. In this case, there is no question whatever as to the lawfulness of that time-honoured and much disputed motto, "The end justifies the means." The Statesman may lie boldly if only his general character be sufficiently sound to ensure to him belief. The point is explained as follows in a book called "Oliver Cromwell, the Protector," which has been lately published by Mr. Palgrave, chief clerk of the House of Commons, and who is one of the most respectable members of the Tory party.—"For leaders of men in this present evil world," he writes, page 144, "much allowance must be made. The higher the seat among the uppermost rooms of society, the further is the seat-holder distanced from those irresponsible ones who, having nothing to hide, can freely speak their minds. Diplomatic fallacy must occasionally veil unsightly truth—profane curiosity compels the just and necessary lie. For such a lie a Statesman is not esteemed a liar, if he be in the main honest, if the truth be in him, and if he rest habitually in truth." Here, for example, is the whole secret of the Pigottist conspiracy explained to us. Lord Salisbury, its chief, and who, notwithstanding its exposure, has tried still to profit by it, and to establish a claim that it had resulted in substantially proving what was desired, has certainly his seat high in the uppermost rooms of society. His character as being in the main honest and resting habitually in the truth, few people would be disposed to call in question. According to the showing of his follower Mr. Palgrave, nothing more is required to justify his Lordship, as a Statesman, in the most devious courses. What, therefore, can be made of the support given by him to the traffick in forgery, and the measures taken to bring about a desirable political end? But we may, on Mr. Palgrave's authority, understand the general tactics employed towards the Irish party, and all in any way associated with them. "Unsightly truth" has been systematically veiled in their regard. What truth, in fact, could be more unsightly than the justice of their ends and the legitimacy of the means employed to bring them about? To veil their truth the whole Unionist party have conspired, and so far as calumny and misrepresentation could go, they have effectually veiled it. But there is nothing to find fault with in that. Their whole action may be summed up as forming what Mr. Palgrave pronounces lawful as the "just and necessary lie." Mr. Labouchere, who, in *Truth*, gives us the extract we have quoted from Mr. Palgrave, makes use of it to excuse his own late refusal in the House of Commons, to believe the word of the Prime Minister:—"Whether a Member of the House of Commons," he says, "may decline to believe the Prime Minister if he is a Peer, or the Marquis of Ailesbury if he is not Prime Minister, is a point upon which Tories and Liberals differ. Whether a prime Minister has a right to lie is also a point upon which they differ. The Liberals hold that this is not permissible, the Tories that it is. Mr. Palgrave, Chief Clerk of the House of Commons and one of the most respected of the Tories, lays down this right as a cardinal article of the Tory faith in an interesting, though, perhaps somewhat one-sided, work which he has just published, entitled, 'Oliver Cromwell, the Protector.'" It is obvious, however, that Mr. Palgrave's doctrine is capable of a much wider application and, as we have said, we have seen it exemplified also in the whole dealings of the Unionist party with the Irish movement.

SOME of the provisions of the Irish Land Purchase Bill, of which details have now reached us, seem hardly credible. Indeed, for some time, although we saw them in plain black and white, we doubted as to whether we understood them correctly. But the Bill really and actually does propose to give, as a guarantee of the payment by the purchasing tenants of the sums for which they become liable, the Government grants in aid of primary education, and of the support

of lunatics and the relief of the poor in Ireland. The introduction of this clause into the Bill seemed almost too much for Mr. Balfour himself, and he has thought it necessary to explain that he did not, in fact, contemplate any such contingency. But, surely, it is not usual for any statesman to introduce into a measure proposed by him a mere pleasantry—even under a form much less grim and unbecoming than that referred to. It is not surprising, however, that Mr. Balfour should have thought it necessary to excuse himself, even in the most glaringly incredible manner possible. But had he not contemplated the contingency he certainly would not have provided for it. Verily, the guarantee is something more than Conservative,—more even than ultra-Conservative. It takes us back into by-gone ages, and places us face to face with some of the most grievous failings and the heaviest wants of a rougher world. Ireland, if her tenants, cajoled or coerced, or persuaded by a mixture of coercion and cajolery, to purchase their holdings at exorbitant prices, do not pay for their land, is, for example, to be deprived of her primary schools, so far as they are supported by public money. Why, the step would be hardly removed from that taken in the penal days when education was made unlawful in the country. What in the present day when the tendency is to over-rate the necessity for schools, is to be thought of such a possibility? It is, moreover, on condition that the Irish population prove exceptionally destitute, broken in fact by the attempt to meet impossible engagements, and completely pauperised, so that of their unaided efforts they could hardly pay a salary to the old re-established hedge-schoolmaster, that such a state of things must occur. What statesman having a spark of sympathy with the progress of the day could in his wildest dreams entertain such a notion as this? Mr. Balfour does well to try and excuse himself, but his excuse is absurd and vain. Again, at a time when the country has been reduced, even to what is for her an exceptional state of distress, the poor-houses are to be emptied and their unfortunate inmates turned adrift to live on the charity of the impoverished people. A brave provision this for famine, produced or aggravated in cold blood and the especial fruits of legislation in the country. Nor is this all; to add horror to the scene it is not only the ordinary paupers, but also the pauper lunatics who are to be sent abroad. Can the imagination picture a more horrible punishment for any people, whatever might be their crime? Were it related of some of the tyrants of the middle ages how black the writers of history would colour the page on which they recorded it—what proof it would seem to afford of the general iniquity of the century in which it had occurred. Yet the proposal comes from the party boasting themselves highest in the most enlightened country in the world—and it is made, notwithstanding Mr. Balfour's senseless excuse, unblushingly and openly. If this proposal alone does not inform the English people of what the Tory party are capable, their dulness must be heavy indeed, and things are less ripe in every respect for salutary changes than has been generally supposed. The clause to which we allude makes the Irish Land Purchase Bill a wonderful Bill indeed.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

THE letter of the German Emperor in which he acquaints the Pope with his project of holding a Labour Conference at Berlin, asks for the co-operation and sympathy of his Holiness, and informs him that he has invited Mgr. Kopp, Prince Bishop of Breslau, to act as his delegate on the occasion, is a very important and suggestive letter. Whether or not, as they say, the German Emperor is of uncertain mind, so that it is impossible to count on any course of action adopted by him, the evidence thus borne to the place filled by the Pope and the homage paid to the influence exercised by him are very notable. This is all the more the case since it is from Germany the testimony comes, so that it may be taken as in some degree expiatory and as the fruits of a bitter experience. Germany had distinguished herself among the countries of the day by her attempt to curtail the influence of the Pope, or rather to get rid of it altogether. Germany in the past, moreover, had initiated the rebellion of the people against the Pope. In this appeal to Rome, therefore, made by the German Emperor a very particular significance may be seen. Whatever may be the points on which the Emperor differs from Prince Bismarck, and it is rumoured that this question of the working classes is one of the chief of them, it is plain that the abandonment of a policy hostile