

drastic of the Coercion Acts ever introduced against Ireland since 1833.

Do not talk to me of comparing the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act with the present Bill. We have suffered from both. We have suffered from some of the provisions of the present Bill, as well as from the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act, and we are able to compare the one with the other; and I tell you that the provisions of the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act empowered you to arrest and detain in prison those whom you suspected; but it guaranteed them humane treatment, which did much to soften the asperities that otherwise would have been bred between the two nations by that Act. Your prisoners under the Habeas Corpus Act were not starved and tortured as they will be under this. Your political prisoners were not put upon a plank bed, and fed on sixteen ounces of bread and water per day, and compelled to pick oakum, and perform hard labor, as they will be under this Bill.

The Bill will be the means by which you will be enabled to subject your political prisoners to treatment in your jails which you reserve in England for the worst of criminals, and it is idle to talk about comparison between the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, under which your prisoners were humanely and properly treated—although imprisonment is hard to bear under the best circumstances; but in the position in which this Bill will place them, your political prisoners will be deliberately starved with hunger and clammed with cold in your jails. I trust in God, sir, that this nation and this House may be saved from the degradation and the peril that the mistake of passing this Bill puts them in.

MICHAEL DAVITT



MICHAEL DAVITT, Irish nationalist, politician, and journalist, one of the founders of the Irish Land League, was born of peasant parents at Straid, County Mayo, Ireland, March 25, 1846. His father, being evicted in 1851, removed to Lancashire, where the son worked in a cotton factory until he was eleven, and then, after a few years' schooling, became a printer. Joining the Irish movement in 1865, he was tried at London in 1870 for "treason-felony" and sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude, but after seven and a half years' confinement in Dartmoor prison he was released on a ticket of leave. With Parnell and others he founded the Irish Land League, in 1879, and was arrested the same year for seditious utterances, but was soon released. In 1881, he was again arrested on a similar charge, and was sent to Portland prison for fifteen months, and in 1883 was once more arrested and imprisoned for three months. While detained in Portland prison he was elected to Parliament, but was disqualified by vote of the House of Commons, and when re-elected in 1892 was unseated. The same year, however, he entered unopposed for Cork, but resigned in 1893, owing to bankruptcy proceedings against him. In 1895, he was returned to Parliament for East Kerry and South Mayo, retaining his seat until 1899. Mr. Davitt has paid several lecturing visits to this country. He has published "Leaves from a Prison Diary" (1884), "Defence of the Land League" (1891), and "Life and Progress in Australia" (1898).

IN DEFENCE OF THE LAND LEAGUE

FROM SPEECH DELIVERED BEFORE THE SPECIAL COMMISSION,
OCTOBER, 1889

I AM only too sensible of the fact that I have trespassed upon the patience and forbearance of the court to an extent which, possibly, would not be permitted to a lawyer. I am thankful, therefore, for such latitude, as well as for the unfailing fairness and courtesy of your lordships toward me, personally, from the very commencement of this inquiry.

I know too well I have spoken hot words and resorted to hard phrases in arguments, which may have been out of place in the calm region of a court like this. But that was because

I felt that the character of the charges I have tried to meet and to answer was such as merited the strongest possible language of condemnation. I came here to address this court contrary to the advice of Mr. Parnell, who was the central figure and chief object of the "Times's" malignant allegations.

I have therefore spoken only for myself. I felt that it was my duty to come here, no matter who should advise me to the contrary. I may be wrong in my opinion, but I thought and believed that if one with my record of suffering, physical and otherwise, at the hands of Irish landlordism and Castle rule; of the conflict of a lifetime with the law as it has been administered in Ireland, and of the punishment which that conflict has entailed: I felt and believed, if I came before this tribunal and pleaded, in my own way, the cause of the Celtic peasantry of Ireland, that perhaps the story which I have told and the case which I have submitted might possibly, in part or in whole, arrest the attention of the people of Great Britain when they come to study your lordships' labors and report.

And I thought and hoped that in the defence which I have made there might possibly be found some help in the task of finally solving this Anglo-Irish struggle. Should my hope be realized, should I have contributed but in the least possible degree to point to a just and feasible solution of a problem which would bring peace and some chance of prosperity to Ireland, I shall be happy in the recollection of the task which I am now bringing to a close.

I can only say that I represent the working classes of my country here as I did in the Land League movement, and I know they feel, as I do, that, no matter how bitter past memories have rankled in our hearts, no matter how much

we have suffered in the past in person or in our country's cause, no matter how fiercely some of us have fought against and denounced the injustice of alien misgovernment; I know that, before a feeling of kindness and of good will on the part of the people of England, Scotland, and Wales, and in a belief in their awakening sense of justice toward our country, all distrust and opposition and bitter recollections will die out of the Irish heart, and the Anglo-Irish strife will terminate forever when landlordism and Castle rule are dethroned by Great Britain's verdict for reason and for right.

My lords, I now bring my observations to a close. Whatever legal points are to occupy your lordships' study and care in this long and arduous investigation, it will appear to the public, who will study the report or the decision of this tribunal, that two institutions stood indicted before it.

One has had a life of centuries, the other an existence of but a few brief years. They are charged, respectively, by the accused and the accusers, with the responsibility for the agrarian crimes of the period covered by this inquiry.

One is Irish Landlordism, the other is the Irish Land League. The "Times" alleges that the younger institution is the culprit. The Land League, through me, its founder, repels the accusation, and counter-charges landlordism with being the instigation and the cause, not alone of the agrarian violence and crimes from 1879 to 1887, but of all which are on record, from the times spoken of by Spenser and Davis in the days of Elizabeth, down to the date of this Commission.

To prove this real and hoary-headed culprit guilty, I have not employed or purchased the venal talent of a forger, or offered the tempting price of liberty for incriminatory evidence to unhappy convicts in penal cells. Neither have

I brought convicted assassins or professional perjurers, like the Delaneys and Le Carons, before your lordships. I have not sought assistance such as this with which to sustain my case. Nor have I been aided by the Colemans, Buckleys, and Igos as confederates, or had to scour the purlieus of American cities for men who would sell evidence that might repair the case which Richard Pigott's confession destroyed, and which his self-inflicted death has sealed with tragic emphasis.

I did not go to such sources or resort to such means for testimony against Irish landlordism. I relied not upon the swearing of spies or informers, but upon disinterested facts, left as legacies to Truth by men who are held in reverence by England for services rendered to their country, to justice, to humanity.

I have reproduced the words which these men have placed on record against crime-begetting Irish landlordism. Among those quoted as authorities, but not of them, one with them in their verdicts, though not to be classed otherwise with honored names, I have placed the "Times" newspaper, which is the Land League's accuser: I have made it speak its own condemnation and compelled it historically to exculpate the League. The face of what the first editorial ever written in the "Times" likened to the pagan deity, Janus,—the face which circumstances have sometimes forced to look toward Truth by power akin to that which compels matter to look toward the sun,—I have made to confront and shame, by contrast, the other face of fraud and falsehood, which, like an evil genius, has led England to regard with hate and distrust every effort of the Irish people for right and justice.

I have made the "Times" of 1847 and of 1880 give the lie direct to the "Times" of this Commission, and have

caused it to become my strongest historic accuser of the evil system which it now condemns by its very advocacy.

To this testimony I have added the sworn evidence of the persons whom it charges with the deeds of its client; the evidence of the living actors in the Land League movement, and of others who represent every class into which Ireland's population is divided—bishops, priests, members of Parliament, municipal representatives, journalists, merchants, traders, farmers, laborers, mechanics, who one and all say with the "Times's" Red Book of 1880 that eviction and threats of eviction are the chief source of all agrarian crime in Ireland.

But there is another and a higher interest involved in the drama of this Commission now rapidly drawing to a close; an interest far surpassing in importance, and the possible consequences of your lordships' judgment, anything else comprised in this investigation. It stands between the "Times" and landlordism, on the one hand; the persons here charged and the Land League, on the other. In bygone ages, historians, with some prophetic instinct, called it "The Isle of Destiny."

And Destiny seems to have reserved it for a career of trial, of suffering, and of sorrow. That same Destiny has linked this country close to England. Politically it has remained there for seven hundred years or more. During that period few people ever placed upon this earth have experienced more injustice or more criminal neglect at the hands of their rulers than we have.

This even English history will not and dare not deny. This land so tried and treated has nevertheless struggled, generation after generation, now with one means, now with another, to widen the sphere of its contracted religious,

social, and political liberties—liberties so contracted by the deliberate policy of its English governing power; and ever and always were these struggles made against the prejudice and might, and often the cruelties, of this same power, backed by the support or the indifference of the British nation.

But, despite all this, the cause so fought and upheld has ever and always succeeded, sooner or later, in vindicating its underlying principles of truth and justice, and in winning from the power which failed to crush them an after-justification of their righteous demands.

A people so persevering in its fight for the most priceless and most cherished of human and civil rights, so opposed, but so invariably vindicated, might surely, in these days of progress and of enlightenment excite in the breasts of Englishmen other feelings than those of jealousy, hate, revenge, and fear. To many, thank God, it has appealed successfully, at last, to what is good and what is best in English nature. It has spoken to the spirit of Liberty, and has turned the love of justice in the popular mind toward Ireland, and has asked the British people, in the interests of peace, to put force and mistrust away with every other abandoned weapon of Ireland's past misrule, and to place in their stead the soothing and healing remedies of confidence and friendship, based upon reason and equality.

The verdict of this court, the story that will be told in the report of this Commission, may or may not carry the appeal which Ireland's struggles and misfortunes have addressed to the conscience and fairness of the English nation much farther than it has already travelled in the British mind.

But one thing, at least, the history of this Commission will have to tell to future generations. It will narrate how this

progress of conciliation between ruled and rulers was sought to be arrested; how a people asking for justice were answered by ferocious animosity; how men who had suffered imprisonment, degradation, and calumny in their country's service were foully attacked by the weapons of moral assassination, and how every dastard means known in the records of political warfare was purchased and employed to cripple or destroy the elected representative of the Irish nation.

This story will picture this once-powerful organ of English public opinion earning again the title of "literary assassin" which Richard Cobden gave it near thirty years ago. It will stand again in this light when its writers are seen plotting with Houston, planning with Pigott, and bargaining with Delaney how best to reawaken in the English mind the old hate and jealousy and fear of a people who were to be depicted in its columns in the most odious and repulsive character that forgers' or libellers' mercenary talent could delineate in "Parnellism and Crime."

This story will exhibit these men sitting in the editorial rooms of Printing House Square, with professions of loyalty on their lips and poison in their pens; with "honesty" loudly proclaimed in articles which salaried Falsehood had written; with simulated regard for truth, making "Shame ashamed" of their concocted fabrications.

And these men, with the salaries of the rich in their pockets and the smiles of London society as their reward, carrying on a deliberately planned system of infamous allegation against political opponents who were but striving to redeem the sad fortunes of their country, in efforts to bring to an end a strife of centuries' duration between neighboring nations and peoples.

Between the "Times" on the one hand, and the accused on the other, your lordships are, however, first to judge. It is, if I may say so without presumption, as serious and momentous a duty as judges of England were ever called upon to perform. The traditions of your lordships' exalted position, elevated as that position is above the play of political passion of the influence of fear or favor, will call, and will not, I am sure, call in vain, for the exercise of all those great qualities of trained ability, of calmness, of discernment, of judgment, and of courage which are the proud boast of the judicial bench of this land.

Whether or not the test of a cold, indiscriminating law will alone decide an issue in which political passion has played so great a part, and where party feeling has been a moving principle in acts and words; whether the heated language of platform oratory, or the sometimes crude attempts at political reform, are to be weighed in the balance of legal scales,—scales never fashioned, at least in England, to measure the bounds of political action; or whether the test is to lie with a discriminating judicial amalgam of law in its highest attributes and of calm reason applied to the men and motives and means of the Land League, as the accused, and to the "Times," its charges and allegations, as the accuser, I am, as a layman, unable to forecast.

But, be the test what it may, if it be only based upon truth and guided by the simple monitor of common sense; I say on my own behalf and on that of the Land League and of the peasantry of Ireland, hopefully, confidently, fearlessly, "Let justice be done though the heavens fall."

THE CRIMES OF IRISH LANDLORDISM

[A monster demonstration in favor of the Land League movement, which sought to reform the Irish land laws, was held at Straide, County Mayo, February 1, 1880. Mr. Davitt was among the speakers, and a peculiar interest was attached to the meeting from the fact that the platform from which he spoke was erected over the very ruins of the old homestead from which he, with his father and mother, had been evicted many years before. Mr. Davitt delivered the following speech:]

WHILE every nerve must be strained to stave off, if possible, the horrible fate which befel our famine-slaughtered kindred in 1847 and 1848, the attention of our people must not for a moment be withdrawn from the primary cause of these periodical calamities, nor their exertions be relaxed in this great social struggle for the overthrow of the odious system responsible for them. Portions of the English press had recently declared that the charity of Englishmen would be more spontaneous and generous if this agitation did not stand in the way. Well, Ireland's answer to this should be that she asks no English alms, and that she scorns charity which is offered her in lieu of the justice which is her right and her demand. Let landlordism be removed from our country, and labor be allowed the wealth which it creates instead of being given to legalized idlers, and no more famine will darken our land or hold Ireland up to the gaze of the civilized world as a nation of paupers. England deprives us annually of some seven millions of money for Imperial taxation, and she allows an infamous land system to rob our country of fifteen or twenty millions more each year to support some nine or twelve thousand lazy landlords, and then, when famine extends its destroying wings over the land, and the dread spectre of death stands sentinel at our thresholds, an appeal to English charity—a begging-box outside the London Mansion House—is paraded before the world, and expected to atone for every wrong inflicted upon Ireland by a heartless

and hated government, and to blot out the records of the most monstrous land code that ever cursed a country or robbed humanity of its birthright. The press of England may bring whatever charges its prejudices can prompt against this land movement, the Duchess of Marlborough may hurl her gracious wrath at the heads of "heartless agitators," but neither the venomous scurrility of government organs, nor the jealous tirades of politico-prompted charity can rob the much-abused land movement of the credit attached to the following acts. The cry of distress and national danger was first raised by the agitators, and all subsequent action, government, vice-regal, landlord, and Mansion House, to alleviate that distress, was precipitated by the action of the "heartless agitators." The destroying hand of rackrenting and eviction was stricken down for the moment by the influence of the agitation, and the farmers of Ireland were spared some two or three millions with which to meet the distress now looming on their families and country, while the rooftrees of thousands of homesteads were protected from the crowbar brigade; and the civilized world has been appealed to against the existence of a land monopoly which is responsible for a pauperized country, a starved and discontented population, and every social evil now afflicting a patient and industrious people, until a consensus of home and foreign opinion has been evoked in favor of a lasting and efficacious remedy. With these services rendered to Ireland, with a resolve to do the utmost possible to save our people from the danger immediately threatening them, the "heartless agitators" will not relax a single effort or swerve one iota from their original purposes,—to haul down the ensign of land monopoly and plant the banner of the "land for the people" upon the dismantled battlements of Irish landlordism. Against what have we declared this unceasing

strife, and whence the justification for the attitude we are calling upon the people to assume? The resolution so eloquently proposed by my friend Mr. Brennan declares that the present land code had its origin in conquest and national spoliation, and has ever since been the curse of our people and the scourge of Ireland. Does not the scene of domestic devastation now spread before this vast meeting bear testimony of the crimes with which landlordism stands charged before God and man to-day? Can a more eloquent denunciation of an accursed land code be found than what is witnessed here in this depopulated district? In the memory of many now listening to my words that peaceful little stream which meanders by the outskirts of this multitude sang back the merry voices of happy children and wended its way through a once populous and prosperous village. Now, however, the merry sounds are gone, the busy hum of hamlet life is hushed in sad desolation, for the hands of the home destroyers have been here and performed their hellish work, leaving Straide but a name to mark the place where happy homesteads once stood, and whence an inoffensive people were driven to the four corners of the earth by the ruthless decrees of Irish landlordism. How often in a strange land has my boyhood's ear drunk in the tale of outrage and wrong and infamy perpetrated here in the name of English laws and in the interest of territorial greed. In listening to the accounts of famine and sorrow, of deaths from landlordism, of coffinless graves, of scenes—

On highway's side, where oft were seen
The wild dog and the vulture keen
Tug for the limbs and gnaw the face
Of some starved child of our Irish race,

what wonder that such laws should become hateful, and, when felt by personal experience of their tyranny and injustice,

that a life of irreconcilable enmity to them should follow, and that standing here on the spot where I first drew breath, in sight of a levelled home, with memories of privation and tortures crowding upon my mind, I should swear to devote the remainder of that life to the destruction of what has blasted my early years, pursued me with its vengeance through manhood, and leaves my family in exile to-day far from that Ireland which is itself wronged, robbed, and humiliated through the agency of the same accursed system? It is no little consolation to know, however, that we are here to-day doing battle against a doomed monopoly, and that the power which has so long domineered over Ireland and its people is brought to its knees at last and on the point of being crushed forever. It is humiliating to the last degree that a few thousand landsharks should have so long and so successfully trod upon the necks of millions of Irishmen and defrauded them of the fruits of their land, while at the same time robbing, insulting, and dragooning our country with an inhumanity unsurpassed by the titled plunderers of the middle ages. An average landlord may be likened to a social vulture hovering over the heads of the people and swooping down upon the earnings and the food which that industry produces whenever his appetite or his avarice prompts him. The tenantry in the past have stood by like a flock of frightened sheep, timid and terrified, unable to prevent this human bird of prey from devouring their own and their children's substance. While rackrents were paid the farmer and his family must live in semi-starvation, in wretched hovels, amid squalor and privations, barbed by the thought that the money earned by labor and sweat from day to day was being spent by his own and his children's deadly enemy in another land in voluptuous ease and sensual gratification. If the rackrent was not paid

and this blackmail levied upon labor in the shape of rent was not forthcoming, to be squandered by one who never earned a penny of it, out upon the roadside the earners would be cast, to take their choice of death by exposure, workhouse degradation, or banishment from home and Ireland forever. Is it possible that our fathers could have tolerated such a giant wrong, submitted to so monstrous an infamy, and bequeathed to us an acceptance of it as an inevitable decree of God, to be borne in meek submission, or to plod on in sluggish servitude from sire to son, from age to age, proud of our trampled nature? Such, however, is not our resolve. We accept no such blasphemous excuse for the abrogation of our manhood, nor will we allow a horde of vampires to fatten upon our soil, to degrade us by their assumption of superiority, and keep our country before the world as the property and the preserve of the deadliest enemies to her social and political welfare. We demand the right to live like civilized men in our land; we demand the right to enjoy life here, and we are resolved to labor unitedly and unceasingly for the privilege to do so. We ask these demands upon the God-given right to mankind to hold in proportion to their wants and deserts the land which was created for their sustenance. The principles upon which this land movement rests are founded upon obvious and natural justice, and if in advocating them we outstep the barriers of political conventionalities we are justified by the monstrous wrongs which are upheld by a system that justice and reason alike condemn, and which civilization has stamped out in every other country. In demanding the land for the people we are but claiming the right which is ours in virtue of our creation and the decrees of our Creator. Land was created for man's sustenance, and declared to be the property of the

human family, to be worked by labor and made productive in food for the children of men. To hold that, because robbery and fraud have succeeded in gaining possession of the soil of Ireland, landlordism was in the Divine intention and has a right to the land of the country, is a libel on God's immutable ordinances and a doctrine opposed alike to reason and common sense. Landlordism has worked the deadliest wrong to our country and our race. Its gifts to Ireland are famines, discontent, bloodshed, national impoverishment, and national degradation. It robs our country of £20,000,000 annually and disposes of our people as so much vermin. It bars our social progress and deprives us of those advantages which are enjoyed by those who have freed themselves from landlordism. Remove the land monopoly, and famine will be exorcised from Ireland. Strike down this giant fraud upon a people, and peace and plenty will take the place of disturbance and starvation. Give labor its claim upon the wealth it creates, remove the restrictions which this feudal code places upon the proper cultivation of the soil of Ireland, and the charity of other lands will no more be appealed to on our behalf, or our national pride be humiliated by our being exhibited in the eyes of the world as a nation of paupers. Organize, then, for so glorious a consummation. Vow that you will never cease striking until land monopoly is crushed forever in Ireland. Forward with the glorious watchword of "The land for the people." The cause of Ireland to-day is that of humanity and labor throughout the world, and the sympathy of all civilized people is with us in the struggle. Stand together, then, in this contest for the soil of your fatherland, and victory will soon crown your efforts with success. Remember, with courage and with pride, that seven hundred years of wrong failed to crush the soul of Ireland.