

# On the Forged Letter Printed in the London Times

It appears that, in addition to the passage of this Coercion Act, the dice are to be loaded—that your great organs of public opinion in this country are to be permitted to pay miserable creatures for the purpose of producing these calumnies. Who will be safe in such circumstances and under such conditions? I do not envy the right honorable gentleman, the chief secretary for Ireland, this first commencement of suppression and defense—this first commencement of calumny and of forgery which has been made by his supporters.

Now, sir, when I first heard of this precious concoction—I heard of it before I saw it, because I do not take in or even read the *Times* usually—when I heard that a letter of this description, bearing my signature, had been published in the *Times*, I supposed that some autograph of mine had fallen into the hands of some person for whom it had not been intended, and that it had been made use of in this way.

I supposed that some blank sheet containing my signature, such as many members who are asked for their signature frequently send—I supposed that such a blank sheet had fallen into hands for which it had not been intended, and that it had been misused in this fashion, or that something of that kind had happened.

But when I saw what purported to be my signature, I saw plainly that it was an audacious and unblushing fabrication. Why, sir, many members of this House have seen my signature, and if they will compare it with what purports to be my signature in the *Times* of this morning they will see that there are only two letters in the whole name which bear any resemblance to letters in my own signature as I write it.

I can not understand how the conductors of a responsible, and what used to be a respectable, journal, could have been so hoodwinked, so hoaxed, so bamboozled, and that is the most charitable interpretation which I can place on it, as to publish such a production as that as my signature.

My writing—its whole character—is entirely different. I unfortunately write a very cramped hand; my letters huddle into each other, and I write with very great difficulty and slowness. It is, in fact, a labor and a toil to me to write anything at all. But the signature in question is written by a ready penman, who has evidently covered as many leagues of letter-paper in his life as I have yards.

Of course, this is not the time, as I have said, to enter into full details and minutae as to comparisons of handwriting; but if the House could see my signature, and the forged, the fabricated signature, they would see that, except as regards two letters, the whole signature bears no resemblance to mine.

The same remark applies to the letter. The letter does not purport to be in my handwriting. We are not informed who has written it. It is not alleged even that it was written by anybody who was ever

associated with me. The name of this anonymous letter-writer is not mentioned. I do not know who he can be. The writing is strange to me. I think I should insult myself if I said—I think, however, that I perhaps ought to say it, in order that my denial may be full and complete—that I certainly never heard of the letter.

I never directed such a letter to be written. I never saw such a letter before I saw it in the *Times* this morning. The subject-matter of the letter is preposterous on the surface. The phraseology of it is absurd—as absurd as any phraseology that could be attributed to me could possibly be. In every part of it it bears absolute and irrefutable evidence of want of genuineness and authenticity.

Politics are come to a pretty pass in this country when a leader of a party of eighty-six members has to stand up, at ten minutes past one, in the House of Commons, in order to defend himself from an anonymous fabrication such as that which is contained in the *Times* of this morning. I have always held, with regard to the late Mr. Forster, that his treatment of his political prisoners was a humane treatment, and a fair treatment; and I think for that reason alone, if for no other, he should have been shielded from such an attempt as was made on his life by the Invincible Association.

I never had the slightest notion in the world that the life of the late Mr. Forster was in danger, or that any conspiracy was on foot against him, or any other official in Ireland or elsewhere. I had no more notion than an unborn child that there was such a conspiracy as that of the Invincibles in existence, and no one was more surprised, more thunderstruck, and more astonished than I was

when that bolt from the blue fell upon us in the Phoenix Park murders.

I know not in what direction to look for this calamity. It is no exaggeration to say that if I had been in the park that day I would gladly have stood between Lord Frederick Cavendish and the daggers of the assassins, and, for the matter of that, between their daggers and Mr. Burke, too.

Now, sir, I leave this subject. I have suffered more than any other man from that terrible deed in the Phoenix Park, and the Irish nation has suffered more than any other nation through it.

You are going to plunge everything back into the seething caldron of disaffection. You can not see what the results of all this may be. We can only point to the experience of what has happened in past times. We anticipate nothing beneficial from this Bill, either to your country or to ours; and we should not be honest men if we did not warn you, with all the little force at our command, of the terrible dangers that may be before you.

I trust before this Bill goes into Committee, or at all events before it leaves Committee, the great English people will make their voices heard and impress upon their representatives that they must not go on any further with this coercive legislation.

If this House and its majority have not sense enough to see this the great heart of this country will see it, for I believe it is a great and generous heart that can sympathize even when a question is concerned in reference to which there have been so many political antipathies. I am convinced by what I have seen of the great meetings which have been held over the length and breadth of

England and Scotland that the heart of your nation has been reached—that it has been touched, and tho our opponents may be in a majority to-day, that the real force of public opinion is not at their back.

A Bill which is supported by men, many of whom are looking over their shoulders and behind them, like the soldiers of an army which a panic is beginning to reach, to see which is their readiest mode of retreat, is not likely to get through the difficult times before it emerges from Committee. The result will be modifications of the provisions of the most 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 with the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, under which your prisoners were humanely and properly treated—altho 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.