

## O'CONNELL ON THE COERCION BILL.

Mr. O'Connell (who had been repeatedly called on before) said, that in rising to support the amendment, he wished, in the first place, to observe that the question on which they had that night to decide was "that the word 'now,' stand part of the question;" that was whether this bill "be read a first time or not?" So that a good deal of pleasantry might have been spared, if a great deal of observation been avoided. In discussing the amendment, if gentlemen recollected that the subject which had to decide on was "whether this bill be now read a first time." He was glad to say that he thought the amendment was extremely well calculated to elicit the real nature of this proceeding (the attempt to destroy the constitution in Ireland), by holding out to the public the certainty of this fact—that one fortnight's delay, it was felt, would be fatal to this measure, which was as unnecessary as it was unjustifiable. He begged to call the serious attention of the House to two questions which that legislature had to decide. The measure then before them was one of vital importance to every part of the British empire; it was one that was intimately connected with the nature of the future government of Ireland. He would ask, then, were they to follow the precedents of former British governments with respect to their conduct towards Ireland? Were they to continue the old and oppressive system? Or were they at length to allow Ireland to be part of the British empire? He would respectfully implore gentlemen to consider well the next question. Had Ireland, he demanded, ever benefited by her connexion with England? Let gentlemen ask themselves and say, what benefit she had derived from the connexion? [Hear, hear.] If she had been totally separated from England, could she have, by possibility, been thrown in a worse situation than that in which she was placed at present? He could show that the most horrible atrocities, that the deepest treacheries that ever stained the annals of any country in reference to its dealings with another, had been perpetrated by England towards Ireland. They had always preferred the interest of a party to the people at large; when a change came in religion, they adopted that faith which was not the faith of the people. In corroboration of his statement he would read a passage from the speech of an individual whom he should by-and-by name. It is stated that the conduct of England towards Ireland had been all along in violation of the laws of civilized nations; that if the wars from the time of Elizabeth had been directed against an enemy, the inhabitants of the conquered country would, at all events, have retained their property in submission to the victors; but what was the case with respect to Ire-

land? The property of the people was conferred on an English Colony, three sets of English adventurers, at the end of three successive rebellions, being enriched, by confiscations, at their costs. Whose language was that? It was the language of Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare, used in the year 1800, and bringing down this atrocious system of misgovernment from the earliest period of English domination to the date of the union. What were they doing now? Had the system of wrong terminated? Was Parliament offering to Ireland reparation for injustice? Was it extending to that country the benefits of the British constitution? No, no; this precious act was presented to Ireland instead of the constitution. [Hear.] It was no disparagement to the right hon. secretary to be compared to the Raleighs or Essexes of Elizabeth, but he was sorry to say that in some cases the greatest men had often proved the greatest tyrants, and without personalities it might be added, that there were cases in which little men might envy that bad distinction. [Hear, hear.] Surely the legislature must wish, if it could, to protect the cause of freedom. Let English members consider how they would feel if this were their own case; they would then excuse any warmth that might appear in the conduct of men who felt themselves on the verge of a dungeon, awaiting the fiat of the legislature to hurl them into it. He would not detain gentlemen by reading passages from the former speeches of some of the supporters of the measure—he would not dwell on the inconsistencies of men in high places—he would not drag the House through the mud or the mire of political tergiversation—though the character of public men were of importance not only to themselves but to the country, and it should be well understood that politicians could not be allowed with impunity to hold one set of opinions when out of place, and an opposite set when in office. It was most justly said that trial by jury preceded the right of the King to his throne—that the monarch reigned, the hereditary peerage was maintained, the House of Commons assembled, the army was supported, in order that we might see twelve men in a box and a judge superintending their deliberations for the protection of life and property against injustice. [Hear.] But the protection of trial by jury was now to be annihilated by means of this bill—the first act of the first session of a reformed Parliament. [Hear, hear.] From the moment this act passed, no man in Ireland dared to offend a powerful neighbour, without having occasion to tremble at the probable consequences; no woman in Ireland—but he would not follow up the subject. Read the section in which it was enacted that it should be a good and sufficient return to a writ of *habeas corpus* that the party suing forth the same was de-

tained by virtue of the powers conferred under this act, and then say whether personal liberty was not altogether done away with. This bill took away trial by jury, personal freedom, the right to complain, and it annihilated the liberty of the press; for any man discussing the question of tithes, for instance, in a newspaper, and expressing sentiments obnoxious to the existing authorities, was liable, according to the Whiteboy Act, which was referred to in this bill, to be pronounced guilty of a transportable offence for inciting to the commission of crime, "by words, gesture, or writing." He repeated, that under the provisions of the bill, his would be a transportable offence, or at least a high misdemeanor to be punished accordingly in a disturbed district. Here, then, was an end to the liberty of the press. Why did the reigning supersede the former royal family, and why had that been cashiered?—because it ventured to interfere with trial by jury, and the right of petition. [Hear.] Parliament was reformed that it might listen to the petitions of the people, and its very first act annihilated the right of petition at a stroke. [Hear, hear.] He hoped that every gentleman who had heard him, and had to answer to his constituents, would recollect that the bill did all this. The right hon. Secretary shook his head as if denying his statement. He asked the right hon. gentleman whether any meeting could be held to petition without the consent of the Lord-Lieutenant? That was all he said. In the first place there was the utmost looseness in the terms and phraseology of the act; he had never read an act of Parliament so untechnical and indefinite in its phraseology. The 14th section enacted, "that every person charged with any of the offences hereinafter mentioned or referred to, may be, and such persons shall be, summarily tried by and before such court martial," so that any offence referred to and afterwards by the bill constituted a subject for the decision of these courts martial. The 19th section was equally vague. The 25th made any man to whom a prisoner under this bill was committed his legal guardian. The 28th made the only return to the writ of *habeas corpus* and affirmation that the party was detained under this act. So that by means of these two sections you had a power of confinement. Where? Was it in the King's goals, in which the sheriff's were accountable for the care and custody of the prisoner? or in the goals of the corporations, which also had their responsible officers? No—but in any place. The prisoner, under this act, might be confined in the black hole of a barrack. [Hear.] Could he be blamed if he found it difficult to preserve his temper when examining the details of such an enactment? He again asked the Reformed Parliament whether this was to be their first bill—this