

ment to the amendment, proposing changes in this resolution to meet the suggestions which I have made, and proposing also that the whole resolution so changed should be not adopted, but referred at once to a Committee of the Whole House, and that that should be an initiatory step in order that, if there were any other suggestion as to the form and language, it might be freely debated, and that the result of our labors might be as near unanimous as possible. Such is the suggestion which I venture to make to the hon. gentleman, such is the suggestion I have prepared here; but such is the suggestion I make only across the floor, and do not emphasise it by placing it in your hands, Mr. Speaker, because I am exceedingly anxious to leave to the hon. gentleman all that is to be gained by his having taken the first step in this matter, and rather to invite him to pursue the necessary steps to secure the best measure of success than myself to interpose by proposing any different resolution than that which he has brought down. Having said so much I will say this: that I propose myself to adopt the course on this question which I have adopted on two former occasions. Upon each occasion I invited the consideration of the House to what I thought the best thing; upon each occasion I endeavoured to secure the assent of the House to what I thought the best thing; upon each occasion I failed, and, having failed, I accepted in the end what was procurable so long as it was at all consistent with my own view of what was right. I shall continue, therefore, in the course I have followed on former occasions, and if this resolution as it is ultimately framed shall not prove such as wholly to command my assent, I shall yet hope to be able to support it, feeling that anything which is not absolutely wrong will be preferable to a division of opinion on this occasion. Sir, I now turn to a few of the other arguments which were used by those who support the amendment. I was desirous, in the first place, to remove as far as I could the force of such of their arguments as I believed were capable of being eliminated by a fair consideration of the language of the resolution. There are others which are to be dealt with only by argument, but which we cannot remove, I am afraid, by any changes we can make in the terms of the resolution. One hon. gentleman said: "Why are you interfering? this is only a local affair, and it deals only with the administration of justice in Ireland; what have you got to do with it?" Well, we have precedents in that respect, too. There were a few men confined in Kilmainham jail in 1832. That was a local affair. The Habeas Corpus Act had been suspended, and they were in jail. But we all agreed upon that occasion that, notwithstanding it was particularly local, confined to the precincts of Kilmainham, that should not prevent our intervention and our doing what we could to procure the release of the prisoners in that jail. Why is it we interfere? Those of us who think interference or intervention should take place, justify it, because the universal principles of British justice are, as we believe, being violated in that particular locality, and because those who believe in the sacredness and the universal application of those principles of British justice feel that no wound can be inflicted upon them in any part of the Empire without that wound more or less affecting us and affecting the glory of the Empire to which we belong. We feel that every lover of British freedom all over the world is entitled to express an opinion, when he believes the universal principles of British justice are to be abrogated or impaired. Another hon. gentleman said: "But you miscall the Bill: it is not a Coercion Bill, it is only a Bill to change the criminal law." What is in a name? What is the substance of the Bill? Of course, it is a Bill to change the criminal law, but it is in its essence and spirit not merely a Coercion Bill, but a deadly Coercion Bill. It is first of all—and remember that, because it is an important circumstance

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—a Bill which upon the face of it is designed to be permanent. The declaration of the Secretary of Ireland, in introducing the Bill, was that the Bill was a set purpose of the Government of the day. They propose to make this a permanent record, a permanent institution. It is to answer no temporary exigency, but it is to be the law of the land for Ireland for an indefinite period. Now, what is to be the law of the land for Ireland for an indefinite period? In the first place, a very large number of offences—and some are made offences, as I understand, by this Act—are to be disposed of by two magistrates without a jury, those two magistrates having the power of sentencing to six months' imprisonment with hard labor. The range of offences which is prescribed by that authority is a very wide one. It covers a great many of those classes of offences capable of almost infinite degrees in their seriousness which unfortunately exist in the island of Ireland. It includes criminal conspiracies, boycotting, rioting, offences under the Whiteboy Acts, assaulting officers of the law, taking unlawful possession, and inciting to the above offences. I do not know much about the magistrates who are to try these cases, but I was very much amused, within a day or two, to read some of the letters of application of highly-placed personages for positions of this description for friends and relatives. One was from a former Governor General of Canada, another was from the Knight of Kerry; and those applications for a nephew, or a brother, or a son-in-law. In the description they gave of the qualifications of the individual, of his previous career, of the reasons for seeking the appointment, were not highly calculated, I think, to induce anyone who considered the subject, and supposed that men were appointed upon such recommendations, to hand over so large a part of the liberty of the subject to two magistrates drawn from society by influences such as those. They belong, as we all know, to one class—to that class which is, as a rule, not in sympathy with, but in bitter hostility to the demands of the Irish people. They belong to a class, they are largely scions of, or related to, or influenced by a class which is divided bitterly, not merely by political, but also by the agrarian question itself, from the very persons whom they are called upon to try. They hold office, as I understand, not during good behavior. They are appointees of the Castle; and to hand over to these persons, without a jury, the power to convict and to sentence to six months' imprisonment with hard labor, for all these classes of offences, is, to a very large extent, to actually obliterate the securities for trial which consist in trial by jury. And there are added offences, as I have said. You add the offence of inciting to any of the above offences. Well, now, what does that mean? What may it mean? Why, Sir, an article in a newspaper, a speech, a word in private conversation, a private letter, may be construed into an incitement to enter into conspiracy—an incitement to take unlawful possession. There is no language which can be devised by the wit of man which can be wider; there is no net you can make that is more ample than those words—incitement to commit offences. I am not surprised that Mr. Balfour—as was said here yesterday—should have said that he hoped to prevent the press from participating in these offences by the operation of the Act, though the Act was not directed against the press. Of course, if they know that two magistrates can commit them to jail for six months with hard labor; if it is found that they are inciting to these offences, they do not exactly know how little or how much—the suggestion of a grievance—the suggestion of the necessity of even an innocent organisation—they do not know what language shall be construed into an incitement—they hardly know at what moment, hardly any man who is interested in a popular cause knows at what moment he may not be summoned and find himself confined for six months in jail with hard labor. Then they deal with