

# THE LIBRARY TABLE

## PRIME MINISTERS

By G. W. E. RUSSELL. Toronto:  
J. M. Dent and Sons.



LIKE all this right honourable gentleman's writings, this book is notable for its literary style, its lack of affectation, its familiarity with the subject in hand, its kindly attitude towards the great personalities that have come under the author's observation and into his acquaintance. Mr. Russell writes familiarly of men who held large places in British political life as far back as the time of Lord Palmerston, whom he remembers even because of his outward characteristics—"his large, dyed, carefully-brushed whiskers; his broad-shouldered figure, which always seemed struggling to be upright; his huge, rather distorted feet, his strong and comfortable seat on the old white hack which carried him daily to the House of Commons." He says of his uncle Lord John Russell that he was in appearance "very short, with a head and shoulders which might have belonged to a much larger frame. When sitting he might have been taken for a man of average height; and it was only when he rose to his feet that his diminutive stature became apparent". Lord Derby had "in richest abundance, the great natural gift of oratory, with an audacity in debate which won the nickname of 'Rupert' and a voice which would have stirred his hearers if he had only been reciting Bradshaw". According to Mr. Russell's opinion it was evident that nature had not intended Mr. Balfour for a public speaker. "Even at this distance of time I can

recall his broken sentences, his desperate tugs at the lapel of his coat; his long pauses in search of a word, and his selection of the wrong after all." Henry Campbell-Bannerman is described as one who had "marched with the times from Whiggery to Liberalism; who had never lagged an inch behind his party, but who did not, as a rule, outstep it". Farther on he is estimated as one who was "not a good speaker, and he had no special skill in debate". To Gladstone Mr. Russell gives the fulness of his praise: "For my own part I say advisedly that he was the finest specimen of God's handiwork that I have ever seen; and by this I mean that he combined strength of body, strength of intellect, and spiritual attainments in a harmony which I have never known equalled". Here is the picture of Disraeli: "If I had not known the fact, I do not think that I should have recognized him as one of the ancient race of Israel. His profile was not the least what we in England consider Semitic. He might have been a Spaniard or an Italian, but he certainly was not a Briton. He was rather tall than short, but slightly bowed, except when he drew himself up for the more effective delivery of some shrewd blow. His complexion was extremely pale, and the pallor was made more conspicuous by contrast with his hair, steeped in Tyrian dye, worn long, and eked out with apparent artificial additions."

The whole book is exceedingly interesting. It concludes with two stories, presumably true although they are classified as fact and fiction—"A forgotten Pause" and "A Crimean Episode".