

THE ENGLISH GOVERNMENT.

Sir Charles Russell's Speech.

Sir Charles Russell, speaking at the opening of the Liberal Club which was lately opened, said

His first duty was to acknowledge the restoration of confidence in the Government of which he had the honor of being a member. They placed in the foreground, and rightly so, then recognition of the responsible duty that lies upon the present Government to give effect to their proclaimed policy of Home Rule for Ireland. The resolution then proceeded to recognize the patriotism and the wisdom of their great leader in propounding that policy, and to the enthusiasm that had been passed upon Mr. Gladstone by the previous speakers, especially to the eulogium so eloquently expressed by Alderman Gibson, he had nothing to add. Indeed, Mr. Gladstone presented a marvel to the world—a man of some eighty-four years of age, but thanks to Providence, in ample possession of his physical energy and his remarkable intellectual activity. Yet he possessed qualities even more remarkable than these—none more so, perhaps, than his determination and that resolution which were as strong in him at the present moment as in the youngest and most ardent member of his party. Their resolution proceeded to speak of the cohesion of the Liberal party. That cohesion was a fact, much to the disappointment of their political opponents. The Liberals had been told they would never get the length of forming a Government, that they should never get the length of introducing the Home Rule Bill; they were told they would never carry the Home Rule Bill, and still more recently were told that when the Bill was thrown out by the House of Lords they would become so demoralized and discredited that, perforce, they would have to retire from office. All these predictions had been falsified by facts, and he believed it to be true that not merely were the Liberal party in the House of Commons more coherent than in any former time he could remember, but that the country, now largely recovered from the shock of 1885 and 1886, was consolidating its strength, and behind the party was a volume of public opinion daily increasing in strength and intensity. They recognized with approval the determination of the Government to carry out some important part of the legislation to which they were pledged. Whether they sat long or short they would carry through that legislation—and while he or one disliked intensely the application of the closure, yet its use was justifiable, nay, was necessary, if a greater evil were to be avoided. After all, the time of the House of Commons, as their leader had well phrased it, was the treasure of the people; and if any clique of men, whatever their motives or designs, set themselves deliberately to squander that treasure, it behoved the Government of the day, as its guardian, to see that these attempts were frustrated.

The resolution made reference also to the fortunate termination of the miners' lock out, through the inter-mediation of the Government and Lord Rosebery. It was a matter of gratification that the well timed inter-vention of the Government had ended this sad dispute, which had been the cause of grievous disruption to trade, and had brought the pinching curse of want to many humble and industrious homes. But all the credit the Government took in this matter was that they had at their disposal, in one of their most distinguished members, a man whose name was a tower of strength, and who was the fittest instrument that could have been selected for the purpose. Perhaps, however, they deserved the further

credit that they watched, as he knew they had done, anxiously and intently the progress of the conflict, and chose a moment when the heat of the contest had somewhat abated, when the men's judgments were cooler, and when the blood was not coursing through their veins with the same heat, an opportune moment—not prematurely—to intervene in the quarrel.

The Government had now been seventeen months in office, and what had they done? They were bound by every principle of policy, by every pledge of honor, to endeavor to deal with, on satisfactory lines, the Irish problem. It was no new problem. The Irish Question had for well-nigh a century been the difficulty which had confronted every Government that had been called to assume power. It had been a source of divided counsel in this land, a source of weakened influence to England abroad, and a source of controversy to those who were willing to notice any difficulty or obstacle in the way of the progressive legislation which the needs of our own land required. Let them not forget how the whole aspect of the question was altered in 1886; how up to then Ireland did not even possess the imperfect franchise that Scotland, Wales and England possessed. But when, in 1886, the franchise in the whole of the United Kingdom having been enlarged and became, broadly speaking, a popular franchise, and when, under that popular franchise, for the first time Ireland spoke, and spoke constitutionally at the polls, and returned eighty-six per cent. of its entire representation demanding, within constitutional lines, the concession to Ireland of its natural right of self government in regard to its own peculiar affairs, no Liberal statesman could turn his back upon that land. Mr. Gladstone was bound to take that matter in hand, and to propound, as a matter of policy, a safe and statesmanlike measure. In corroboration of Mr. Willans, he believed the Home Rule Bill had the distinct advantage and characteristic that it was a step to that Imperial Federation in support of which there was a growing intelligent opinion in the country. Public opinion was ripe, and demanded a local Legislature to deal with local affairs, leaving the affairs of the Empire to be dealt with by the Imperial Parliament. A point he wished to make, farther, was this, that while their opponents attacked and condemned their policy, they propounded no policy in its place. He wanted to ask, Was there any reason to expect that with the growth of political knowledge, and with the greater power the Irish people now possessed, the difficulty had been brushed off the stage merely by the rejection of the Home Rule Bill? Therefore, it was a question that would and must confront them—that would be a hindrance to other useful legislation so long as it was not dealt with on sound, comprehensive principles, and got out of the way. The Home Rule scheme held the field. It had no rival, and the principle of the Bill lived as actively to-day in the minds of thoughtful and intelligent men as the day before. The House of Lords made their great effort, by an enormous majority, to kill it.

In the House of Commons they spent a great part of the session on that work, and they were now devoting themselves to work directly in the interests of England, Scotland and Wales. They had two important Bills before them, one of which passed last Thursday evening its third reading—he meant the Employers' Liability Bill. The first principle of the Bill was the abolition of the doctrine of common employment, which debarred a man from getting compensation for his injuries, because the injuries were caused by the negligence of another employe; the second principle was the prohibition against contracting out of the benefits conferred by the Act;

and the third principle aimed at was that which prevented an injured employe getting redress by the substitution of a sham sub-contractor. The clause dealing with contracting out was attacked principally in the interests of one or two great railways and firms, who provided, by the joint contributions of masters and men, for insurance against all kinds of accidents. The Bill would not operate against such insurance at all. What were the reasons why this insurance had been instituted by the railway companies? Like all human actions, they were dictated by mixed motives of interest—a desire to safeguard their employees in time of trouble and difficulty, and also by the desire to establish good relations with their men, to attract those men to them and to keep them out of the pernicious air of agitators and agitations. Would not those motives be as strong to-day as the day before?

The next Bill of importance brought in was the Parish Councils Bill, the principle of which, broadly, was the introduction of Home Rule in rural life in parishes and districts. There would be given to the bodies that were to be elected very important powers, the importance of which varied in particular parts. To some, for instance, the question of allotments did not assume the important form it did in other parts of the country, where it was a life and death question with the laborers. He, for one, should be glad to see, if it could be efficiently, safely and practically done—if there could be committed to those representative bodies not only the power to acquire land, but the power to build cottages where they were badly needed. If the provisions as to allotments were worked efficiently it would do some thing, at least, to stay the tide of immigration—always to be regretted—into the great manufacturing centres; which left, on the one hand, whole districts imperfectly populated, and, on the other, those who ought to be working on the land coming into labor markets already over-congested. That had a tendency to prevent the living wage, which it ought to be the object of all employers to see their laborers attain. Those were two measures which he hoped would pass before the session terminated. The Government meant to carry out their Newcastle programme. Their tenure of office depended upon no tenure of the Lords. They were not going to the country by the mandate of a non-representative House; their tenure of office depended on the goodwill of the majority of the House of Commons; and he saw no reason to believe that there was any element of disintegration in the Liberal party in the House of Commons which would prevent that party making a great impression upon the work propounded in the Newcastle programme.

Then there was a further scheme of reform in the Registration Bill. We must have a simplified system of registration; we must have a shorter period of residence; all outside fantastic kind of voting must be done away with, and there must be the affirmation of the principle that the vote of every man in the community—whether he were a millionaire or whether he were a poor man—was, as regarded Imperial interest, of equal value in the service of the country. In this division there were between 14,000 and 15,000 on the electoral register, and he thought there were about four thousand voters upon the freehold franchise, those same men having votes in some other places. That duplication ought to be put an end to. Then there was the payment of election expenses out of the rates and the payment of members. The Liberal party contended for that principle, on the ground that the existing system laid restrictions upon the choice of constituencies in the man they elected to

represent them. A man had no claim, however high his personal character, however distinguished his position, unless he represented the instincts, and wants, and aspirations of the country he proposed to represent.

He came, in the next place, to a very important matter closely touching the administration of the law, especially amongst the poor—he meant the formation of the benches of magistrates. According to the existing system, which he believed to be a bad and pernicious system, the appointment of magistrates rested with the Lord Chancellor. A series of years brought about the practice, which had been acted upon for a long time, of appointing them on the nomination of the Lord Lieutenant. That did not mean that in the majority of cases the Lord Lieutenant knew much more about the merits of the people than the Lord Chancellor did. But the Lord Chancellor or the Lord Lieutenant had a particular shade of political opinion, and he got advice from persons of the same shade of opinion; and the result was that nominees who were supposed to be nominees of the Lord Lieutenant, were really the nominees of a little clique or coterie, it might be on the Bench or partly off the Bench. That little clique or coterie had the making or unmaking of those who had to administer the law. There was also the objection that county magistrates must have a particular money qualification. That could not be a sound principle. What were the requirements of such a position? Character, to begin with, intelligence, and a collection of those attributes which would command confidence in the administration of justice among those with whom he had to act. The absence of land, or the absence of money, ought to be no bar or hindrance. There was considerable dissatisfaction with the tardiness of the Lord Chancellor in dealing with this matter; but he knew that his Lordship was applying himself honestly and earnestly, recollecting what it would not be right to forget, that the responsibility for those appointments rested upon him, and that he must justify it to his conscience to bear those principles in mind. He might not be going as fast as some thought, but he was making an honest attempt to give effect to the resolution of the House of Commons.

Continuing, Sir Charles said Mr. Asquith had been thoroughly successful in his administration of the Home Office. He had done hard work, which such communities as theirs must appreciate, in the matter of administering the Factory Act he had done much to reduce the growing evil of swearing, and he had taken a bold step in employing female inspectors for certain classes of factories. With reference to the use of the military, Mr. Asquith's position was this. When the magistrates applied for the use of the military, the Home Office pointed out to them the inadvisability of calling in such force until all local means were exhausted. The magistrates were obliged to apply for assistance not merely to particular districts, but to the adjoining counties. It was only after a statement was made, upon the responsibility of the magistrates, that local means were insufficient, that the employment of the soldiers was consented to by Mr. Asquith. If, in face of that demand, he had refused to assent, and a catastrophe had happened, his weak knees would have been the responsibility. He would only refer to another instance, that was Mr. Acland, who had introduced the Free Education Act, and that while he meant to be tender to the large class of Voluntary schools which had done so much for the education of the poor throughout the country, he was bound to see that free education was no longer a sham, but a reality. Concluding, Sir