

OPENING OF THE NEW LAW COURTS OF ENGLAND.

superior to-day to its original germ in vitality and force, as it is in flexibility and learning. So that the fusion of its parts, of which Monday presented the outward and visible sign, was no heraldic pageant or mere historic survival; it was the starting point of a new development with a boundless range for its energies to come. And the era of Victoria will certainly not be the least in the annals of our law, amid that small list of epochs which have seen our administrative system recast, a list that can hardly be extended beyond the names of the Conqueror, the first and the second Henry, the first Edward, and the Restoration.

Few of those who pressed on Monday to catch a glimpse of the show or procession, will have any idea that the ceremony of the day was in some sort an act of respect to the Great Charter itself, when viewed in connexion with recent Acts. The Common Pleas, by virtue of the Judicature Act, being merged in the High Court of Justice, having perforce to quit the Hall of Rufus, that 'certain place' in which they settled as required by the Charter of John. On the day that they migrate to that other, but new 'certain place,' by the Temple and the Inns of Court, where they may look for a history as long in times to come, it is due to the conventional respect we all of us pay to the Act of Runnymede, that the 'place' should be proclaimed in the sight of the nation. But the ceremony, if connected with the future through the Judicature Acts of the present reign, goes back in its symbols and suggestions to a time much earlier than the Barons and the Charter. In those days, as now, there was a Chancellor, but no Court of Chancery: then there was an Exchequer, but no Court of Exchequer; there were then, as now, no courts of exclusive law and equity; there was one supreme court, of which all the judges had a share; there was a Chief Justice, but no special Court of King's Bench. Nay, more, the ceremony of Monday gathered in one hall the executive and legislative chiefs, beside the judicial. And so, when the Sovereign in state installed at length the united Courts of Justice in their new common seat, and there took her place surrounded by her sons and her family, by the officers of her house and the officers of State, by peers and magnates of various degree, the scene in the great gothic hall at St. Clement's curiously served to recall

one of the gatherings in the dawn of English history, when the King's Court was Parliament, Council, Cabinet, Chancery, King's Bench, Exchequer, and Common Pleas in one, and claimed to be a survival of the old English Gemot, which had power to dispose of the throne itself. It is a quaint point of resemblance to the representative character of this rather elastic body of councillors, that in the open court beyond, the First Commissioner proposes to place, beside so many Witan, or Sapientes, a stout contingent from the people.

The scene must strangely remind us of that stubborn continuity in our English law which has few parallels in history. But two institutions of man can be found to surpass it—one in the ancient world, one in the spiritual sphere—the law of Rome, and the Christian Church. And to put aside these, no modern civil institution, unless we count the throne of England, has any such continuous record. The origins of the English law and its principal offices can be traced back in unbroken series to types that are distant nearly a thousand years. And the actual organization and forms of our own memory have for some seven or eight centuries been in full activity. They were venerable things before the Constitution itself had begun its secular course of development. A man tried for treason to-day must be judged by a law made before the battle of Poitiers was fought, 530 years ago; and at this hour the greatest of all authorities in law is he who once was Attorney-General to Queen Elizabeth. No man can understand how an acre of land is transferred till he goes back to the laws of the first Edward; and the art of conveyancing arose out of innovations which, in things spiritual, are called the Reformation.

A case tried 200 years ago, but for trivial verbal differences, might easily be taken to be argued but yesterday; and as to the reports of 100 years back, there are scores of cases where every turn of expression and argument may be heard any day in term. The apparatus of the Great Seal and its bodyguard, the Hanaper Office, and the Petty Bag, and the quaint offices remembered by living men, all descended from ages when great men could not write their names. The noblest hall that remains to us from the great architecture of the Middle Ages has been the Royal Court of Justice, ever since its walls were raised. The most perfect hall of the Renais-