

FRIDAY DECEMBER 13.

IRISH NEWS.

HOME-RULE MOVEMENT.

LETTER FROM MR. BUTT, M. P.

To the Electors of the City of Limerick.

Fellow-Citizens and Fellow-Countrymen: The present position of Irish politics is such that I believe it to be a duty incumbent upon me to place before you, and through you, before the Irish people, the views I take of that position, and of the prospects of the national cause. Let me first discharge an obligation which I owe to you, the fulfillment of which has been too long deferred. Six months have now elapsed since, in reply to an appeal which I made to you, I received that address, the memory of which will never be effaced from my heart. I never can forget your generous appreciation, far beyond my deserts, of my services that I have been able to render the country, the trust and confidence you expressed in me, and the terms of eulogy in which you conveyed to me your wish that I should continue to be your representative and should retain my position in relation to the guidance of the Irish Parliamentary party and generally of the Home-Rule cause.

It seems strange that it is only now that I am expressing my acknowledgments of your kindness. The truth is, I was led to believe that your address would come to me in a formal shape, and, under some misapprehension, I waited for this to reply. Since the close of the session I have been in constant hopes of being able personally to thank you. But although a delay has thus occurred in the expression of my feelings, when I read that address, and the language in which you assigned me a place in the history of our country beside those whose names are written for ever on its page—the signatures attached to it of men whose good opinion would be in itself the reward of the labors of a life, when I saw the long list of signatures which recorded the good opinion of a people as high-minded, as intelligent, and as patriotic as the people of any city upon earth, among the signatures of those who fill the place of authority in your ancient and historic city, headed by your chief magistrate; and may I say, above all, when I saw that the first name attached to that address was that of the distinguished prelate who so worthily presides in your city over the Church to which the great mass of the people belong—with that signature followed as it was by those of the clergy, of whose virtues and learning it would be presumption in me to speak, I felt that, however exaggerated might be the estimate you had formed of me, yet to receive such a testimony from such men was more than compensation for all the toils and sacrifices and anxieties which any efforts of mine to serve my country have brought with them. I regard the expression of your wish that I should not adhere to my resolution of retiring from the place I had occupied in public as a command. I obeyed that command the more confidently because I felt that when you assigned to my name a place on the page of our country's history you gave me the highest assurance that you would sustain me in maintaining the honor and dignity of our country as the great men who have gone before us. When you told me that the chances and changes of political life had made my humble name one to be remembered in future times in association with your own proud memories of fame, I knew that you would be as jealous of my honor as of your own; that you would never wish me to place myself in any position by which I would compromise in the judgment of another generation that name; that you would not ask me to accept responsibility without authority, or permit myself to appear as guiding a cause over the conduct of which I really exercised no control.

But it is not on any personal matter that I now address you. The present condition of the great cause which seven years ago you elected me to represent is the subject of comment in all the journals of the empire. It is, I believe, the cause of perplexity and dismay to many an Irish heart. I have no portion in the gloomy forebodings with which either friends or foes surround that cause. We are, indeed, in the presence of dangers, but of none that courage and energy and patriotism may not avert. If I offer advice to the people of Ireland, I trust I am guilty of no presumption. I must indeed address myself perhaps peculiarly to those who entertain the same conviction that I do—that Ireland will never enjoy her full measure of prosperity, contentment and freedom until a large measure of self-government is conceded to us upon the principles asserted at the great National Conference of 1873. But the matters on which I now write are of the deepest interest to all who desire good government or national dignity and honor.

I need not remind you that after the general election of 1874 we were able to form an Irish party, containing within it a fair majority of the Irish representatives. That party was united by an agreement on the question of Home-Rule but, however united, it was more than a Home-Rule party—it was, emphatically, an Irish party, maintaining Irish interests, representing Irish opinion, making the voice of Ireland heard as that of a distinct nationality in the senate of the empire. In this capacity we were able to discharge functions the use of which was cheerfully recognized by many who differ very widely from us on the question of Home-Rule.

There is no reflecting Irishman, no matter what may be his political opinions, who must not feel that in the line of conduct taken by that party, and the place it takes in the estimation of Parliament and the country, the honor and character of our common country is involved. It is vain to deny that dissensions have arisen in that party. It is useless to conceal that they are serious ones. A small section of its members have advocated and in some degree adopted a course of action in which they have not the concurrence of the majority of their colleagues. They have endeavored to force their policy upon the party. I am far from saying that occasions may not arise in which a few members of a party such as ours would be fully justified in striking out a line of action for themselves, and even appealing to the country to sustain them in it against the opinion of the majority. I confess such a course of action appears very like a severance from the party. Those who adopt such a course take upon themselves a great responsibility. Their justification must depend upon the circumstances under which this course is adopted. I say for myself that I have always resisted every attempt unduly to fetter the action of individuals. But, after all, that which I invite the Irish people to consider is, not the merits or demerits of individuals, but the means by which the great interests of the country can be best advanced. I believe the discussion which has arisen to be very needless and a very mischievous one; but what I wish to do is to calmly and dispassionately review the present position of Irish affairs, and on that review to ask of every Irishman to judge what course is most likely to serve the interests of his native land. Of the extent to which division has proceeded we have no difficulty in judging. At the meeting held in the Rotunda on the evening of the 22nd of last month a resolution was adopted to which I ask the earnest attention of every one who desires to understand our present situation. After referring to the inactivity of the Home-Rule League and other matters, with which I may deal hereafter, this resolution proceeds: "We declare our solemn conviction that to secure the success of the Home-Rule cause it is essential that the constituencies should return only members who will pledge themselves to carry out in Parliament the policy of sustained action heretofore pursued by our most energetic and trusted members." There can be no doubt of what this resolution means. The mover of the resolution in his speech introducing it said, frankly and fairly: "I told you in plain language the resolution intends to commit you to the policy of Biggar and Parnell."

Indeed, a subsequent resolution very plainly indicated the meaning of sustained and very vigorous policy. It was as follows: "That in the event of the Government attempting to carry out their threats of suspending, expelling, or imprisoning any Irish member, and thereby temporarily disfranchising an Irish constituency, we trust that a sufficient number of his colleagues will be found to resent such conduct by stopping further Government business until the member thus deprived of his rights has been reinstated in them; and we recommend this question to the consideration of the patriotic constituencies."

The resolution, therefore, means a call upon the Irish constituencies to discard all the representatives who will not accept a pledge to pursue a certain line of conduct which every one perfectly understands, and which may lead to the imprisonment or the expulsion of the member pursuing it. It is with great regret I have seen that the spirit of this resolution has been acted on. If Mr. Parnell be correctly reported, he said at a tenant meeting in Roscommon on Sunday last that: "If they wanted to carry the land question the mode of procedure should be very different from what it had been. Men should be sent to Parliament to support the Obstructive party, and then they would be assured of victory."

I do not think any one has a right to complain of this. If Mr. Parnell believes that the adoption of what is known as the obstructive policy in Parliament is the only way and the sure way of obtaining a reform of the land laws, or any other benefit to Ireland, he is only following out his convictions when he asks of his Irish constituencies to send representatives who will adopt it. But this must not prevent us from considering what must be the consequence of such an attempt, if we could for one moment suppose it successful. It is more childishness to say that it does not involve the total and complete breaking up of the existing Irish parliamentary party. I do not think the country is prepared for this.

It is a very small matter that it would involve my own exclusion from Parliament and from political life. After your address to me, after the many testimonies I have received from my countrymen, I may perhaps be excused for believing that there are Irishmen who would not regard this as an unmitigated good. But these resolutions are a direct call on you, the electors of Limerick, to discard me as your representative unless I am prepared to accept a pledge to pursue a policy of obstruction in the House of Commons. I have repeatedly declared that rather than sanction for one hour a policy (if such it can be called) which is my solemn conviction could only end in disaster and disgrace, I would resign even the high and cherished honor of representing you.

But how many other of our representatives are to be discarded? They have already been marked out by name. But we do not want this. Their exclusion is the necessary consequence of acting on this resolution. The two members for the great county of Cork must give way to two tried services of Mr. Downing must give way to some one who will pledge himself to carry fifty of tenure, or something more, by obstructing all business in the House of Commons. Mr. Shaw's high character, and the great services he has unostentatiously rendered to the cause of Home-Rule, must not serve him. Lord Francis Conyngham must not plead to his constituents the untiring assiduity with which he has devoted himself to the service of the national cause. Mr. Blomfield cannot recall the memory of the first great electoral triumph which was achieved for the cause of Home-Rule. Mr. Mitchell-Henry will not be saved by the splendid proof he has given of devotion to the cause of Ireland. All, all must go unless they take the pledge of adherence to the policy and the course of action which is to be forced upon us. I ston in the enumeration of the men that must be discarded. It is not for me to speak of valued colleagues and friends, but let there be no mistake as to the meaning of the resolution—the constituencies to return no one who will not pledge himself to sustained action—that is, to the policy known by the name of "obstruction." It is impossible for me in the compass of a single letter to embrace all the topics upon which I must address you. In another letter I will endeavor to point out the consequences to which such a course of action must lead, but in this letter I confine myself to the plain and manifest results that must follow from the attempt to force such a pledge upon candidates at the next election. Does any man in his senses really believe that the cause of Ireland would be served if those who passed this resolution had the power of driving from the House of Commons every member of the five gentlemen I have named, and replacing us by their own nominees who are the men to take their place?

But it is not, I suppose, expected that we, and those who wish with us to see the advocacy of the national cause conducted on rational and constitutional principles, will yield at once to the summons which calls on us to retire to obey the command to pledge ourselves to a course of conduct of which we disapprove. Are contests to ensue? Are we to exhibit to "Anglo-Irish" men? the spectacle of interfering contests raging in the Home-Rule constituencies—contests in which the best men of our party will be assailed because they resolved to preserve their independence? Is this really the spectacle by which Irishmen of independent feeling are to be attracted to the Home-Rule ranks, or by which either Irishmen or Englishmen are to be persuaded that we are fit for self-government?

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I have no apprehension that attempts like those threatened in the resolutions I have quoted would succeed. But I am sure that the very declaration that such an attempt will be made is very mischievous to our cause. It will deter men of honor and spirit from coming forward as candidates if they are told that they are to be subjected to such a pledge. It will alienate from us those elements of social and political power with which, believe me, the Home-Rule cause cannot dispense. In the discord which it causes upon our party and our cause it will most assuredly in many constituencies secure the return of men who will not be the advocates of Home-Rule. I cannot help saying that the adoption of this resolution is, in plain words, the avowal of a policy of dissension. I would not discharge the duty which I owe to the country if I did not fasten attention upon this. I am satisfied that some of those who appear to give a sanction to that resolution had not

fully reflected on its effect. I may hope that many of those who did understand its effect may possibly, on reflection, think that it is unwise. But, be this as it may, I ask of the Irish people to discourage the policy of dissension which that resolution proclaims. We may, perhaps, hope that no immediate attempt will be made to carry out the resolution by an agitation among the constituencies, in its direction. No heavier blow could be inflicted on the cause of Ireland than giving to such an agitation even the semblance of popular approval. When once the present Irish party is broken up it will require many a weary hour of patient work to build up another in its place. No man probably for years will venture on the task, and in the belief of the hopelessness of again forming a united Irish party men would retire individually for themselves. Many would retire altogether from political life, others would fall into the ranks of the party to whom their feelings or their antecedents might attach them. Some few would possibly make an effort to preserve an independent position—a position which would be a mere personal one. I cannot too strongly repeat that the inevitable result of a course like that recommended in the resolution would be the utter and total disruption of that party.

I can conceive men believing from many reasons that the breaking up of that party is desirable. I have never concealed from myself that the existence of a separate and distinct Irish party is viewed with intense hostility by those who think that the last hope for Ireland is in the merging of the Irish popular members in the great Liberal party of the empire. Those who entertain these sentiments must look with more complacency upon anything that tends to break up the separate Irish party we have formed. There are those who still believe that a reliance on Parliamentary or constitutional action is only misleading, and that the only hope of Ireland's regeneration is in other means. Those who entertain these opinions would naturally desire that the attitude of those men, who have certainly led the people to look to legal action and not to revolutionary efforts. And, lastly, there are some who, regarding the present party as unfit or indisposed to carry out those views of the Parliamentary procedure by which, in their opinion, good can be effected, would take the responsibility of destroying it in the hope, or even on the chance, of erecting on its ruins a small, but, as they would say, a determined party, who would resolutely pursue the obstructed action of obstruction.

All these opinions, however mistaken, are, I believe, honestly held by men sincerely desirous of serving their country, and are, therefore, entitled to a respectful examination. But so far as I feel called on to enter on that examination, it is impossible to do so in this letter. It is enough for me at present to fasten the attention of the people of Ireland upon this, that the policy of breaking up the present Irish party is openly proclaimed, and that those who are not prepared to endorse that policy ought to give no countenance to any step that is taken directly or indirectly to carry it into effect. There is one reason assigned for the breaking up of that party to which, before I close this letter, I must advert. It is said that the party has failed in achieving any results for the country, and that, therefore, it is time a party has been more energetic and more energetic in the past. It is expressed in the compendious phrase, "Mr. Butt's policy has failed," and that the country must look to other leaders and another course of action to accomplish the results which the organization of 1874 has not succeeded in bringing about.

My answer to this is an emphatic denial of a statement as destitute of foundation as any that has ever misinterpreted the course of political events. I do not hesitate to take upon the personal issue and say: "Mr. Butt's policy has not failed," much as it has been marred by division and dissent. As for the action of the Irish party, I believe that never in four years has so much been done to make the voice of Ireland respected and influential. In a hostile Parliament, under a ministry commanding against a union of all parties a compact majority of sixty and seventy, they have succeeded in preventing bad measures and in obtaining some good. They have forced the claims of Ireland upon the attention of statesmen and Parliament on Irish questions which five years ago could not obtain a hearing. The demands of Ireland have been supported by minorities which a little more care would have converted into majorities. There is not a question in which the Irish people are interested and in which they have not secured a place in the political and Parliamentary battle-field altogether different from that which it filled before the Irish Parliamentary party was formed. It is essential that on this subject the Irish people should form a just and true conception of what has been done. I know that you and my countrymen will bear with me if I endeavor fully to place before your mind the materials on which your judgment must be formed. I cannot do so in a letter even of the length of this. I do not hesitate to undertake to review, I reserve for my next letter the subject of the action of the Irish Parliamentary party and the influence it has exercised over public affairs. In another I will consider, I trust calmly and dispassionately, the new policy of action which Ireland is called on to adopt, and, finally, I will endeavor to clearly point out our duties for the next session, and to recall your attention to the words of our own countrymen, my judgment and confident belief, our country may yet by peaceable and constitutional means attain all that is necessary to make us a happy, free and contented nation.

Meaning, let me ask the people of Ireland to reflect upon the issue that is put to them. The proceedings on which I have felt myself bound to comment are really a demand that the management of Irish affairs should be entrusted to the hands of those who have originated these proceedings. They ask that all the questions that have been pressed by others upon the attention of Parliament should be now entrusted to their guidance. The claim of the Irish tenant to protection in his holding is to be entrusted to their care; the right of the Irish Catholic to free education is to be enforced, not by those who have succeeded in making it the Parliamentary question, but to those who propose to carry it by other means than those of reason and argument. If those of the Irish people interested in these questions think that such a transfer of the management of these questions would tend to bring them to a successful issue, by all means let it be made; but let it not be done without fully weighing all that it involves.

I feel that I am open to the charge of repeating myself, but it is a truth I cannot but often repeat. I say that the very first step of the process involved in the breaking up of the existing Parliamentary party. All I can do in this letter is to point out the danger and the mischief that is involved in the course of action which has been so plainly proposed. It is the old story of Ireland that whenever any plans for her welfare seem approaching to success, dissension and waywardness mar the best-formed plans and destroy the fairest hopes. It is too late to avert the repetition of this calamity, and to hope that the good sense and the patriotism of the country may yet enable us to present to Parliament and the British nation a party whom no dissension weakens, and who would be powerful because united? I remain, my dear friends, your faithful servant,

EDM. BUTT.

THE FUTURE OF IRELAND.
The Rev. Father Lavell has a true idea of what should be the present policy of the Irish people. He says:

It is not now a question of Power, Butt, or Parnell. It is a question of Ireland, and the Irishman who, by word or deed, contributed to the continuance of the present chaos, no matter how well he may mean, is in practice the foe of his country. But must there not be a free and full expression of every individual opinion on the great issue raised within the last twelve months, and more as to the proper action of the Irish Parliamentary party in face of a hostile Parliament, and the duties of Irish representatives as formulated five years ago in the room where you are to meet again to-morrow? I answer emphatically, "Yes." Yes, even though the expression of that opinion runs directly counter to the unalterable formula.

The remedy for the divergence or recantations is clear, and that is—elimination, in my opinion. The resolutions adopted at that conference, especially as interpreted by the conference of last January, must be taken as the groundwork, the gospel, of Ireland's political creed. To that creed and gospel there are three enemies, two avowed, and a third, the most dangerous of the three, a silent, scheming, lurking foe. The two avowed are the men of the sword and pike, and the late apostles of repeal.

To the former my answer is: Where at present are your swords, and pikes, and rifles, and powder, and men, and bread? To the latter I say, if we cannot obtain Federalism, as defined, from a hostile and foreign power, it follows, nor can we repeal. The third section remains, and it consists of a motley set of knaves and drones and sycophants, both in and out of Parliament. It is with these Ireland has to deal in the present serious emergency, and on their action, or rather non-action, it is that every Irishman is now called upon to pronounce. I, therefore, for one, emphatically declare the Parliamentary portion of them traitors to their trust and country.

Though comparatively silent for some years past, I have not been the less observant of, and anxious about, the attitude of those men, who are men of whom, from the sloth who sleeps away his whole Parliamentary life, to the deserter, like the Home Rule member for King's County I have at this moment before my mind. These men must be "eliminated." Young and pure blood must be infused into their veins. Half the present current that runs through them is enough to poison the Continent. Even in the next session, if session there be before a general appeal to the country takes place, the portion that remains pure must continue its course unpolluted by its enforced contact with the other half, and should, as is most likely to occur, the mad Eastern freaks of the greatest juggler of the day compel that appeal, let us hope that the people will be found thoroughly educated, and will fling with indignation and scorn from their high places those knaves and slaves who have rendered with the trust so unacceptably repulsive to them.

In a word, the next Parliamentary campaign must be one of doubly distilled and rectified "obstruction," as far as the "construction," as they call it, will allow. I am sorry to have to differ from Mr. Butt as to his estimate both of the propriety of our Irish-English brethren holding their convention and meeting in Dublin, and of "its mischievous results." I consider that their forced exile, so far from having their right to appear and be heard in the land of their fathers and their birth, on the contrary, enhances that right, and that the right hand of fellowship should be held out to those few "followers from Newcastle, Liverpool, Lancashire and other English towns," who assembled together and dictated to Irish representatives what they are to do. I deeply regret that Mr. Butt should be led to adopt, not the vulgar, offensive language of the hoary Whig, Sir Patrick O'Brien, but his very sentiments. There is no dictation whatsoever here.

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