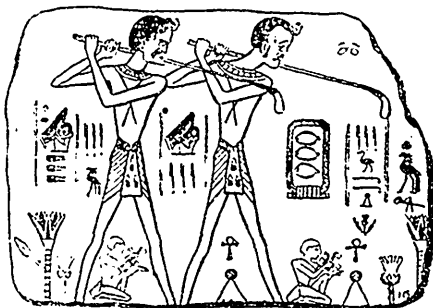


1885 and 1886 he was installed in one of the many minor offices that are the stepping-stones to fame or extinction. His chance came in 1887. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was obliged by ill-health to retire from the Irish Secretaryship. For the last hundred years the Irish Secretaryship has been the most difficult and engrossing office in the service of the British Crown, and such it seems likely to remain. Who was to succeed to it? That this slim, delicate "philosopher" should essay an office that had killed Mr. Forster, and turned Sir George Trevelyan's hair white, seemed incredible to the point of laughter. But so it was. Mr. Balfour had himself thoroughly overhauled by a physician. He was declared to be constitutionally sound, and advised that hard work would be the best of all tonics.

Lord Salisbury had made no mistake. The mistake was made by the Irish members, who prophesied that "Pretty Fanny" would be either out of office or in his grave inside of three months. They did their best to make good their threat, but they had yet to learn their man. Mr. Balfour met their jeers and insults and obstruction with a calm that was phenomenal. He never let himself be "drawn." They could make no headway against his invincible good humour. In Ireland he put in force a drastic coercion bill that stamped out disorder. In the House he simply smiled while the Irish members raged. Three months went by, and he had neither died nor resigned. On the contrary, he had ceased to be "Pretty Fanny." He was now the "base, bloody, and brutal Balfour," and history was ransacked for tyrants and oppressors to compare with him.

That Mr. Balfour made as great a success as leader as he did as Irish Secretary cannot be said. He seems to be one of those men who need opposition to brace them. The continuous, petty strain of the leadership told on him more than his fierce encounters with the Nationalists. Three times last winter he broke down under it, and had to take to his bed and hot gruel. From which, as well as from his whole career, one may infer that in his new position he will not be an exacting overseer. He will, nevertheless, make an excellent Premier. He has the charm and the graciousness of manner that persuade, even if he lacks the force that drives and coerces. He has, too, one of the quickest and widest-ranged intellects on either side of the House, and a noble power of oratory. The House has a really ten-

der feeling for Balfour, quite apart from his standing as a party leader. The man himself, the extraordinary sweetness and sympathy of his character, have completely won it over; and the British House of Commons is not an assembly that gives its esteem lightly. Mr. Balfour has won it by deserving it."



AN EGYPTIAN FRAGMENT.

—From the Westminster Gazette.

Mr. Balfour's long, gaunt form, and his addiction to golf, make him a ready subject for the caricaturist, one of whom shows him and Lord Harcourt as ancient Egyptians playing at their favourite game.

THE SCHOOL QUESTION.

The great educational question is one of the most important questions in every country of Europe—Germany, Austria, Russia, Italy, France, and England. The twin storm-centres at present are on either side of the English Channel. The purpose of the French Government to entirely secularize the schools arouses the intensest antagonism alike of the highest clericals and of the Breton peasant folk. It is not a very dignified action of the Government to send soldiers and police to drive the nuns by force from their schools. By arousing the antagonism of the people, by kindling their devotion to their Church and sympathy with religious teachers, the Government is perhaps preparing a rod for its own back.

Across the Channel a contrary policy involves similar peril. The Government bill invests the clericals with the power to use the school system of the country in the interests of the Church established by law. The Non-conformists strongly protest. Such men as Hugh Price Hughes and Dr. Joseph Parker declare that they will