

OPENING OF THE NEW LAW COURTS OF ENGLAND.

ecutive force, and of the legislative authority in these islands. So that, in some sort, the ceremony had a character of its own that modern England has never witnessed before. There has been no lack of pomp and splendour on many occasions when the Legislature, the civil and military officers, the corporations and the like, have been duly represented. But the occasion of Monday, in reality and historic meaning, stands quite by itself. It is not only the beginning of a new era in the oldest of our living institutions, but it will be the embodiment in visible form of that ancient order which carries back the imagination to the very origins of this realm. It was a fine thought of the Minister in charge to convert the dedication to the public of a new building, in itself so often a barren form, into a symbolic memorial of that primitive Curia Regis, out of which Parliament, Council, Ministry, Cabinet, and Law Courts, all alike, have issued; but from which the Law Courts were the first to develop into clear and organic life.

Of all the institutions and offices which were duly represented in the hall, the Courts of Justice go the furthest back into the past. Our judicial system was a thing of antiquity when the House of Commons first emerged into view; it was full grown before the Great Charter: nor is it clear that the Conquest did more than recast it. The Privy Council and the Garter, the Speaker and the Lord Mayor, dukes and princes, dignities and offices which seem to the layman so ancient, are things of yesterday to the legal antiquary beside the historic offices of the law. There were Chancellors and Masters of the Rolls in the time of the Conqueror; and the Barons of the Exchequer are heard of as early as his youngest son. Seven centuries ago the predecessor of Mr. Gladstone in the Treasurership of the Exchequer tells us how, in the 23rd year of King Henry II., "he sat by the window in the watch-tower near the river Thames," and resolved to record his learning in the duties of the Exchequer and its offices. And so he describes the duties which tradition and long experience had taught him, just as Sir Erskine May records the ancient custom of Parliament, as a thing even then of almost venerable age. We recognized Mr. Gladstone on Monday, not in the new-fangled style of Premier, but in the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer: an office, indeed, that was not created till the Exche-

quer had been centuries old, but which still is anterior to the House of Commons. His episcopal predecessor, who wrote the famous Dialogue, takes us back to the whole apparatus of the Court—to the oblong table with its checkered cloth to count the money withal, and the melter, and the tallies, and the clerks, and the method of accounts (here you must have the eyes of a lynx, says he). And then he goes on to tell us of the Chancellor, and his clerks, and his office, and the Marshal, and then of the Court of Exchequer and its officers, and how men traced up the functions of the Exchequer to the English kings before the Conquest, and how 'the King in the Royal Court himself decrees right by law sitting in his own person.'

The Great Charter affected, but in no way remodelled the Courts of Justice; but, since its 17th section required the Common Pleas 'to be held in some certain place,' the causes between subject and subject were henceforth fixed at Westminster; and so began that system of disintegration in our administration of justice, which has gone on increasing for nearly seven centuries down to the re-integration of our own time, the visible result of which we have just installed. How often do we notice in those vast transformations of some persistent force in nature or society, where through long epochs the tendency to divergence is counteracted by equal efforts towards union, that the full maturity of the organism reverts to the simple unity of the original germ! That is precisely what we see to-day in the long evolution of our legal system. It began even before the conquest in the primitive single Court. Under the administrative genius of the Norman and Plantagenet Kings and the judicial instinct of our race, it gradually threw out special, local, and anomalous organs. The anomalies at length swelled into an incubus, till the recuperative energy of the system, by a series of vigorous crises, has established at last an organic unity. It is the triumph of civilization to reduce to orderly working the active powers which in ruder times were held by arbitrary bounds. The unity which, in the days of the Confessor, the Conqueror, Henry Beauclerc, and Henry of Anjou, was the simplicity of mere inexperience, is achieved in the days of Victoria, after eight centuries of strong life, by the harmony of mature science. And that judicial organism, after eight centuries, is as much