

In a short visit to the Courts at Westminster Hall, for two days in succession, this fact was deeply impressed upon us. We there saw, indeed, men of ordinary human infirmity, with passions and prejudices, no doubt, such as fall to the common lot, sitting in their ancient places, which had come down from the creation of the *Aula Regis*, dating back almost to the period of the Norman Conquest; but men who felt the support of the prestige and the traditions of eight hundred years to back them—men who had all their lives witnessed the field at Runnymede, where the *Magna Charta* of English liberty was signed and sealed by King John and the English barons; who had looked upon, and read, and pondered the original instrument for fifty years; who knew every word of it, and all its commentaries and amendments by heart; and, above all, men who had imbibed, with their earliest mental culture, the sense of the soundness of British law, and the rights of British subjects; a thing to earn and settle which had cost centuries of toil, and treasure, and blood too; upon which no price could be placed by any man not base enough to become a slave himself.

With such men for judges, holding office beyond the limit of all earthly control, unless forfeited by crime, what temptation was there to know any man's person in judgment, or to feel any interest, or influence, beyond that of simple justice? It is impossible to witness an argument before any of the Courts in law, in Westminster Hall, and not feel that the judges, the counsel on both sides, and the parties, if present, which seldom is the case, as well as the bystanders, who are often very numerous, are all striving, consciously and quietly, towards one result, to find out, in the shortest way and time, the exact truth and justice of the case. So that, if the presiding judge, or, what is often the case, all the judges in succession, interpose ever so formidable objections, there is no fluttering among the counsel at meeting unexpected difficulties, and no feeling of disappointment among the judges at having objections satisfactorily and conclusively answered.

There seems to be no pride of opinion among the judges, no unwillingness to yield a first impression, but rather, on the contrary, a feeling of satisfaction to have it corrected if it were wrong.

In short, one cannot spend an hour in one of these courts, and not feel that the courts are far more the courts of the people than of any other interest. Not that the interests of influential parties are any less regarded or respected than those of inferior standing; but from the natural presumption that the cases of parties of means and position will be likely to be more carefully investigated and thoroughly argued than those of persons who are less expensively represented, it will always become the duty of upright and impartial judges to look carefully to the protection of the rights and interests of those who have no one else to look after them. This was wonderfully illustrated in the late trials, under special commission, both at Manchester and Dublin. In both these cases the accused were arraigned for alleged crimes aimed most directly at the quiet and good order of society, in one case a treasonable conspiracy against the Government, extending through a very considerable number of disaffected persons, and, in the other, the deliberate assassination of one of the police, in open day, and in cold blood, for the avowed purpose of rescuing a prisoner in acknowledged lawful custody! But in all the trials, before both these commissions, the deliberation and watchfulness of the judges, to reach the exact truth in all the cases, was so marked and undisputed, that no prisoner was heard to utter the least complaint in regard to the fairness and justness of his trial. And in the case of those prisoners who chose not to be defended by counsel, the judges literally performed the constructive duty assigned by the common law of supplying the counsel for the prisoners, in making repeated suggestions to the prisoner to put questions favoring his defence. And then, the summing up of the judges, in all these cases, was so entirely fair and full, in bringing out all