

SIR GEORGE JESSEL.

weaker minds, to commend itself to the average member of the House of Commons; and he was persuasive by the force of his reasoning only. This, however, is the power which makes a reputation among lawyers. The strength of his intellectual qualities was the more conspicuous because its recognition was conceded, in spite of many faults of manner. There are many whose memory of Sir George Jessel will be accompanied by some soreness. He did not spare any one who crossed swords with him in argument, whether his opponent was at the bar or on the bench. But his manner was due to no feeling but the desire to push home his conclusion. It was well known at the bar, that if a man had something to say worth hearing, and said it in a few words, Jessel would be sure to listen to him, particularly if he were a young man. He would take pains to show the disputant the error of his ways, and he never passed unnoticed any objection to his decision which had any weight whatever. Sir George Jessel never wrote a judgment while he was on the bench, and yet he seldom delivered one which did not deal with every point in the case; and sometimes, when he had clearly made up his mind as to some obscure legal topic or disputed Act of Parliament, he went out of his way to elucidate it. Within the last few days the Master of the Rolls seems to have been conscious of the defect in his judicial manner. "Don't think I am against you," he said; "counsel, in arguing, sometimes think that I am much more against them than I really am"—a confession which has now something pathetic in it.

The performance by Sir George Jessel of his daily work in the now deserted Rolls Court was an exhibition of power seldom witnessed. The lawyer hardly knew which most to admire—his minute knowledge of case-law, the breadth of his acquaintance with legal principles, or the amazing rapidity with which he took in the facts of his cases. Sir George Jessel seemed to devour an affidavit as soon as it was put into his hand. There was a superstition that nature had physically endowed him above other men with the capacity of acquiring knowledge, and that he could read one line with one eye and the next line with the other. It is certain that hardly any subject came to the surface in his Court without his displaying a knowledge of it which astonished experts. Large drafts were made on these gifts in patent cases, and the Master of the Rolls was

equally at home in mechanical complications and in chemical mysteries. Something has necessarily been said of his fault of manner on the bench; but it lay merely in the manner. His mind was eminently judicial, and the most skilful advocate that practised before him probably never discovered that he had any prejudices. Least of all had he any favour for those of his own race, although he was the first of his blood who attained the English bench. On one occasion, when it appeared that a peculiarly hard bargain had been driven by a party in the case, the Master of the Rolls observed: "I fear this gentleman is of the Israelitish race." There was no section of the community which did not look to him for the most uncompromising justice. This was due to the belief, not only that he had a practical knowledge of most of the affairs of life, and was a learned lawyer, but that his mind was absolutely free from cant. His rapidity was so great, and his reputation so high, that the Rolls Court became during his reign the most important Court in the country. When the Judicature Acts came into operation, the universality of Sir George Jessel's legal knowledge stood him in good stead. Here, at least, was one judge who could decide off-hand upon the limitations of a crabbed settlement at one moment, and at another expound the obscurities of a bill of lading. Sir George Jessel's place in history will probably be connected with these Acts. The Common Law Procedure Acts failed to bring about a satisfactory compromise between law and equity. As Sir George Jessel was fond of pointing out, the common law judges had equitable powers given to them by those Acts which the Chancery judges did not possess. These powers, however, were ignored, and the Judicature Acts became necessary. The same influences were at work in the passing of the Judicature Acts, and at an early date they showed themselves ominously. Sir George Jessel set himself to the task of giving the most liberal operation to the principles of those Acts, and he effected far more for the fusion of law and equity than the Acts themselves. It is not too much to say that the success which the Judicature Acts have obtained would have been impossible without him.

Sir George Jessel was not free from the faults to which great minds like his are liable. He was so quick that occasionally he was hasty, but the mistakes he made were not half so many as those of other judges who