

LETTER FROM LONDON.

Weekly Correspondence of the Register

LONDON, Eng., March 2nd, 1894.

Rumours of impending changes in the Ministry are again in the air. Little else is discussed in political circles. The Anarchists' outrage and the British reverses in West Africa have ceased to have the prominent place in public attention. Even the compromise on the Parish Councils Bill pales before the all-absorbing topic of Mr. Gladstone's personality. It seems to be the universal impression that we are on the eve of some historical movement which has its origin in the Cabinet. But that is about all that men of experience in political affairs will venture to admit, even to themselves. What the real secret is, no one outside the Cabinet seems to know, and the wildest guesses are made by political quidnuncs. One says that Mr. Gladstone intends to resign; another that the Queen sent for Lord Rosebery to prevail upon him to accept the leadership of the Liberal Party, a third states that a dissolution will take place in a few days or a few weeks. On the other hand, rumour hath it that Lord Rosebery's visit to Windsor was of the simplest official character; but again it is declared that his visit was of a personal nature of a most interesting kind. Every one of these statements may be only "floating fancies of an idle mind," but some of them are gravely discussed by sage men, who believe "that behind all this smoke there must be at least some fire."

When all has been said that can be said, one thing remains patent, Mr. Gladstone's resignation cannot be long delayed, and may come at any moment. Whenever it comes, strife for the moment will be hushed in considering the pathos of his personal position. He still retains much of his intellectual energy, and his greatness is denied only by curmudgeons. His courage is as high as ever. His ascendancy over his followers is still almost unrivalled. His devotion to his duty is without thought for self, save in so far as the love of power for fame's sake may be called selfish. Yet now, if he passes out of politics, it will be as a statesman baffled in the midst of a great enterprise, and unable for purely physical reasons to continue the struggle. It is a saddening spectacle, and one which will excite universal sorrow. We should have wished to see the Grand Old Man retire to his well earned repose with the task he had set himself in the evening of his days, accomplished. But should the fates decree otherwise he will yet lay down the reins of office amid "the fragrance of the gratitude of two nations though his loss will be keenly felt by both. Perhaps the best thing that can be said is to tell over again the story of an incident which touched both Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone acutely. Some years ago they were going to church together in London, and walked through a portion of St. Giles. They were recognised by a crowd of larkins, and stared at until one of the lads cried out, "Well, they may say what they like about him, but they'll miss him when he is gone."

To turn to the future, Lord Rosebery must be the Prime Minister, even though Mr. Labouchere denounces him as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Sir William Harcourt is his only possible rival. Lord Rosebery is a model Foreign Secretary. He is an Imperialist by instinct. He believes in a strong foreign policy. He is rarely subject to political delusions. He has diplomacy which he can exercise even in the domestic field. He is an orator and a wit and is praised even by his opponents for the fairness of his argument. He can stand up for a principle which he thinks important with all the courage and tenacity of an enthusiast. Sir William Harcourt is a very

able man; but he has one disqualification that he has the misfortune to be regarded, even by his friends, as somewhat of an opportunist. It is felt that he would seek to minimise the questions which concern the Empire. The people at large know him so well that that they discount him, and his own party has not sufficient faith in him. Lord Rosebery from the calm of the Upper House can control general affairs better than Sir William with doubtful national sympathies can control them from the House of Commons. Sir William would have great power as leader of the Lower House, but as leader of the Party his success would be questionable. Mr. Gladstone himself may advise her Majesty to make Lord Rosebery her chief adviser, for it is some years now since the Prime Minister spoke of the head of the House of Primrose as his political heir. But in any case the Queen is likely to prefer Lord Rosebery, and the majority of the Liberal Party will acquiesce in her choice.

Last night was a historical one in the House of Commons. Mr. Gladstone made a memorable speech—one which will stand out as marking an epoch in the political conflicts of the country. The gage of battle has been thrown down to the House of Lords by the greatest statesman of the age, and a challenge coming from such a quarter means that a crisis has been reached in the fortunes of the Peers. Early in the evening it was evident that something important was about to happen. Mrs. Gladstone, who had driven to the House with the Premier, was in her accustomed corner behind the ladies' grille—a sure sign that her husband was going to make one of his important speeches. The House was crowded, and members were obviously in a state of animated expectancy. At half-past three the Prime Minister entered, and was received with a thunderous cheer from the Liberals and Nationalists. Foremost among the latter in the demonstration of welcome was Dr. Tanner, who was wearing a flaring red tie, which he always does when battle is at hand. Questions over, the Premier advanced to the table. A hush fell upon the assembly, for the House by intention knew that a fateful moment had arrived. There stood the venerable Old Man, ready to sound the clarion note of war. The spectacle was one to vividly appeal to the imagination; for the victor of debate, with the snows of eighty-four winters upon his head, was about to make an epoch-making speech. Members felt that in all probability this was to be his last great effort in an assembly where for sixty years he has played a leading part, and this thought gave an additional touch of pathos to the scene. Standing erect at the table, without a note in his hand, and in clear, silvery accents he denounces the action of the Lords, and vehemently declares that for this continued contrariety, this incessant conflict between the Peers and the people there is only one solution, and he pledges his party to attempt that solution. At an announcement so unexpected the Liberals and Irish break out into a demonstration of the wildest enthusiasm and the Premier sits down amidst a chorus of cheers such as, perhaps, never greeted him before in his chequered career. The leader of the Opposition replies as best he can on the spur of the moment, and then members and spectators troop out to discuss with unwonted excitement this latest move in the political game.

The speech has greatly heartened the Liberal rank and file, and they refuse to believe the Premier's resignation is as imminent as it is reported. A movement has set in with great vigour to induce him to retain the leadership of the party even if the state of his eyesight necessitate a temporary withdrawal from active duties.

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C. V. R.	7.00 3.00	12.15pm 8.50
	a.m. p.m.	a.m. p.m.
G. W. R.	noon 2.00	9.00 7.30
	6.15 4.00	10.30 8.20
	10.00	
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