

There is probably no man west of the Atlantic with whom those who are working in this matter could more properly take counsel than the Governor-General of the Dominion of Canada, whose sympathies with the workmen are by no means circumscribed by parallels of latitude or mountain range or sea.

Lord Aberdeen's second appointment was somewhat similar, inasmuch as it concerned the prevention of the loss of life on the part of the working population. The agitation initiated by Mr. Plimsoll concerning the wholesale destruction of sailors' lives by the sending of coffin ships to sea, in order to realize a profit for the owners, led to a prolonged and angry controversy, in which Mr. Chamberlain, who was then President of the Board of Trade, took a very strong line against the ship owners. After considerable re-creation, during which feeling on both sides became extremely heated, it was at last decided to appoint a Royal Commission on which both parties could be represented to take evidence and report. The Commission was a strong one. Mr. Chamberlain was one of its members, and the leading representatives of the ship owners were also there in force. It was no easy task presiding over a tribunal in which the chief disputants sat as judges, and it was a singular tribute to the rapidly rising reputation of the young Earl that he was selected as chairman, a position which somewhat resembled that of Æolus in the cave of the winds. However, by the judicious dining of the Commissioners before they commenced the inquiry, and the excellent practice of lunching together during the course of the inquiry, Lord Aberdeen was able to establish sufficiently genial relations with the Commissioners to get through with a singular absence of friction. His position as chairman was largely official and appeal was constantly made to him by the advocates of the respective sides to rule out of order this, that or the other question. He was almost the youngest man on the Commission, and his courtesy and amiability might have led some of the ruder Commissioners to try to get their own way with a rough hand. Whatever attempts were made in this direction miscarried signally, and the Commission had not been many days in session before its members recognized that although its president had a glove of velvet there was within it a hand of steel. When he had to vacate the chair in order to undertake the responsibilities of the Irish Viceroyalty, the Commissioners, on the motion of Mr. Chamberlain, passed a unanimous vote expressing their high sense of the signal impartiality and *savoir faire* with which he had discharged the arduous duties of his office.

Up to this time the Earl of Aberdeen, although acting in hearty accord with Mr. Gladstone, who had always been a close personal friend of all the Aberdeens, and especially of the present Earl and Countess, had not held any purely political post under the Liberal Party. Lord Aberdeen, the Prime Minister, began life as a Conservative. He was first employed by Lord Castlereagh, and was subse-

quently Foreign Minister of the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel. When the Corn Laws went by the board he became a Peelite, and the Aberdeen Ministry was a combination of Peellites and Liberals, hence when the present Earl took his seat in the House of Lords he sat neither with the Conservatives nor with the Liberals, but occupied a place in the cross benches, which is supposed to belong to peers of an independent mind who do not wish to identify themselves conspicuously with either of the two parties. He was regarded, however, as belonging to the Conservative Party by heredity, and hence in 1876 he was selected to move the address to the Queen in reply to the royal speech. Even then he gave an indication of how loosely he regarded the party tie by taking occasion to express his objection to the Royal Tiths bill, a measure which was strongly supported in august circles.

It was soon evident, however, that the popular sympathies of the young Earl and the immense personal influence of Mr. Gladstone, who had always been as a father to the Earl and the countess, were sweeping him directly into the Liberal ranks. In addition to this, two influences, of different degrees of importance, were telling in the same direction. One was the influence of his wife, who was strongly Liberal, and the other the natural reaction against the follies and courses of the Jingo period which marked the close of Lord Beaconsfield's administration. His first overt act of rebellion against his party was when he telegraphed from Brindisi his adhesion to the popular protest which was being signed against the Afghan War. That this was no mere caprice he made abundantly evident when he spoke in the debate against the Afghan policy of the Ministry, thereby maintaining the traditions of his ancestor in his devotion to peace and conciliation. In 1879 he indicated his transference of political allegiance by supporting Mr. Gladstone's first Midlothian campaign, having accepted Lord Rosebery's invitation to form one of the house party at Dalmeny on that memorable occasion. The following year, on the very day on which Lord Beaconsfield dissolved Parliament, Lord Aberdeen took his seat for the first time on the Liberal side of the House. He had burned his boats and definitely cast in his lot with Mr. Gladstone on the eve of an election which, in the opinion of society, was certain to result in the return of Lord Beaconsfield to power. Society, as usual, was wrong, the elections went with a rush against the Jingoese, and Lord Aberdeen found himself embarked on the winning side.

The only appointment which he received from the Government of that day was the chairmanship of the Commission on Shipping, to which I have already referred. It should be mentioned, however, that Lord Aberdeen was, during these years, entrusted with the duty of acting as Lord High Commissioner to the Church of Scotland. The Lord High Commissioner is the representative of Her Majesty and he must be present at the opening of what may be called the Par-