

N° 12446

AUTHORISED EDITION.

Clag 68.20225

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PRESENT EVENTS AND FUTURE POLICY.

A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

THE RIGHT HON.

SIR H. CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN,

G.C.B., M.P.,

AT LEICESTER,

On FEBRUARY 19th, 1902.

PUBLISHED BY

THE LIBERAL PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT

(In connection with the National Liberal Federation
and the Liberal Central Association).

42, PARLIAMENT STREET, LONDON, S.W.

—
1902.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

PRESIDENT EAVES
ON
FUTURE POLICY

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PRESENT EVENTS AND FUTURE POLICY.

SIR HENRY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN, *who was received with loud and prolonged cheering*, said :—Mr. Chairman Ladies and Gentlemen,—It is with the greatest pleasure that I find myself in the presence of this splendid gathering of Leicester Liberals and of representatives of the Liberal party collected from the whole country; and I am deeply indebted to your Association for the invitation which they gave me, now many months ago, to meet you here to-night. I am glad also to have this opportunity so soon after the opening of a new Session of Parliament to give you some account of what I conceive to be the objects and policy which ought to be kept in view both within and without the House of Commons, and also to ascertain—and here my colleagues from the House of Commons, who are here in no small numbers, share my advantage—to ascertain how far that policy commends itself to the general opinion of the party.

The New Procedure Rules.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we come here straight from the House of Commons, with the dust of its arena upon us, with our minds full of the controversy which is now engaging us there, and I think you will not find it unnatural that I should begin by saying a word or two as to the true nature of that controversy. I am the more ready to do so because it is a matter of supreme importance to you as citizens of a free, self-governing country. The Government have proposed a number of changes in the rules of procedure in the House of Commons. Need I say to you that, so far as those changes or the rules themselves concern the personal comfort and convenience of members, you may without more ado exclude them from your attention? But there are some of them which appear to involve a serious infraction of the rights of the House of Commons, not the rights of individuals or of any group of individuals, but the rights of the House at large as representing the constituencies at large. Let no man be deceived into thinking that this is a mere question of the vanity and self-importance of members of Parliament who wish to magnify their office, as it is only in human nature they should do.

What is involved in the free power of interrogating Ministers, however irksome and tedious it may be, or the liberty of raising discussion upon urgent questions by an improvised motion of adjournment, however inconvenient that may sometimes be—what is involved in such matters, I say, is nothing less than the efficacy of Parliament as the main guardian of the public interest.

The Grand Inquest of the Nation.

The framing of laws, the voting of supplies, the sanctioning of taxes, are high and important functions indeed, but not one of them is a more vital function than that which is expressed in the consecrated phrase which speaks of Parliament as the Grand Inquest of the nation. It is this function, the function by which the Executive Government is made answerable to the people, that we believe to be threatened by some of the proposals of the Government—threatened by them not, let us hope and believe, from malice aforethought, but out of sheer supercilious indifference to popular rights. I hold that we cannot be too jealous and too pertinacious in guarding our privileges against usurpation. Facilitate business, curb prolixity, prevent disorder and obstruction, suppress useless forms, and no one will object; but leave intact the free privileges of the representatives of the people. And why, ladies and gentlemen? Because it is the exercise of these free privileges by which your liberties have been won and by which alone they will be maintained in the future; and, Sir, I am glad to say, and as a patriotic man I am proud to say, that this is a view which is held as strongly by the constitutional Conservative as by the constitutional Liberal, as the events of the last half-dozen days have shown. Long may this common jealousy of the Executive Government endure! Now, observe this. What is the answer and excuse made to us when we put forward a claim to maintain our position as the masters and not the servants of the Executive Government? They say, "What nonsense you are talking! You are already, and necessarily, our masters. It is you who have put us in office, and you can eject us at any moment you like." Why, what is this but the very excuse and basis upon which is founded the most modern form of absolutist government?

Imperialism.

We hear a good deal nowadays, you may have observed, of the word Imperialism—a word that seems to be as uncomfortable for those who like it as it is an object of suspicion to those who do not like it. But there are two kinds of Imperialism, or rather there are two developments of it in different public spheres. One may be called

broadly, foreign and the other domestic. As to foreign Imperialism I hear it sometimes spoken of as if it were some new creed, just invented and fraught with virtues of its own, some newly-discovered doctrine, some patent specific floated and put upon the market—I hope my phrases are right, for I confess I am not conversant with the up-to-date Stock Exchange phraseology—by a mixed political syndicate in which the Liberal party as at present constituted has no part at all. What does it mean, this magic word? What does it cover within its mystic shadow? Why, ladies and gentlemen, we all know that in its ordinary and perfectly innocuous and reputable meaning it implies that we should all desire and endeavour to defend and promote the interest of our Empire, and strengthen it in every way; that we should knit together in close friendship all the peoples and States within its borders; that we should defend our interests in all parts of the world. That is its reasonable meaning. Who among us dissents from it? This, which is put forward as some novel doctrine, is as old as the British Empire itself. It is a sentiment to be treasured and nourished and acted upon; but I confess to you that, when a man chooses to be always boasting about it, and whenever he hears the very name of Empire uttered throws up his hat and shouts, he does nothing to exalt the object of his adoration—he only vulgarises it and makes himself ridiculous.

Cæsarism.

What I wish to direct your attention specially to is that besides this—what I would call this world-wide acceptance of the word—it has another significance which is most sinister and ill-omened, and it is a startling thing to find how soon apparently the extravagant misuse of the word in one sense runs into the other. There is a domestic Imperialism, as I have said, which we know also under the name of Cæsarism. What are its methods and characteristics? I will recite some of them. It magnifies the executive power; it acts upon the passions of the people; it conciliates them, in classes and in localities, by lavish expenditure; it occupies men's minds with display and amusement; it inspires a thirst for military glory; it captures the electorate by false assertions and illusory promises; and then, having by these means obtained a *plebiscite* and using electoral forms, in the servile Parliament thus created, it crushes opposition and extinguishes liberty. And the irony of the thing is this—that all this is done in the name of the people themselves, and under the authority of the popular voice, so that the people, whilst boasting of being supreme, are enslaved. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I do not say for a moment we have reached the near neighbourhood of such dangers in this

country ; but I think some of the operations and manoeuvres which I have recited must strike you as not altogether unfamiliar to your ears ; and it becomes a duty for us to watch closely the earliest tendencies of things. The Romans had a maxim, wise as most of their maxims were, which said we should resist the very beginnings of mischief ; and I trust the constituencies will strengthen us—and I include in the word “us,” as I have already said, many men who do not owe allegiance to the Liberal party—in opposition to any proposal which invalidates the authority of their representatives.

South Africa—Unconditional Surrender.

But whatever the immediate subject occupying the labours of Parliament, we still remain, as we have for three years, under the shadow of the South African drama. In the earliest days of the Session we made the strongest protest that it was in our power to make against the Government’s policy of exacting unconditional surrender. I say the Government’s policy, for, although one or two of them have repudiated it, others have used the very words, and we all know, at any rate, that one of the two most potential men in the whole affair—namely, their representative in South Africa—has made no secret that it is his policy. Whether that policy has for its object the ruin and practical annihilation of the Boer race—and things have been done which, in my opinion, can bear no other interpretation—or whether the object—and it would be a more avowable object—is to beat the Boers to their knees and place them at our mercy—in either case I say it is a policy mischievous and, if persevered in, fatal. Against it we set the policy of negotiation and conciliation, out of which may be hewn the foundation of good understanding in the future between Dutch and British, and between the representatives of British power and supremacy on the one hand and our new citizens on the other, of whom a large number are in the field against us or are kept in captivity in South Africa or elsewhere. Well, that protest which we made was supported, I am glad to know, by the whole of the Liberal party, with few exceptions. For I would beg you to observe that among those who abstained from voting on that occasion there was a large proportion who took that course, not because they differed from our proposition, but because they wished that it had been expressed in more uncompromising terms.

The Dutch Government’s Note.

Since that time we have had the Dutch note and Lord Lansdowne’s answer. That answer was far from being satisfactory, and I wish it had been more cordial in its effects ; but it did not shut the door upon negotiations ; and, therefore, we refrained from comment in the House of Commons, because we were afraid that if debate arose something might be said which might extinguish such glimmerings of hope as existed. Even to-night I feel myself under the necessity to speak guardedly, but there are two things that I can say and that I wish to say. The first is this. Surely if there is on either side a willingness to

treat, it will not be imperilled by some point of dispute arising from form or etiquette. Surely it will not be neutralised by any question as to the authority of the negotiator. Some weeks ago the Colonial Secretary went over a list of possible negotiators—Ministers, officials, generals in the field—and one after the other he discarded them all. But I am relieved to know that at the end he wound up by saying that this difficulty was not insuperable. Well, it seems as if that difficulty was standing in the way to a considerable extent. It is, indeed, hard to see any fixed view on the part of the Government on this matter. Lord Lansdowne says that negotiations must take place in South Africa, and that Mr. Schalk Burger and Mr. Steyn must communicate with Lord Kitchener. But what does the Colonial Secretary say of Mr. Schalk Burger? He says that if he fell into our hands he would be promptly banished for life from his own country under Mr. Chamberlain's darling proclamation as a dangerous and undesirable person, whose room was preferable to his company. Rather a hazardous prospect, is it not, for a negotiator, and an intimation not likely to induce a spirit of mutual confidence and amiability; a curious way, also, don't you think, of conducting a war—thus to banish the men that you cannot catch! But perhaps even more curious is it to expect the man so interdicted to come forward as the representative of his own State to discuss conditions of peace. What an instance this is of the way in which the Government play fast and loose with matters of supreme importance, trusting to the shortness of the public memory and the torpor of the public conscience. It would be most intolerable that the prospect of a regular settlement on terms should be wrecked by any such difficulty as this.

Amnesty and the Banishment Proclamation.

The second thing which I wish to say is this. I wish to renew the expression of my opinion that there are no two greater causes of the prolongation of the war, no two greater impediments to a settlement, than the denial of amnesty and the maintenance of the proclamation of last summer. In this, I am fortified by the independent judgment of the late Prime Minister, who has declared that the first of these questions—amnesty—wrecked the Botha negotiations, and who has gone on to say that, if the Botha negotiations had been in the hands of a statesman, they would have been successful. What a frightful indictment of the Government is this. Last March the Botha negotiations took place. Think of all the deaths, all the blood, all the suffering, all the waste of money, all the ruin and desolation, that have gone on during nearly twelve months, and which we are told might have been avoided by a little statesmanship in the Botha negotiations. I resume what the late Prime Minister said on my second point—namely, that the maintenance of last year's proclamation is a stultification of any vague willingness for a settlement that may now be professed. There is now, therefore, this great gulf fixed between our view and that of the Government, and I very much fear that the

glimmer of hope to which I referred burns feebler and feebler every day.

"Security."

Lord Salisbury, the other night, said that the great object of the Government in South Africa was security. Security! Yes, Sir, so it is with all of us; but the whole question is how security is to be attained, and what is it to rest upon? Security founded upon force is a contradiction in terms. In a free country—and surely we do not intend South Africa to be other than a free country—the only solid ground of security is the goodwill of the people; and the sooner we set ourselves to obtain their goodwill and their confidence the better for South Africa, for the Empire, and for ourselves.

Errors of Administration.

Now, Sir, when I speak of those errors in policy having caused the prolongation of the war, I do not imply that they are the sole cause. There have been errors of administration as well, which have had that effect, and which have thereby greatly added, besides other evils, to the financial burden upon the country; and besides the cost involved in the protracted war, blunders have undoubtedly been committed which directly caused a great waste of public money. We have had some disclosures lately which make this clear beyond doubt; but when we demanded a public inquiry into the subject for the double purpose of fastening blame upon those who were responsible and of preventing the recurrence of similar evils in future, we are told that all such inquiries must be postponed until the end of the war, and that it is now too soon to inquire. To which I answer that at the end of the war it will be too late to inquire. The Government have promised a full, comprehensive, and catholic investigation at the close of the war into everything, diplomacy, military strategy, administration, and they will be held to their promise; but much of such an inquiry must be ineffective through lapse of time. I do not speak without personal experience. A great many years ago, when I was a mere Parliamentary boy in my earliest days, I served as a humble member of a committee appointed to inquire into the expenditure in the Abyssinian campaign. When the campaign commenced, the first estimate was four millions, which was amended to five millions. The ultimate expenditure was nearly nine millions, and what a shout of horror and indignation was raised! But what would the honest people who were so horrified and indignant in those days have said if they heard of a war the first estimate of which was ten millions, and which already, before it has ended, has reached two hundred millions? Well, this inquiry was earnestly and actively conducted, but it had no effect whatever. It came too late.

The Need of Immediate Inquiry.

There is no good reason why in particular subjects an examination should not be made now. At the beginning of the war we were told that it was unpatriotic to inquire or even criticise, and the whole of

our political opponents and some of our political friends told us that in rough weather, with difficult navigation, we must not speak to the man at the wheel. I remember with some selfish satisfaction that I promptly and publicly repudiated that idea. Sir, the public and patriotic duty of any man who sees errors being committed, mischievous errors being committed, is to expose and condemn them with a view to stopping them. In more than one instance we have seen successful results following when someone was bold enough not to stand idly by in dumb indifference, but to face senseless and vulgar obloquy and to speak out. I have no doubt that the same idea that silence is patriotic will be urged in resistance to inquiry, but I trust that the country will make its demand heard, and that where, in relation to particular subjects, maladministration has evidently occurred, full and independent inquiry shall be made.

Lord Rosebery and the Liberal Party.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, let me now invite you to come nearer home. We Liberals have been receiving a good deal of advice lately from one to whom for my part I shall always be disposed to listen with respectful and friendly attention. I do not know down to this moment of my speaking to you whether Lord Rosebery speaks to us from the interior of our political tabernacle or from some vantage ground outside. I practically put that question publicly to him a month ago, but he does not answer it, and I frankly say I do not think it is quite fair to us not to do so. But, however this may be, I think it right and opportune—nay, I feel it to be absolutely necessary—frankly to state what I think of the advice offered to us. When last month I addressed a large meeting in London I avowed myself in great bewilderment as to my noble friend's real meaning. I confess I am still bewildered; but in groping about I have laid hands upon one definite doctrine, and I regret to say it is one to which I can give no adherence whatever.

The “Clean Slate.”

Gentlemen, I am no believer in the doctrine of the clean slate. It may be capable of further explanation, but I take it as it stands. I am, in fact, wholly opposed to the doctrine of the clean slate; and I am equally opposed to that which I am sure is not intended to be its accompaniment, but seems to me to be its inevitable accompaniment, the practice and penance of the white sheet. I am not prepared to erase from the tablets of my creed any principle or measure, or proposal, or ideal, or aspiration of Liberalism. I remember when I was at college there was a story current of a gentleman who occupied the position of Esquire Bedell in the University of Cambridge, whose function is to carry the mace before the Vice-Chancellor—I do not know whether he has anything else to do—and who in that capacity has to attend the Vice-Chancellor every Sunday in term at the sermon preached in the University church. This is always preached by some eminent divine selected in order that he might



controvert some of the recent heresies in religion. It was said of this gentleman that he was heard to congratulate himself that after thirty years of this experience he still retained some lingering belief in the elementary doctrines of the Christian religion. Sir, I improve upon the achievement of this Esquire Bedell, inasmuch as I have thirty years and more of Parliamentary life, and I have listened to an endless number of Liberal speeches from my right hon. friends here and others, and have attended an endless number of Liberal meetings, and not only remain through these years an impenitent Liberal, but with the years have grown more and more convinced. I do not know what I should have been if I had not always been there. "Absence," they say, "makes the heart grow fonder." It does not seem always to have that effect. But custom has at least not staled my faith or zeal. I apologise for speaking of myself. But I do so because every one knows himself better than he knows other people. What I say of myself is, I believe, true of my colleagues and of every Liberal in this hall. I appeal to you confidently that it is so.

The Habit of the Liberal Party.

Let us look a little closer. We are to sponge out every article of our creed, but we cannot do that. Is it that we are to sponge out every one of the recent embodiments of our creed? Then we should have a clean slate; but what is to be written on the clean slate? Who is to decide what is to be written on the clean slate? Who is to choose what is to be written? Surely it is never meant that we ought to wait until we find out what will be popular, and suit the whim of the day? We are warned to keep up-to-date and to have new ideas. Why, it has ever been the habit of the Liberal party not to follow, but to lead opinion, to outstrip the average mind, to be in advance of the times. I said it has been our habit—I might almost be justified in saying that it has been our fault, for any embarrassment we have suffered from, and may be suffering from now, is due to our convictions and our imaginations having outrun our opportunities of realisation.

The Cupboardful of Liberal Measures Left Behind in 1895.

But let us look closer still, because this is a most serious matter, affecting the very innermost policy of the party to which we all belong. Let us look at the individual, concrete measures with which we are associated. I am not now speaking of fundamental doctrines, which may be enshrined in some holy tabernacle and looked at now and again. I am taking proposals and measures by which these principles are applied. The cupboardful of measures which we left behind us in 1895, are they out of date and musty? Take, first of all, the whole range of reforms which seem to be necessary in order to simplify and complete our electoral and legislative machinery—the simplification of registration, the abolition of the plural vote, the reduction of electoral expenses, the removal of every bar to the free

choice of electors, and, above all, the adjustment of the relations between the two Houses of Parliament, which in 1895 seemed to us among the most urgent, and to some of us to be the very one most urgent, of all the necessities of the day. Why, Sir, we all remember that Mr. Chamberlain once said of this class of measures, which occupied so much of our interest and attention, that the working-man would never be a penny the better for it. One would have thought Mr. Chamberlain ought to know, because he has boxed the compass himself; but his multiform experiences must have confused his mind. Sir, these are changes which the working-man ought to claim as his birthright. It is these that will give him the power to obtain, with the consent and co-operation of other classes of the community, changes which he specially desires and demands, without waiting upon the condescending benevolence or the grudging necessities of the hereditary House. There is no one knows the truth of what I am saying more from his own experience than my friend Mr. Broadhurst, who has fought so well for the working-class to which he himself is proud to belong, and whom Leicester honours by returning him at the head of the poll—and carefully sending a Tory with him to neutralise all that he can do. It is idle to expect that any of the more conspicuous problems, social and political, of which we are all ready to talk so vaguely, can be worthily and adequately solved unless these improvements in machinery are first effected. It is they, and they alone, which will give us the power which we require. But take these conspicuous problems to which I have referred—licensing with popular control, education with popular control, housing and the land question, with new municipal powers in the public interest. Which of these, I would ask, is to be discarded as fusty and out of date?

Development since 1895.

It is not as if they stood now as they were in 1895. There have been new developments. I go back upon them. In licensing we have Lord Peel's report, which I have always from the first insisted afforded the best basis I know for legislative action. In education we have the disclosure that has been made of quite recent years of designs against the popular unsectarian authority which we consider vital in this matter. In housing we have new ideas coming in, and stringent reforms demanded in rating and the land system, over which the House of Commons in our absence has been engaged to-day. To say that reforms in these matters are necessary is true; to say that they are urgent is quite true also. The first Tory you meet in the street will say as much. But the critical point is this. We want to see them done thoroughly and effectively; and it is only by Liberal methods and Liberal principles that this is possible.

Welsh Disestablishment.

Well, then, I go on to another question, and it is the last domestic question referring to England that I have time to refer to, and I think it must be the approach I make to the other side of the Channel that

has made me speak of it as a question relating to England, because this is precisely what it does not do. As to ceasing to care for religious equality, we were engaged in the work of piloting a Bill for disestablishing the Church in Wales—as well as we could, with a desperately small majority, and I am not sure that the Welsh members always gave us their full support and sometimes did not make that majority smaller than it would have been—but we were engaged in that delicate and most difficult work at the very time when the Government fell in 1895. Has that question passed into oblivion? Look at the division and the debates the other day in the House of Commons, which were a stronger demonstration of feeling on the subject, I think, than we have ever had before.

The Irish Question.

Now I go across the Channel. I come to the question of the government of Ireland. Is our Irish policy a thing that we can lightly abandon because it happens for the moment to be inconvenient? I believe that I have been blamed because on the first night of the Session, when speaking of the actual present condition of Ireland, I said the policy of national self-government has been and is the remedy approved by the Liberal party. Home Rule, to give it its convenient name, is often spoken of as if it were a strange, fantastic, almost whimsical and madcap policy, rashly adopted in a random way to secure the Irish vote; and therefore to be easily and lightly dropped at any moment when an equal amount of support can be obtained from any other quarter! Not a very noble view of the case! Not, in truth, a very creditable or even a decent view of the case, but intelligible enough if there were in the way no principles and no facts. What are these principles and facts? The virtues, the efficacy, the justice of self-government—that is one Liberal principle. The appreciation and encouragement of national sentiment—that is another Liberal principle. The recognition of the popular will constitutionally expressed through the people's representatives—that is another Liberal principle. That may do for principles.

The Irish Demand since 1885.

Now what are the facts? What happened in 1885? Down to that time and through the century since the Union Ireland had been governed by a system of alternate concession and coercion; but I think I am accurate in saying that every Coercion Bill that was passed had the approval in the division lobby of a majority of those who represented Irish constituencies. But in 1885 the voice of Ireland was fully expressed when the franchise was extended, and what was the result? Eighty-seven, I think, out of the 103 members demanded self-government; and subsequent elections in 1886 and 1892, in 1895, and in 1900 have confirmed, and more than confirmed that demand. Here, then, is a fixed constitutional demand of the Irish people; and I ask you what possible Liberal principle can we invoke which will

allow us to set our faces against it by refusing them the control of their own affairs in a statutory and subordinate Parliament. An independent Parliament goes wholly beyond the case and has never been demanded by any man qualified to speak for the Irish people, and has never been accepted or contemplated by us. Well, here you have the solid foundation for our Irish policy.

The Argument from the Empire.

One consideration alone can outweigh this argument—that it would be dangerous to the three Kingdoms and to the Empire. Again I appeal to Liberal policy and Liberal experience. This mighty Empire, whose strength and glory we boast of—how are our kinsfolk in its various communities drawn together to us in loyal and affectionate sentiment? Because they have enjoyed that which we would give to Ireland. Canada, once torn by racial dissensions, discontented, and even rebellious, is now peaceful and prosperous. To that great Dominion and to every province under it and forming part of it there has been given what we would give to Ireland. Turn to Australia, which two years ago amid the plaudits and felicitations of the world formed itself into a mighty Commonwealth. Every State in the Australian Commonwealth enjoys what we would give to Ireland. Yet we are told—and is there any one not misguided by prejudice who believes it for a moment—that in Ireland it is impossible and dangerous.

The Negative View of the Question.

But let us look at this for a moment from the other side. Let us take what I may call a negative view instead of a positive view of this question. Suppose a new, or renovated, party were by the stroke of a magician's wand to be called into being, and placed in office to-morrow. It would not be the Liberal party, but it would be what the Lord Chancellor would call "a sort of a Liberal party," purified from past errors, disengaged from old entanglements. This party will have abjured Home Rule. How are they to govern Ireland? Is it to be by coercion? Is it to be by placing some of the most important rights of citizenship at the mercy of the Executive? We renounced coercion sixteen years ago. We washed our hands of it. For ten years under Liberal and even under Tory government Ireland has been governed by the ordinary law. Boon upon boon and concession upon concession, pecuniary and other, have been heaped upon Ireland by the present Government, and yet what do we see to-day? The old, old story! Ireland was pronounced in the House of Commons but a week or two ago to be free from crime, yet within the last few weeks the Government have been fetching down from their rusty armoury—here is something that is rusty if you like—an exceptional law imprisoning members of Parliament and others—there was a rumour last night that twenty-five new prosecutions were ordered yesterday—and all the squalid business of plank beds and prison clothes and gaol cells is revived.

Now this is an instance of what must happen. These members of Parliament, these men who are now in gaol, who a night or two ago were sitting and voting with us, and who are now on prison beds, or at this hour very soon will be, were convicted by a special tribunal, against whose competence their counsel protested. An appeal was made, and the appeal came before the proper High Court; and what said the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, perhaps the finest lawyer, and one of the most eminent men in the three kingdoms? What did he say? "Each conviction, he said," "was made in respect of subject matter which was outside the jurisdiction of the justices who made it, and consequently each conviction was unlawful and void." And, he further said, "for all these reasons he was clearly of opinion that these convictions were entirely illegal and void, and that they ought to be quashed." But the men who were convicted are to-day in gaol. The Lord Chief Justice was outvoted by his brethren on the Bench. He may be right, or he may be wrong; but we have the right to ask what Irishmen must think of proceedings under an exceptional law, which ought to be construed with special strictness, which are declared by high authority to be illegal and void. They are sent to gaol under a law which does not apply to England or Scotland. They are sent to gaol without a jury in a case of the very class in which in this country it is considered most essential to require a jury—namely, cases of conspiracy. I merely quote that as an instance in point to show you what sort of thing coercion is, and how Ireland will have to be administered if our method is not adopted. How can we expect loyalty to the law from people handled in this fashion? Our methods may be good or bad, but these at least I hope will never again be Liberal methods in Ireland; yet they are the sole alternative to Home Rule. I have very little more to say, but I wish to say a word or two more upon this same subject.

Ireland and the War.

I am well aware that British feeling bitterly resents the hostility to our country which prominent Irish politicians have shown, and the injurious language they have used. I admit it, I condemn it, I deplore it; and it would probably be doing nothing to extenuate it if I said it was nothing new. It shocks us all; but the deduction I draw from it is not that which in some minds militates against the idea of Home Rule. The deduction I draw is that there must be some deep underlying cause which creates this exceptional political enmity against us, exceptional within the whole bounds of the Empire, and that our duty and our interest alike demand that we should search for that cause and remove it. The temper of the Irish people towards us is the fruit of all the generations through which they have been governed from this country. Force has been the main feature of that government, and we are reaping the result. Is it not time that we should try something else? That, gentlemen, is why I adhere to this old policy, in its general purpose, at least. It is not likely that it would

take the shape of the former Bills ; it may fall in with a wider scheme of devolution. But the essential change is inevitable. It is not within the range of practical politics, because at the present moment it does not commend itself to the English people ; but it remains, as I said on the first night of the Session, the sole remedy for the condition of Ireland, which is the most serious weakness in the whole British Empire and the most grave blot upon its fame.

The Duty of Liberal Unity.

Well, now, I think I have said enough to show that the Liberal creed and its embodiments are not dead but are alive. This, however, is not enough. There is something else that must be alive. The Liberal party itself must be alive. I come here with a peculiar qualification to speak to this assembly in the name of the party, and especially in the name of the militant portion of the party—the mobilised army of Liberalism. Those of us who through these years have been active in Parliament and in the country, who have worked for the party, who have faced the enemy, who have met the thrusts and blows, we know probably better than others what the tone, the temper, and the desires of the party are. I declare them of my own knowledge to be sound and healthy. The war, they say—the war has done us damage, and no doubt it has wrought some confusion in our ideas ; but the end of the war and the consequences that will follow upon it have yet to come, and we cannot foretell what their political effect may be. Then people point to the huge majority of the Government ranged against us in Parliament. Why should we be intimidated by it? We know its composition. Why, it is the Government themselves that are frightened and hampered by their own majority. And we know, also, that it ridiculously exceeds the majority in the electorate upon which it is founded. But, above all, gentlemen, it is not numbers that tell in a political movement ; it is life and force. And life and force are ours if we will only believe it. What the party requires and desires now is unity of purpose and action. It is the exorcising and forgetting of miserable personal preferences and differences, mostly suggested and fostered by a hostile Press, and it is concentration upon our plain duties and doctrines. This is my message to you Liberals of Leicester in particular, and to our friends from distant places. Act upon it, and we may be perfectly confident that, whether after a long interval or after a short one, we shall win a triumphant victory for our cause, which we know to be the cause of freedom and justice and good government.

The Liberal & & Magazine.

A JOURNAL FOR LIBERAL SPEAKERS,
AGENTS, CANVASSERS AND WORKERS.

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

Under the direction of the LIBERAL PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT.
Chairman: AUGUSTINE BIRRELL, K.C.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, FIVE SHILLINGS, POST FREE.

The Yearly Volume begins in February, but subscriptions can begin
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